

**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.