At the World Trade Center
by Carol Coffee Reposa

Somewhere in the desert, dawn comes late
And angles of the world begin to shift
In acrid billows of freefloating hate.

Twin fireballs bloom like giant poppies, fate
Of millions melted down, consumed. Hands drift
Somewhere. In the desert, dawn comes late

As reams of paper spin through light, gyrate.
Small dervishes in white, they drop and lift
In acrid billows of freefloating hate.

While grimed firefighters plod through ruin, their gait
Slowed by the footsore dogs that whimper, sniff
Somewhere in the desert. Dawn comes late.

Through crumpled girders, sirens, shouts, a spate
Of cell phones ringing in the labyrinth
On acrid billows of freefloating hate.

Now at the fuming crypt new mourners wait,
Light candles, listen for a breath, a gift.
Somewhere in the desert, dawn comes late
In acrid billows of freefloating hate.

Looking at a Painting by Rousseau
by Carol Coffee Reposa

The forest pulls me in:
Hypnotic trees
Mythic green
A shade unknown anywhere else
Those fairy-tale leaves.

I walk beside sleepy cows
Too contented to graze.
Milkmaids wander drowsily
Through silent groves.
They too are spellbound,
Leaving their chores undone
Unhampered by their heavy gowns.
I want to curl into this idyll
Nod off somewhere in the dream
My head against an otherworldly oak
Like Rip Van Winkle
Missing decades of the evening news
Sleeping through reports of bullets flying
Blood and hunger everywhere

Before the guard
Comes by
To shake my shoulder
Hustling me
Into another room.

Song for New Orleans
(to the victims of Hurricane Katrina)
by Carol Coffee Reposa

Walt Whitman would love you
Even more today,
Grimy jewel of the South
Glowing in the foil
Of Big Muddy.
He would walk all over you,
Count the red brick buildings
Rich with soot
Streets bright with the heavy confetti
Of shopping bags and flyers.

He would amble through the French Quarter
Paint peeling from its facades
Its telephone wires sheathed in vines,
Before he wolfed down gumbo in big bowls
Crab claws floating on top like mermaids
Everpresent as flashing breasts.
He would swallow Louie Armstrong's highest notes,
Gulp down jazz, blues, and zydeco
Breathe in the ghosts of Williams and Capote

Before he strolled Canal Street
Standing on the neutral ground
To take in multitudes:
The young man rapping on a corner
A harried intern racing to the hospital
Handcuffed teens
Piling out of the police van
Like reluctant clowns.
Maybe he would see the live show at Loew's
With the Voodoo Sex Queens from Outer Space.

Further out, beyond the Superdome, he would hear
The Natchez Queen puffing up the river
Like an athlete out of shape,
Or hitch a ride on the fabled train
Chugging through the heavy evening air
Rich dark laughter
Shining like gold in an alley.
He would smell the sea and Lake Ponchartrain
Perfume and sweat, chickory, trash, and magnolias
Catalogue the whorls on an oyster shell.

Later he might loaf along the levees
Stroke their voluptuous shoulders
Take his ease under oaks and sleepy cypresses
Spanish moss trailing from their limbs
Like tattered shawls.
He would pass
Through both the shot-gun shacks
And antebellum dowagers of the Garden District
Becoming part of them,
Of everything.

Then, under a starry night
He would watch the endless pageants
Of streaming lights
To find his way to Duncan Plaza
Where Avery Alexander points the way
Leaning into civil rights
Remembering the auction block
Where John McDonough wants to do
"Good, much good, great good"
For his fellow man.

At last Walt would stretch out
By the homeless man
Asleep at the feet of George Washington
And dream
Curling into the heart
Of New Orleans
Grimy jewel of the South
Glowing
In the foil
Of Big Muddy.
At Blarney Castle
by Carol Coffee Reposa

The rain here is a lens.
We plod through gray refractions
Toward the keep
Light bent into round towers,
Stumble up the narrow spirals
Angled for armored feet.

As we climb, I look at ruined rooms
Rock walls slippery against my hand
Like the lines of a stale seducer
Patter or a tired comedian.

At last I reach the ramparts
Take in the dripping green of Cork
Its heavy skies
And razor wind.

And now the kiss: attendants lean me back
Into the fable like Rapunzel showing off
A backbend, and my mouth glides down wet stone,
A date gone wrong in all this cold.

They say I'll have the power now
To talk my way through anything.
I think about my grandfather
Who lived here once

Left for Texas and a woman, talked her
Into hunger, years of fights
Battlements of words
And stony wit

I leave the crenelations
Thinking of the stories
I could tell
Clever incantations that would guide me
Down these stairs,
A slick descent.

The poems of Carol Coffee Reposa have appeared or are forthcoming in The Atlantic Review, Coal City Review, The Formalist, Iron Horse Literary Review, The Valparaiso Review, The Texas Observer, and other journals and anthologies. She has three collections of poetry: At the Border: Winter Lights, The
Green Room, and Facts of Life. Nominated three times for the Pushcart Prize, she also has received three Fulbright/Hays Fellowships. A professor of English at San Antonio College, she has won several awards for teaching and writing, including the Poetry Award of the Conference of College Teachers of English (2003).