

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## John Amen: Three Poems

John Amen · Wednesday, June 25th, 2025

### For Amy Winehouse

The needle crashed on the jukebox, the tumult began. Cranes appeared in the backyard, arms swinging over the rooftop. Racecars revved in the cul de sac. This was the kind of carnival that everyone in the Lower Burrows envied. How could a girl with that voice end up fetal on her bathroom floor? – tiny burn marks streaking her skin like a black rash. There were few days in the light, really. Even music, with its mighty sails, foundered in the bay, never cut the open seas. Jazz was her diving bell was her shark cage. She held her breath, the same hand that offered her the sword of soul now tapping her on the forehead. How could anyone be expected to see death amidst that bounty? A chainsaw roared in the next room, a snake slithered down her throat. Later, she'd crawl to the shore, burying her feet in warm sand. The greatest song ever written crested in her rib cage, disappeared. Those mythic piers, her mother used to write about them, burned in the distance, flames ripping the sky.

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### Bukowski, after

Things weren't that different – a couple screamed in the next-door apartment, the death rattle of his AC. A pinwheel spun in the sky, all that craving stored up for a rainy day. The feather-capped landlord trolled the stairs, waiting for the first of the month. Was this purgatory? A layover? The vintage hotel on the highway to Graymoor-Devondale? His 7 & 7 was bottomless, he swigged & swigged, the juice stayed the same, he couldn't flush the world from his head, tightropes you walked, satyrs you wrestled, all that money folded into little airplanes, tossed into the High Judge's throat. He crashed further into the downy pillow, the clouds in his room. The needle on the phonograph sank into a groove, that Ludwig refrain erupting over & over. He couldn't bring himself to nudge the golden arm, to reach out & stuff the crescendo. It was ok: his bottomless glass, the glitchy record, a couple arguing about sex & money & god. He cranked the broken, silent AC, as cold as the son of a bitch would go. It might've been July, it might've been twilight in East Hollywood, fuck he was right at home.

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## Camille Montfort

1869-2011

She refused to be photographed, a jetload of anvils crashing from the sky. Not a speck of ash on her white gown as she prowled the ruins of London, Milan, Hiroshima, Dresden. She sang nursery rhymes, hair impeccably mounded, as the dying shrieked in the dark, hands reaching through shrapnel. She tamed a boat to Marcelle Island, that exquisite boy pale as a piano's ivory keys. She meant to change him but slurped too greedily, the frantic pulse stilling on her lips. Her body never lagged, though owls & falcons, clipped, unfed, shrieked in her skull. How many melted before her, pallid on the floors of the Galleria Borghese, Sydney Opera House, Vatican Library, the peepshows of De Wallen, Patpong, Times Square, men stripped, drained, eyes bulging from their skulls, cocks still erect. The inevitable arrived like a posse she couldn't outrun, recoil from streetlight, the shriek & groan of traffic, jackhammers, bulldozers, cranes. She hid in boarded-up buildings, outskirt warehouses, an overgrown culvert. Nothing is designed to endure forever; beauty, like any burden, eventually crushes the carrier. Summer 2011, Calais, she gave herself to the pyre. A busker two blocks inland sang a chorus she remembered from childhood, blue flames spiraling over the boardwalk.

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