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'No Happiness without (B)order': Brexit, Collective Ecstasy and Transgression in Niall Griffiths's *Broken Ghost*

The work of Welsh novelist Niall Griffiths addresses the urgent political questions which result from the gradual devolution of the Welsh and Scottish nations. His novels anticipate what Tom Nairn has famously called the gradual "break-up of Britain" (1981) and imagine the possibilities and dangers of "post-British" (cf. Gardiner 2004) communities. Far from being exercises in literary utopianism, however, Griffiths's novels do not simply highlight the inter-national divisions within the British nation-state, but also point to the intra-national fault lines within Wales that complicate idealised notions of devolved national unity. His first post-referendum novel, *Broken Ghost* (2019), focusses on the additional challenges of Brexit for a nation that is not only divided over the question of EU membership, but also by stark class differences.

In *Broken Ghost*, the spectral vision of a woman floating over the Welsh hills becomes the catalyst for social and political tensions to violently erupt in Brexit Britain. For the novel's central character-narrators – social outcasts who are severely affected by the social and political fallout of austerity politics and the Leave vote –, the vision becomes a source of hope and optimism. As people from all over the United Kingdom go on a pilgrimage to the site of the apparition at Lake Pendam, political detractors fear that the collective craze over the alleged apparition will destabilise the nation on the verge of leaving the EU and will empower "Remoaners", "illegal immigrants" and social "filth". As one commentator in the novel says, there is "no happiness without order" (57). This "order" relies on the maintenance of political and social boundaries that are challenged by the transgressive potential of collective ecstasy and counter-hegemonic action.

In my paper, I will demonstrate how Griffiths's novel interrogates the social and political divisions of Brexit Britain by juxtaposing two potential images of a future Britain after Brexit: the first scenario – "a glimpse into how life could, *should* be" (311) – is an ecstatic collective spectacle that prefigures a utopian post-British future which will unite the socially marginalised and overcome the bordering construct of the nation-state. This utopian scenario is contrasted with the bleak prospect of a corporate Britain ordered by private property laws and proto-fascist police brutality against transgressors of these laws. In my talk, I argue that

the novel stages this collision of ideas by employing focal and narrative strategies that unsettle
unsettle temporal and spatial order and thus challenge the boundaries necessary to maintain
images of national unity.