

Debt

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25.09.26 - 21.11.26

“...the picaresque life is more leisurely than the life of kings, emperors, and popes.”

Second Part of Lazarillo de Tormes (1620)

J. de Luna

The *pícaro* is a servant and a city disturber. Serving others, he unveils corruption and refuses fate by elliding ideals, ingeniously and amateurly. More fun than an emperor's, the naughty life of the servant is equated to a philosopher's by de Luna, at least in the sense of renouncing privilege to “go over” to the picaresque life.

All their flirting and urban pleasures are exceptional. The disturber gets away with their leisurely tricks, moody, all eyes, pouting indiscriminately, singing seductively—and picaresque trickery might even entertain—but often gets too close to that thin-lipped reality we call normative society.

The public secret is always crystal clear. We know the conventions and double-standards they mock and yet *saying it how it is* carries a price. The jester is funny until they're not. They take a stance and heads roll...

Let us wait for the fall.

There is a saying, at least in Spanish, *estirar la pata*, to stretch the foot or leg, meaning to kick the bucket. A last stance, as if stretching were the better alternative to death. And there's a bit of transhistorical mammalian truth to the euphemism: when *rigor mortis* extends the foot to extremes.

A stiff limb becomes a metonym for the corpse. The foot poses for the whole, which is best severed through metaphor. The body has lost a kinky detail. Like the roots of a beautiful flower, Georges Bataille thought feet literalize base materialism: an anti-concept of anti-beauty in false oppositions of high and low. The body needs a base, the foot a big toe. The last stance refuses to let go.

A life waiting to sniff a foot promises more dignity than any false heroism (or antiheroism) might. Some attachments seem to provide existential grasp. It is imminent to understand that my pleasure is forever in debt. I can only erotically attach to feet and their image via a grander whole.

Kinky for the base, I put my tongue at your service and remain mean, vulgar and small like a wart, a bottomless protuberance, the passive life of literally and metaphorically waiting for your foot.

All my ideals have fallen, and my enemies are still on their feet.

As Israel and the U.S. bunker up, enticing deadbeat Europe to man up and continue raining profitable bombs on Black and Indigenous peoples, we are buried deeper, suffocated, in our unpayable debt. Some epistemic humility is overdue: May posing, however deadly, afford us some necessary wiggle room.

Denise Ferreira da Silva urges us to see that debt is indeed ours and yet not ours to pay. Suddenly, the fetishist suffers, forgetting that the simple life requires scarce means.

The duty is to repair, she insists.

Yassir Arafat responded on April 5, 2004 to what today we would call genocidal threats by saying, “All of us are martyrs-in-the-waiting.” His rebuttal accepts necropolitical condemnation and infuses it with dignity. He recoded refusal and took a stand. Every pose is indeed deadly and bound to diplomatically engineered deaths.

The martyr is the epitome of suffering, and dies witnessing the crime of their death—murder, genocide and other -cides unfold before their eyes. Neither suffering nor vision is meant *for* martyrs. These are for spectators and our memory.

Waiting is the life of the martyr. In that attendant pose the martyr waits and watches the affairs of the world unravel, posing for ideals, of which a nation is no small one. And yet life is *not* condemned to waiting and suffering.

The شهر آشوب (Shahr-āshūb) disturbs the city by reminding everyone through the sheer presence of its characters that it could all be different.¹ City disturbers are committed to picaresque life. Of course European and Indo-European traditions are not the one and same but remain urgently indebted. How can transcultural debt accommodate the erotics of city disturbers?

The hope lies in minor acts of dissidence like a song, an unruly tongue or a flurry of gossip mid-bazaar can summon the unforetold. The lesson is that there's suffering in many poses and the martyr is their base matter. Like taking a stance, the price is high and nigh. The martyr's sacrifice disturbs the city.

What and whom are you posing for?

The city disturber reminds us that potentiality lives unruly in all of us. We might call this waiting and find it deeply boring. Unlike the philosopher, the *pícaro* has nothing to give up but time; mean and small like a seasonal tick with no ideals and no nation to pay for. It is a base matter of doodling privilege away and coming over to the picaresque life. Sir, please rest this foot right here.

I can't imagine a better politics to deal with debt.

– José Segebre

1 A footnote courtesy of the artist: “A Persian, Turkish and South Asian literary trope beginning in the 11th century that translates to “city disturber.” It inserts itself in the textuality of the city, camouflaged as a book of trades, by addressing the beloved often engaged in a craft who coquettishly offers their wares to the love-struck poet or writer. Contrary to Orientalist interpretations, the trope is unconcerned with musings on class and instead appropriates the city's commercial scene as a site for obscene projection. It disturbs the city – which is understood as a text – through a slightly twisted pose of each normative character, opening up space to insert the villain, the vice, the ostracized. By the 16th century, in the context of early modern tendencies of the Safavid empire and its complex legacies, the trope took an explicit turn into self-help and was used to produce handbooks for pícaros cruising the city [NA].”

- ① *The Pigeon Fancier* - کفتر باز
2026
Pencil on paper, stained and waxed Maple wood, veneer, museum board.
46 x 56 x 2 cm
- ② *The Pickpocket* - چافوکش
2026
Pencil on paper, stained and waxed Maple wood, veneer, museum board.
54 x 46,2 x 2cm
- ③ *The Judge* - قاضی
2026
Pencil on paper, stained and waxed Maple wood, veneer, museum board.
48 x 71 x 2cm
- ④ *The Seamstress* - چرخکار
2026
Diptych
Pencil on paper, stained and waxed Maple wood, veneer, museum board.
56 x 38 x 2cm (each)
- ⑤ *The Scholar* - مجتهد
2026
Pencil on paper, stained and waxed Maple wood, veneer, museum board.
56,5 x 57,5 x 2cm
- ⑥ *Every Pose Is Deadly* - شهید
2026
Pencil on paper, stained and waxed Maple wood, veneer, museum board.
57 x 65,5 x 2cm
- ⑦ *The Page* - کاتب
2026
Pencil on paper, stained and waxed Maple wood, veneer, museum board.
54 x 52,2 x 2cm
- ⑧ *Shahr-āshūb* (شهر آشوب)
2026
Film 17"50, color, stereo sound.

