Spill

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Spill

First I thought it was my furnace:
a black metallic odor
seeping through the glass-block
window into the yard.
Then I guessed it started
under my car: a shimmery river
of darkness. Then I figured: my lawn-mower. Did it blow a plug?
What was that weird smell?
Where were the plovers, the sparrows,
the terns? My eco-neighbor,
out watering compost worms,
said, “It’s BP!”

And then I knew.

It’s not BP. It’s him. It’s me.
We’ve been gushing bullshit
since Earth Day, 1970.
What to do? Write a poem?

Christ.

Rilke beat everyone to it.
He said, “You must change your life.”

—Angela Sorby
STATEMENT

Frogs, because their skin is osmotic, are often the first to register the signs of environmental degradation: they grow extra arms or fail to develop eyes. Poets, like frogs, should be marking these changes as they occur. I don’t think poets can change the world, at least not with poems alone, but we can be witnesses to its collapse, and maybe to its regeneration.

Angela Sorby’s books include DISTANCE LEARNING (New Issues, 1998); SCHOOLROOM POETS (UPNE, 2005), and BIRD SKIN COAT (Wisconsin, 2009), which won the Brittingham Prize. She’s headed to Xiamen University, China, on a Fulbright next year, but mostly she teaches at Marquette University, in Milwaukee.