

“HIGH TIME YOU COME HOME”.
REVISION OF H. P. LOVECRAFT’S FINAL DAYS THROUGH THE
MORTAL EYES OF
JACQUELINE BAKER’S *THE BROKEN HOURS* (2014)

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ABSTRACT: The paper focuses on Jacqueline Baker’s novel *The Broken Hours*, subtitled “A Novel of H. P. Lovecraft,” and tackles the always problematic relationship between biography and history and the many ruptures that occur in the creation of a biofictional text. Navigating the multifaceted and labyrinthine realm of biofiction, the paper’s main point of departure will be the life of the American weird-tale and horror master Howard Phillips Lovecraft shortly before his death in 1937. With the introduction of an outside observer (who will turn out to be quite involved in the whole business), the novel tries to piece together some loose ends that characterize Lovecraft’s final days and, at the same time, makes bold attempts at a somewhat new reading of the author’s life. Perhaps the greatest strength of the narrative lies within Baker’s endeavor to paint the picture of Lovecraft as a human being rather than the otherworldly, beyond-mortal hermit known to scholars and fans through his short stories. The biofictional aspect profits mainly from the subtle and not-so-subtle changes the author decides to introduce to shed light on this extremely gloomy and desolate moment in Lovecraft’s life. The final product is a text that presents a fine blend between past and present, reality and imagination, and between mortality and immortality.

KEYWORDS: biofictional studies, H. P. Lovecraft, Jacqueline Baker, letters, biography, history, fiction.

Howard Philips Lovecraft is unequivocally hailed as *the* master of cosmic horror and weird fiction of the 20th century. A weirdo during his own time, Lovecraft’s life, to a great extent, revolved around madness, misunderstanding, hermitry, family issues, and sporadic outbursts of racial pronouncements. His legacy of short stories, poetry, and novellas still lives on, turning him into an indefatigable horror and weird fiction icon one hundred and thirty years after his birth. As one might expect, owing to his interesting life and posthumous rise to fame, there is a fancy array of biographical books about him. Apart from the two-volume magnum opus of the literary critic S. T. Joshi *I Am Providence* (2010), there are some other books that need mentioning – Donald Tyson’s *The Dream World of H. P. Lovecraft* (2010), *The Gentleman from Angell Street* (2001) by Muriel and C. M. Eddy, Jr., as well as the once only prominent biography of the author by L. Sprague de Camp *H. P. Lovecraft: A Biography* (1975). As far as the biographical aspect is concerned, things are well taken care of, but what of the fictional accounts of the author? Not many attempts have been made, only some novels that use Lovecraft’s name and unearth suspicious heirs, but nothing of the man himself. Though the list is somewhat longish, and one might think that Lovecraft is indeed presented very well in the fictional aspect of writing as well, taking a closer look at the novels shows us only superficial mentions and far-fetched plotlines. Literary endeavors worth mentioning here are Keith Giffen’s graphic novel *Lovecraft* (2003), Donald Tyson’s *The Lovecraft Coven* (2014), and Jonathan Howard’s abandoned duology *Carter & Lovecraft* (2015), but they all stop short of dealing with the real person behind the cosmicism

and horror in writing. All these books deal with fictional storylines, where Lovecraft may or may not appear, and those times he does, the plot is that of an intriguing yet tepid and bland as a B-movie. However, one title really stands out from this list, and this is the novel that I am going to discuss in this paper.

Jacqueline Baker's *The Broken Hours* (2014) traces the author's final days as he sits in his gloomy apartment on Angell street, and slowly withers away. Arthor Crandle, the main character, comes to work for H. P. Lovecraft, desperate for money during these financially unstable times in 1930s America. Once employed by the mysterious owner of the house, Crandle is very much welcomed by nothing else but shadows and dust in the bleak house that is going to be Lovecraft's final resting place. The novel then goes on to slowly entomb long-hidden secrets, but its major strength lies in trying to shed some light on Lovecraft's final moments on this mortal plane, something that none of the abovementioned novels ever attempted. Through the use of biofictional writing as the means to construct a life for someone whose real life was shrouded in mystery and secrecy, *The Broken Hours* shows Baker's bold attempts at altering the facts from the author's life in order to give voice and flesh to Lovecraft the person, not only to Lovecraft the myth. In other words, Baker is "using history in order to tell a story" – a story that is at the same time fictional, as any novel would claim to be, but also veracious as far as Lovecraft's life would allow it to be.

Within the biofictional world, there is an incessant dispute as to who is telling the truth and who is not. Is the biographer the one responsible for this truth delivery, or is there another level at which the reader has to look for truth, never trusting the entire process of fictionalizing a person's life? In his *Historical Criticism* (1879), Oscar Wilde points out that while for some "[t]he moment (i. e. history) makes the human, the biographical novel underscores how an autonomous individual can add and does create the age" (Lackey, 2022, p. 12). On the one hand, the biographer works with the available sources of information – letters, other biographies, autobiographies (if any), and whatnot. On the other, there is always something missing even from these often comprehensive enough pieces of evidence. This is where the biofictional writer steps in – both as a chronicler of the person's life and as a creator of all that has been left unsaid or lying dormant in the shadows behind the curtain. Jacqueline Baker commences a daunting undertaking, one that might not give her the desired result but definitely one that is going to brush some cobwebs off the walls of Lovecraft's final days. The focus on this exact period from the writer's life is also symbolic of the biofictional aspect Baker immerses herself into – offering an insight into the author's hermitry and mysteriousness but also proposing a new reading of those lacunae left by Lovecraft himself while writing his own story during his lifetime.

With thousands of letters sent to his friends and publishers, Lovecraft's life would seem like an open-house visit by the outsider. However, this is not the case, for he was known as a rather talkative person on paper but a detached and taciturn interlocutor as far as face-to-face conversation was concerned. What is more, he seldom wrote in his letters about painful moments from his personal life, and his friends knew as much as they were allowed to know via their written correspondence. Thus, it is no wonder how, in her novel, Baker decides to present the communication between Crandle and his employer mainly through the medium of small notes left on a table in the dark corridor leading to Lovecraft's room. This adds another layer of credibility to the life of the real H. P. Lovecraft also blurs the distinction between fiction and reality, making the beginning of the novel as true to the real-life person as possible. However, Baker has prepared a different approach, since she was not quite satisfied with the enigmatic halo of secrecy and untold facts surrounding her favourite real-life author. While the biographer may feel uncomfortable altering facts because „the author implicitly establishes a certain kind of truth contract with the reader“ (p. 1), the writer of biofiction feels a little bit at ease when dealing with this truth representation. For them, biographical accuracy is not that important anymore – the

historical character is well-known to the reader through their biographical narratives. What they are concerned with, actually, is the presentation of the character as a *real* figure, one that you can touch and meet in person – what Michael Lackey, one of the most distinguished contemporary scholars of biofiction, describes as “one that the reader might find more plausible and understandable” (p. 15). It is exactly this *plausibility* and *understandability* that makes Baker’s novel stand out from the rest of the list. She is not doing her best to give yet another account of Lovecraft’s life, spice it up with some monsters and secrets, and then finish in the way it is supposed to. Just the opposite – she is trying to acquaint herself and the reader with the figure of Lovecraft, the ordinary man during his final days, to get into his darkened room and sit on the couch next to him to converse with him if possible. In one way or another, Baker sees it as her mission in *The Broken Hours* to paint a somewhat different picture from the usual hermit Lovecraft appears to be in the other fictionalized or biographical texts, to breathe new life into him and free him from the historical chains that hold him firm to the ground, unveiling the obscurity behind Lovecraft as a mortal human being.

The importance of the biofictional texts in the creation of further biographical accounts of the respective person of interest is what David Lodge, in his collection “The Year of Henry James: The Story of a Novel” (2007) highlights as paradoxical - that this person’s feelings and veracious factual material construct and at the same time deconstruct the text, turning truth into a pretty malleable factor, ushering speculation, suggestions, and made-up evidence for the filling up of empty spaces often left by the author himself. Jacqueline Baker herself never deviates from this postmodern stance on writing and embarks on her journey carrying all those assumptions and beliefs with her. Already versed in Lovecraft’s biographies in the field – L. Sprague de Camp, S. T. Joshi, and August Derleth’s ones in general, she clearly understands that her task lies specifically and unequivocally in the realm of biofiction – for the biography can do only so much. Jonathan Dee, an American novelist, often can be heard to accuse writers of biofiction as possessed by the “God complex” – their incessant attempts to construct these historical figures as alive and kicking on the white page, taking credit for their new, resurrected lives. Michael Lackey, on the other hand, disagrees with this mode of thinking, saying that biographical novelists (and biofictional writers as well) do not see the paper person and the real person as one and the same persona. There are similarities, but there are differences as well – differences that should not be bothered to be left aside. Jacqueline Baker’s novel is not a novel to which readers would come for truthful accuracy and veracity – they are welcome to do so with S. T. Joshi’s monumental two-volume “I Am Providence.” Her purpose in this novel is to present readers with new options for knowing H. P. Lovecraft in his final days, not parrot the already-known facts from time immemorial. This is best illustrated by the Nigerian-born author Chika Unigwe, who takes a firm stand as far as biographical fiction as a separate and fully-fledged genre is concerned:

Readers don’t come to biographical fiction for truth. They come to biographical fiction for possibilities. (Unigwe, p. 255)

Jacqueline Baker ushers the reader into an altered, speculative world where the postulates of biography and real-life facts no longer hold that much water. In the novel, the primary focus falls on the character of Arthor Crandle, not on H. P. Lovecraft, and Baker makes it extensively obvious that this is going to be so until the very end. The latter occupies the space of a frame around which the main action takes place, sitting placidly in the dark, orchestrating and at the same time being orchestrated himself by the events surrounding him. This inactive status of the central figure in biofictional writing creates an ostensible rupture with historical fiction, awarding the writer of biofiction with more freedom in the imaginative process. But no matter how much freedom the writer may earn from this rupture, there is always something that they have to stand on if they want to create a text that will pass the test of time.

Perhaps the central question this novel poses is the following: what happens to H. P. Lovecraft that deserves the writer's attention? 1936 was an important year for both Lovecraft in the real world and for Crandle in the fictional world, for they both reach such an impasse that makes moving on almost impossible. Lovecraft is confined to his room – by illness, poverty, and his life nearing its end. Crandle, on the other hand, is pushed to the wall – his financial difficulties have become so dire and hopeless that his only salvation lies in taking any position that pays money. The other option is losing one's mind, which is slowly what underscores the entirety of the novel, right from the very first sentence:

Desperation, some say, is but a particular form of madness. (Baker, 2016, p. 3)

It is not a coincidental choice of words for the beginning of the novel since it is exactly madness that plagued Lovecraft's life from an early age, taking both his father and mother away. Baker opens her novel in that way, hinting at what might happen to her protagonist as the text progresses. And it is something that the reader might well expect. Madness is what awaits anyone who comes near Lovecraft in the darkened, decrepit house – Crandle, Flossie, even the aunt – Helen. Despite the fact that the word “madness” itself (and the adjective “mad” as well) is mentioned only twice in the entire novel, the author makes it hang in the air, pervading every corner of her narrative. By doing this, the biofictional creator adds credibility to her text but also decides to focus on other aspects that might prove more fertile. What is more, in many of the other books about Lovecraft, the theme of madness is abundantly explored and utilized. In that case, adhering to the historical aspect of the situation, the two characters – that of Crandle and Lovecraft – share a lot of similarities with one another. Both have somewhat failed at their job endeavors, Crandle going from job to job like a rolling stone, Lovecraft writing story after story, and not getting sufficient recognition, barely holding the rope. What is more, Crandle indecisively talks about his partner in life, leaving the reader to doubt what is going on really. Apart from his daydreams and regrets about Jane, the only thing that he tells us about his status is the curt response while talking with the clerk at the job office:

And neither are you then what is commonly called a family man? Which is not to say I have anything against it. But I assume you are not connubially leashed, lest you would not be applying for such a position, in domus, as it were.

Sir?

I assume, apart from your good mother, there is no Mrs. Candle, no Lady Candle, no Candle of Perpetual Sorrows. That would complicate things, of course.

There is no Mrs. Crandle. (p. 29, emphasis mine)

Lovecraft himself had a failed marriage behind him, with Sonia Greene divorcing him in 1933, unable to live the life of constantly fighting for a bare existence. Last but not least, Crandle is asked by his employer – once again via a note on the table – to read and type an unfinished horror short story about a young chambermaid, Aralyn Eakinns, and her father, Oakley Eakkins. What is interesting here is how Baker deliberately commences the central theme of her novel – to slowly transform the character of Arthor Crandle into the enigmatic figure of H. P. Lovecraft.

All this historical and biographical interrelatedness is not where the strength of *The Broken Hours* lies. Perhaps the central idea that sets the novel apart is *transformation*. Jacqueline Baker infuses her novel with some true-to-life accounts of Lovecraft – the facts surrounding his aunt Helen, her illness and recovery, as well as his gradual decline in terms of physical and psychological health during the last years of his life – but her major contribution to the realm of biofiction is what she decides to do with her protagonist, Arthor Crandle as a means of depicting the real writer of horror fiction in a different light. Up to some point in the novel, the reader can clearly see the distinction between Lovecraft and Crandle as two separate people inhabiting one and the same house. However, slowly but

steadily, Baker begins an undertaking to combine the two of them into one, creating a new version of Lovecraft that will serve a different purpose – to separate the man from the myth and to breathe new existence into his persona. This gradual transformation from Crandle, the real human being, to Crandle/Lovecraft takes place in a very Lovecraftian manner. For Lovecraft himself he was a man devoted to darkness, dreams, and astrology – all of these things that begin to manifest to Crandle once he sets foot in the house:

And another thing: I had begun to notice that upon waking, I did not feel like myself, as if I'd spent my few sleeping hours dreaming the dreams of someone else; perhaps that, too, a result of the manuscript, that eerie story, or a symptom of the work at least, typing someone else's correspondence, someone else's thoughts. (p. 95)

Dreams occupy a central place in Lovecraft's literary canon, and he was immensely fascinated by everything they had to offer. Short stories like "The Dreams in the Witch House" (1933), "Beyond the Wall of Sleep" (1919), and his longer novella "The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath" (1926-1927) serve as evidence of the importance of dreams for Lovecraft. Crandle begins to dream when he comes to the house, but this is not the only strange thing that begins to happen to him. Once in the house, he begins to *feel* the darkness there, to notice its animate presence:

But the second floor, too, was dark. Only the light shone dimly from beneath his study door. And that presence, a slight stirring of the air around me, as if someone, something, moved there in the darkness. I scarcely knew what to think of it, whether it was the place or my own unreliable perceptions. (p. 94)

Baker masterfully incorporates H. P. Lovecraft's own short stories within her text, creating a palimpsest postmodern writing that gradually begins to lose its contours. A good example of this would be the short story „The Whisperer in Darkness“ (1930), in which an instructor of literature is invited by a man who lives in an isolated farmhouse in Vermont, claiming to have evidence of some strange sightings in the rivers after a serious flood hit that part of the country. Henry Akeley, the Vermont farmer, communicates with Albert Wilmarth through letters, a communication that gradually becomes more and more alarming, making Wilmarth make up his mind to go and see for himself. When he reaches the farmhouse, he finds Akeley in a terrible physical condition, blabbering nonsense about an extraterrestrial race that has been communicating with him for the past months. In *The Broken Hours*, the author also positions Lovecraft in the darkness, from where he whispers his faint and near-death messages to Crandle through letters and notes, reluctant to meet him in person due to some undefined physical malady. This darkness, however, does not hold only Lovecraft within its grasp. There is something more to it, despite the fact that Baker never fully reveals what it is:

As I neared the second floor, I could feel it, that thickening presence that seemed to be there, raising the hair on the back of my neck. It occurred to me that the presence was strongest when moving toward his study door or away from it. I could almost hear it. A low, steady, almost imperceptible groan. I nearly spun a retreat to my room, but the idea of turning my back on the thing, the feeling, whatever it was, in that darkness, was worse than moving forward to the promise of light, candles I remembered seeing in a utility drawer in the kitchen. (p. 121)

Crandle's constant roaming in the darkness of the house and the mysteries surrounding his employer begin to take their toll upon him. The majority of Lovecraft's characters are actually wanderers in the darkness of his oeuvre, trying to find whatever reason and explanation there might be. Baker does not deviate from that literary heritage but builds Crandle's life in the house as one constantly beset by strange occurrences and surreal experiences. It is exactly through Crandle that the reader

catches a glimpse of the persona that Baker is trying to construct for the audience. The historical aspect is no longer important, and the move towards biofiction is best illustrated by the shift of attention in the novel from Lovecraft to Crandle.

If it may not be quite easily detectable from the beginning of the novel, the central part of it clearly shows how Jacqueline Baker's attempts are not targeted at following Lovecraft's life as it was, but to follow the life of her fictional character, Arthor Crandle, and through him to cast a different light onto her favourite cosmic horror and weird fiction author. Biofiction is immensely concerned with the human agency rather than the biographical or the historical, thus creating the abovementioned severance, described by Michael Lackey as "rupture rather than continuity with historical fiction" (Biofiction, 16). It is this rupture that allows Baker to present a story different from the ones known to the reader through the previously mentioned biographies and fictional texts. The biofictional element is concerned primarily with the creation of something new than simply repeating what is already known. In that vein, the biofictional writer occupies the important role of both an inventor and a revealer of mysteries through the use of his text. And despite the fact that there are some plothes and undeciphered mysteries in the text, Baker does her best to do her aim – for she is aiming at giving Lovecraft a new fictional life, detached to some extent from the life he has already been assigned by the rest of his biographers. This "new fictional life" is possible only through the introduction and incorporation of Crandle, who might appear as an intruder in the eyes of the historically accurate chronicler. Intrusion, rewriting, and metamorphosis – these are all levels of Baker's biofictional interference in Lovecraft's life. It is through Baker's creativity that the reader is allowed to see behind the veil of Lovecraft's shrouded in mystery in the last days of this mortal plain. The creative vision of the biofictional writer opens up new vistas of possibilities, where the historically accurate is not the sole truth anymore but is actually being dethroned. This change in power comes with new ways of thinking about the subject matter of the biofictional text, and it is exactly this new mode of thinking that enhances the "critical-creative capacity of the reader" (28), turning the text of biofiction into a special relationship between the writer and their public. Baker's masterful maneuvering between the historical and the biofictional renders this complicated relationship satisfying for Lovecraft's aficionados, for they finally get to catch a glimpse of their favourite author's last days as a mortal human being. To a large extent, this is the main purpose of Baker's novel – to make Lovecraft finally step into the light through the main character of Crandle.

Later in the novel, when things in the house (and the protagonist's life as well) have taken a strange turn, Crandle meets Lovecraft's aunt, Helen, who has been hospitalized for some time but has now returned home to take care of the house and her nephew's condition. Aunt Helen arrives and develops an uncanny interest in Crandle, trying to explain the situation behind her nephew's condition and the squalor of the living conditions. However, as the story progresses, Baker shows that Lovecraft's aunt is actually after something else, not simply worried about her health issues and the state of the house. By mentioning the aunt, there is no going further without mentioning also Flossie, a fictional character that appears one day in a search for accommodation. She mentions to Crandle that she has known Helen, who lived in that house, and that the latter has told her that she can use the room whenever she comes to visit. Crandle and Flossie develop a strange relationship from the very beginning since Flossie mistakenly takes Crandle as the master of the house, adding more oil to the biofictional experiment of Baker that is going to come to fruition on the very last pages of the novel. Crandle sees that he can pass for his employer in front of Flossie and decides to play along. However, he has to come up with some facts about his employers/his own life that Flossie might expect to be true as far as her close friend Helen is concerned. When Flossie and Crandle meet, Helen is still missing in action, leaving the property to just the two of them and to her nephew, enigmatically cuddled in the shadows on the

second floor. This shift of attention from Lovecraft's women-related life to Crandle's life is not accidental, and this fictionalizing of the biographical subject and replacing it with a biofictional one serves to propose an alternative to the *known* history and cast light on the *unknown* elements from it. Crandle and Flossie's relationship, more or less, mirrors the complicated relationship that Lovecraft and his wife Sonia had while their marriage was intact. In the novel, Flossie is always trying to find some new ways of connecting to Crandle and his mysteriousness (for he has taken the role of impersonating his employer completely), just as Sonia was trying her whole life to reach Howard in their marital relationship. Still, Baker deems it fit to assign Flossie a different role whatsoever in order for her biofictional text to become more solid in terms of subject matter and objectives. Flossie turns out to be a figment of Crandle's imagination, existing solely within his troubled mind and nowhere else:

Where did you go? I said.

Nowhere, she said, sadly. I've been here the whole time.

Much later, when I opened my eyes, I was stretched out on the sofa next to Flossie. All the lights blazed, and she lay there dead to the world, covered in the violet blanket that she clutched bunched up under her chin like a child. Her back was to me and her yellow hair had fallen across her face, so that I could not see it.

I eased myself from the sofa and paused there a moment. I cannot explain it, but I had in that moment such a feeling of dread and horror. There was something so terrible in her stillness and in that ordinary detail, that Flossie in that moment did not have a face. (p. 232)

Flossie is gone the next day Crandle goes to her room. The place is empty, fancy cushions and draperies missing, "gone were the bouquets of white chrysanthemums" (p. 234), only dust remains. Crandle slowly realizes that it was his imagination, and not reality, that gave him Flossie in the first place. His slow and gradual change from having dreams of some ghastly, darkness-entombed presence, spawned by the stories of his employer, to his imagination playing tricks on him in broad daylight, signals the ultimate transformation that awaits him at the novel's end. The biofictional often offers the reading audience exactly this – a complete transformation at the world's end. However, for Baker, this is simply a metaphorical ending, for it is in her hands to orchestrate the direction of her characters' destinies.

The last segment, from the gradual metamorphosis of Crandle to Lovecraft, begins to take place with the coming of the aunt and Crandle's visit to a place from Lovecraft's own youth. It is the beginning of the novel when Crandle finds a strange stony piece in his bedroom, one that he is unable to decipher for a large portion of the novel. This stone is actually one of the biofictional materials that Jacqueline Baker utilizes in order to navigate the novel in the direction of her own choosing. Obviously, the stone belongs to a larger one, and Crandle begins to question its significance and importance for his mysterious employer. The stone itself is constructed with a rather interesting story. Crandle finds it in a very obscure manner:

I was startled awake. I knew not how long I'd slept, if truly at all, but a sudden thought brought my blood ripping hotly into my veins, startling me into the unfamiliar dark.

I switched on the bedside lamp and looked at the stone in my palm, the skin there welted red where I'd clenched it. I rubbed its smooth edge with my thumb.

A piece of gravestone. (p. 16)

As the novel progresses, Crandle develops a somewhat undetachable relationship with the stone and the mysteries it might entail. Further provoked by the dream-like quality of the stone's discovery, Crandle sets his mind on the stone as the latter might be some object that holds the answers to the questions that lurk in the darkest corners of the house – and of his employer's life as well. The stone is

always present when Crandle decides to do anything at all – it is there when he makes up his mind to write a letter to his wife, Jane:

I began another letter to Jane, enclosing the money and assuring her more would soon follow. Beyond that, I had little to write, and I found myself staring at the page, so I signed off and sealed the envelope and put it aside. I picked up the chunk of gravestone and sat turning it, staring out at the glittering city. The dormer light there blinked on and off, on and off. I was becoming quite accustomed to it. I thought I must venture out when the weather was warmer and find out just what sort of building it was. (p. 45)

He is also fidgeting with the stone when he is instructed by his employer to send a letter from the latter to his mother:

My god, I thought then. I rose and rifled through the pockets of my suit jacket. I pulled out my wallet, the chunk of gravestone. Where had I put the letter? Then I recalled I'd left it sitting on the desk. There it was, itself a mystery: each time I meant to deliver it, something distracted me, something stood in my way. As if forces were conspiring against it. I turned the envelope over in my hands. The mother, surely, would shed some light on the man. Perhaps that in itself was keeping me. Perhaps I was afraid of what I would find. (p. 56)

Crandle's sleep habits are also influenced by the presence of the gravestone – as the novel progresses, he finds it more and more difficult to fall asleep during the night:

That night I did not sleep. I rose and moved around restlessly in my attic room. I felt weary—sad, too—and I went to the window to look out over the darkened city, turning the piece of gravestone in my fingers as had become my habit and comfort. (p. 58)

The great revelation comes when Crandle makes a visit to the psychiatric hospital where his employer's mother is supposed to reside, being treated of an unknown mental illness. He learns from the doctors there that his employer's mother died fifteen years ago. What is more, the doctor also notices that Crandle is somewhat quite vested in the whole family matter:

Crandle, yes. Forgive me, Mr. Crandle, but may I make an observation?

Certainly.

You seem to have become rather deeply involved, yourself, in the matter. (p. 167)

Crandle becomes the hands, feet, and tongue of his employer, doing things for him that the latter is unable to do due to him being incapacitated in the darkest recesses of his home. Quite expected, the ending of the novel is what Jacqueline Baker has been preparing the reader for – the complete transformation of her protagonist, Crandle, into Lovecraft himself. The gradual alterations of facts from the historical reality of the author's life to the biofictional reality of the novel culminate in Baker's ultimate vision of her text – combining the protagonist and the inspiration into one, signaling that the final trick up her sleeve is now on the table. In the story Crandle is rewriting on behalf of his employer, the old Oakley repeatedly visits Aralyn, ending his stay with the words: "High time she come home" (p. 12), then disappearing into the night. These words prophetically spell the fate of Crandle, though he realizes it once it is too late.

The ending of the novel deserves a bit more attention than the rest. In it, Baker masterfully concludes this biofictional experiment of combining Lovecraft and her protagonist Crandle into one,

successfully completing the process of transformation that she has started at the beginning of the novel. Once Crandle realizes that Flossie has been nothing but a figment of his rather rickety imagination, slowly being detached from the realm of sanity, he drifts off on the sofa, only to awaken later, being visited by his employer's aunt – Helen. However, this is where the mystery is revealed – Crandle is actually no more but has turned into his employer, who has already disappeared without a trace from the darkened room.

I might have slept. I wasn't certain. When I opened my eyes, it was with the sense of a great deal of time having passed, and someone leaning over me in the half-light.

Howard, she said. I thought I might find you here.

She moved slowly, painfully, out of the apartment and up the creaking stairs and I followed.
(p. 214)

Crandle's final moments as Arthor Crandle and his new life as Howard Philips Lovecraft end and begin at the same time with him following the aunt up the stairs leading to the vacated room of his employer. There is no need whatsoever to ask questions or doubt the reality around him, just a silent acknowledgment of the situation. By offering the reader such an ending, Baker clearly shows that for a biofictional text, there are no boundaries that cannot be crossed, and that once you start that crossing, you have to go all the way up. The myth-making process has not reached its end; it is just the opposite – *The Broken Hours* continue Lovecraft's life even after the death of the man himself. Lovecraft's death in 1937 coincides with Crandle's metaphorical death at the hands of the biofictional writer, who, above all, desires to turn the tides of historical accuracy to her own devices. Baker's constant use of history in order to construct a different history – and more important, a continuation of this history – for her favourite weird fiction writer culminates in this final episode where Crandle, though unsure of what is really going on around him, is led by the hand through the darkened corridors of the house and time, slowly becoming one with the world around him. The fear of losing oneself in the darkness, as Crandle first feared when entering the house and his mysterious employer's complicated relationships, little by little gives way to the eradication of darkness and fear and its subsequent replacement with light and placidity. The biofictional touch is complete – Crandle is no more, and Lovecraft gets more years to his immortal life. A new immortal life breathed upon by the mortal eyes of the fictional writer:

I dreamed I would go to Angell Street again.

All the lights blazed out from the windows there, as if for a party, falling yellow on the walk and on the grass and on the fountain trickling musically into the night. There were fireflies in the woods and they glittered faintly, floated up and up, cold stars against the blackened ether. Then the woods darkened, and the lights in the great house went out, one by one, in every window, and I was being led by the hand through its rooms, slowly, until my fear was gone. How easy to hide oneself there. And, hidden, to lose oneself.

But within all darkness is the possibility of light. (p. 229)

This exact “possibility of light” is what might have served as the impetus for Jacqueline Baker in the first place to write her biofictional novel. She herself mentions in the last pages of the book that “I have taken liberties with certain details while, I believe, remaining true to the spirit of the man I found in his stories and letters” (232). This circle is now complete – the biofictional aspect has performed its duty, and this tripartite late-night dance *biographical/historical/fictional* has come to an

end. An end that suits both Baker as the puppeteer and as the ardent fan she herself is. What is more, it is an ending fit for the persona of Lovecraft as a man who gained his gargantuan literary and cultural influence posthumously – becoming immune to death and gaining immortal life through his followers. As Lovecraft himself stated in his short story “The Nameless City.”

*That is not dead, which can eternal lie,
And with strange eons, death may even die.*

Signaling that death is not the final destination but, for some, is just the beginning. Death is no longer for H. P. Lovecraft; he has overcome it and moved further. He is now free to roam the endless corridors not only of his house at Angell Street but also those of time and space, becoming a thing “out of time,” if I may use a periphrasis on his short story “The Shadow Out of Time.”

Jacqueline Baker’s novel *The Broken Hours* is not a text that easily fits the rest of the fictional accounts concerning the horror legend Howard Phillips Lovecraft. Commencing her arduous work with bold attempts at creating a masterful blend of biographical and fictional content, Baker creates a text that is about Lovecraft and, at the same time – is not about him to a great extent. The shadows that populate the room of Crandle’s mysterious employer do not reside in the room alone; they move freely through the text, aligning with the obscurity surrounding both Crandle’s present predicament and Lovecraft’s personal life in general. The author uses the freedom of her (and her characters’) imagination in order to fill in some of the empty places from the life of Lovecraft, the main concern, of course, being personal and intimate rather than literary. It should be noted that Baker is not writing another biography of Lovecraft or another exploration of his literary prowess. Just the opposite – she is tailoring her text based on a plethora of ideas and vistas, with the firm belief that she can concoct a story, introduce some new faces and happenings, and still pay her homage to the master of weird fiction and horror. The overall product is *The Broken Hours* – quite an ordinary story about Lovecraft’s final days (“ordinary” as far as this adjective works for Lovecraft) seen through the eyes of an unsuspecting protagonist. A product that masterfully maneuvers between the mortal and the immortal plain, between real and dreamlike, even between past and present, signaling the author’s attempt to create a text that can cover as much ground as possible, given the formal limitations of 200 pages. *The Broken Hours* is a text that truly deserves its place amongst the other texts about Howard Phillips Lovecraft, and on the other hand, it can fit on the shelf of the constantly-developing field of biofictional writing, sharing a lot of its formal and stylistic characteristics.

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