

Eleventh Floor Lies

This is a place
where minor matters are decided.
Here, on the eleventh floor of the courthouse,
I conduct a reluctant venue
for lawyers. Only small injustices occur.

I demand explanations. Tardiness is unacceptable.
The lawyers tell me lies about
where they were and when they left. No one,
certainly not I, believes the lies.
If they were dropped on a scale
they would barely press.

Still, I accept the lies. We must
get on with it. Cases are called
and I decide them. Someone wins
and someone loses. The number of people
in the courtroom remains the same,
but the faces change.

The lies are lost, replaced by other lies.
We pretend and we proceed. People leave
with more or less of something.
Decisions require words. At times
I look up from papers, to the wall.
On the wall I see: In God We Trust.

Misplaced Blame

*A power failure blamed on a cat shut
down the Cook County Criminal Courts
building Monday . . .*

— Chicago Daily Law Bulletin, 9/26/03

Let's not blame the cat.
He, if he was a he,
had a right to find
a warm, safe place
to rest until dark.

The cat did not know
the white powder was dropped
at the detective's feet,
or placed for finding
on the car's cold bright leather seat.

The cat did not see
what the worried witness saw—
the hooded man running
after firing the bullet
that ended an unfulfilled life.

The cat did not commit
the stickups or burglaries
or aggravated sexual assaults
or any of the other ways
men and women find to offend.

The courts closed for a day.
No trial, no prison term,
no decision to kill a killer—
a restful 24 hours.
Then it all started again.