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## Portal

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## Portal

Door  
to the  
Underworld,  
Gateway to Hell—  
what locals call  
*(superstition)*  
that great thermokarst canyon

The Batagaya Slump  
– *thermo-cirque, sediment flux, retrogressive thaw* –  
from the air: a huge keyhole, skeleton slot  
unlocking earth with the sun's brass key

a sprawling Rorschach-ian symmetry,  
its immense gash a mud-blot

that reads like a fearful O'Keef-ian  
flower blossoming in rough  
umber brushstrokes  
on a grass-gold  
veridian field –

the uncensored  
labial spread of a centerfold  
[long slash leading  
to the Batagay river  
an ugly perineal tear]

*just write it:*

*gaping vulvic gulch*

~~huge damp slump~~  
~~sucking downward~~  
~~compelling the plane~~  
~~to plunge~~  
~~into the awful~~  
~~unfathomed~~  
~~depth~~  
~~of that~~

~~sinking~~  
~~sludge~~  
~~canal~~

on the ground: the Slump is *a micro-climate*  
shadowy alcoves carved below the frostline  
chilled arctic air tunneled through hoodoo

rivulets of slurry melting on the gulley floor  
*form sediment mounds* slimed with green furze

soft explosions of soil and slithering avalanches  
– *intermittent erosion* –  
cliffs calve severed clumps

[*Valley of Stagnant Pools, Valley of Incremental Terrors, Valley of Fools*]

neon-garbed humans unspooling blue rope descend the slick rim  
tiny venomous spiders  
abseiling into the throat of a bloom

[into the gloom of an ossuary vaulted in ice, unthawed  
acres bricked with relics  
bison skull raptor bone petrified spruce]

stacked inside a towering headwall sweating stale water  
is a two-hundred-thousand-year-old forest  
tree roots proud of the grit-face  
protrude through time  
skeletal claws groping for purchase

[*what does Hell smell like?*  
–exhalations of mineral freon  
–gusts of de-oxygenated ice  
–unseen spores of prehistoric pollen  
–voodoo, dead things decanted from crypts]

[like standing inside a defrosting fridge  
slick  
slow  
drips  
a metronome ponderously ticking the eras]

*internal landslides destabilize*

*the sinkhole*                    ~~underfoot the ground contracts like something spawning~~

*periglacial dilation charted at a rate of 10 metres per annum*

~~like some huge unthinkable horror starting to crown~~

**CATHERINE GREENWOOD** is a PhD candidate in Creative Writing/Gothic Studies at the University of Sheffield, and her research includes the shifting literary topography of an Arctic sublime impacted by climate change, recent unburials of extinct ice-age animals exhumed from melting permafrost, and the attendant trade of mammoth tusks, or ice-ivory, inspire Catherine's eco-horror poetry sequence *Siberian Spring*.