The Old Pump

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The Old Pump

David Lyttle is a professor of American literature at Syracuse University. He is the author of two books of poetry and a book of literary criticism.

The rain is falling
on the green boathouse
and on the marsh outside
and I am in the green
boathouse working alone
on the old black water pump
that like a hard muscle
has pumped up marsh water
to the main house longer
than the gibberish
of private myth reveals.
It needs new leathers
like I need a new heart.
What is my life coming to?
I have grunted & sworn
over these iron gears
for forty odd years.
But now it works again
thumping up marsh water
like blood thru lead pipes
to cook food in, to wash
dishes, faces, hands
to flush the toilet.

And now the rain passes
like some useless pain
clarifying nothing;
and in the light of evening
white moths drift
under the long pink anatomy
of clouds.
& I stand
by a golden boathouse
among lilies & duck-weed
singing to the totems
of my simple life
along the shore
glancing
thru leaves & shadows
at the main house.

—DAVID LYTTLE