Post Office Discipline

Post Office discipline
collapses on the rammed earth
like dominoed bicycles.

One man always watches, paid,
cleaning his nails.  
Hammer-eyed, he oversees.  
He should purr, shirt cut
above the rest, but can't.

"I have earned this mask:
counted humid stamps,  
argued tall customers' hands 
from the countertop;  
suffered the lunch hour  
and the lazy man beneath 
the only fan.  
I worshipped him;  
my wife suffered, 
and I was almost always on time."

The Postmaster's glycerinal 
hairline buttressed
by fixed forehead wrinkles;  
scaffolding improves the dome.  
Eyes closed, the rasping man 
prevents a migraine. If his 
English improves 
he'll require a new pen, 
perhaps spectacles.

"My assistant will give you 
change for the telephone.  
Is that your bicycle?"

JOEL BAIRD