



The Broken Hours

Jacqueline Baker

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In the spring of 1936, horror writer H.P. Lovecraft is broke, living alone in a creaky old house and deathly ill. At the edge of a nervous breakdown, he hires a personal assistant, Arthur Crandle. As the novel opens, Crandle arrives at Lovecraft's home with no knowledge of the writer or his work but is soon drawn into his distinctly unnerving world: the malevolent presence that hovers on the landing; the ever-shining light from Lovecraft's study, invisible from the street; and visions in the night of a white-clad girl in the walled garden. Add to this the arrival of a beautiful woman who may not be exactly what she seems, and Crandle is pulled deeper into the strange world of the horror writer (a man known to Crandle only through letters, signed "Ech-Pi"), until Crandle begins to unravel the dark secret at its heart.

A brilliantly written, compelling and deeply creepy novel, *The Broken Hours* is an irresistible literary ghost story.

The Broken Hours Details

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Author : Jacqueline Baker

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From Reader Review The Broken Hours for online ebook

Emma Catanzaro says

I gave this book three stars because I liked the style of writing. However, I don't know what happened! I was so confused and the end didn't really clear it up for me.

Tom Cork says

I really enjoyed this little novel. The ever-shifting narrative reminded me of House on Haunted Hill by Shirley Jackson. As the story progresses, little clues from the outside world begin to seep in, leading you to question what you've assumed to be true.

I'm very glad this wasn't just fan fiction for a particular author. The prose is delicious and stands on its own. If you find yourself reading a novel on the way home, trying to walk and balance the book on your arm while holding up an umbrella in the strong winds of a thunderstorm, chances are it's a keeper. I want to read Baker's other fiction!

John says

In the midst of the Great Depression, Arthor Crandle is desperate for employment. He eagerly accepts a position as a live-in secretary/assistant for H.P. Lovecraft, a reclusive unpublished author and shut-in. When Arthor arrives, he discovers an elegant, two-story colonial with some rooms converted into one-room apartments. The only job instructions he receives are to perform the simple tasks left in writing for him and to not enter his sanctum where he sleeps, dines, and writes during the evening hours. When Arthor begins seeing a young girl dressed in a nightgown playing in the garden, he begins to investigate the house's current and past occupants.

Although the premise of this Gothic novel had promise, it did not live up to my expectations. Although simply okay in my opinion, the plot lacked dramatic tension and suspense.

Barry Hammond says

Fiction which uses real historical characters can be tricky and sometimes disappointing if the reader knows more about the historical figure than the author. Happily, this is not the case with this novel. Baker uses weird fiction writer H.P. Lovecraft as a character but has obviously done her research. Although she takes a few liberties with facts (as sometimes fiction must) she remains true to the essence of both his character and some of the tone of his stories to weave her own rather creepy tale into which Lovecraft figures. The prevailing tone of a cold spring in Providence provides the setting for a ghostly story which touches on madness, identity, and hints of things otherworldly which captivates the reader utterly. A literary gothic of high quality with an interesting take on one of the masters of horror. - BH.

Annie says

H.P. Lovecraft is experiencing a revival. The strange author of even stranger stories had a life, it seems, that was crying out to be turned into fiction. Within the last year, I've seen Lovecraft turned into a character in stories based in his fiction. His settings have been revived for even more novels. Jacqueline Baker's *The Broken Hours* is a literary turn on this little renaissance. Her novel is set in the last year of Lovecraft's life, when he was furthest down on his luck and dying of cancer. *The Broken Hours* sent me scurrying to Lovecraft's biography more than once—and, consequently, had me wondering what was fictional and real more than once, too...

Read the rest of my review at A Bookish Type. I received a free copy of this book from Edelweiss for review consideration.

Peter Darbyshire says

Delightfully eerie.

Aksel Dadswell says

I had mixed feelings about *The Broken Hours*. The book was not at all what I expected, in good and bad ways.

The writing itself was spectacular, scalpel-precise but never too simple or sparse. Every word felt like it was exactly where it was supposed to be. There was a beauty and intensity - and more than a little melancholy - that cut right into my perception and continued its work deep into my brain matter. Lines like the "coldly muscled coursing of the river" provided perfect, delicious moments of imagery so vivid in both what they evoked and the sheer genius of that particular combination of words that I often found myself re-reading them over and over again under my breath until the rhythm became familiar with my tongue.

The story, which was not exactly plot-heavy, opting instead for a gloomy slow-burn character study, was engaging in terms of psychology and atmosphere, but confounded my initial expectations of the cover's promise that this was "a novel of H.P. Lovecraft." I kept expecting - hoping - some eldritch horror would come squirming from the shadows, and was inevitably disappointed when this [SPOILERS] didn't happen. But to judge a book by something it is not - and something that it isn't trying to be, more specifically - is somewhat unfair.

The real problem I had with *The Broken Hours* was the at once implausibility and predictability of what constitutes the book's major climactic twist. Although the mystery is underplayed quite well at times, to fantastic emotional effect (a particular flashback is brilliantly executed in terms of what it specifically doesn't mention), it became one of those "I really hope they don't go in that direction" contrivances. Ultimately, the author did go in that direction, and although by no means a failure, the reveal fell flat for me. A quiet novel with a quiet ending, all of it laced with melancholy and loss, but with something missing that could have brought some of the disparate elements together and elevated it to great piece of literature.

I'd still definitely recommend the book though; I devoured it quickly and urged myself to read one more chapter, one more chapter with every sitting. Jacqueline Baker writes with a deep sort of Gothic poetry that

really gets under your skin and stays there, worming its way into you. Despite my misgivings, its scenes and characters and tangible atmospherics still turn slowly in my head.

Melissa says

I got this book expecting a frightening story about H.P. Lovecraft. It was a good story that easily captured my attention but H.P. Lovecraft made few appearances in the story besides letters written to the main character Arthor. The beginning I thought set the stage for the rest of the book with its atmospheric description of the house in which Lovecraft lived. Instead it was replaced by odd occurrences that were suppose to be frightening but really weren't. Upon finishing I was curious as to why this is listed as horror because to me horror is scary or frightening and this book read like an old ghost story written to amuse more than frighten the reader.

Jeff Raymond says

I guess it was only a matter of time before Lovecraft himself started winding his proverbial tentacles into the New Weird as a character, but here we are with *The Broken Hours*, a quiet, creepy affair.

The story is mainly about a man who takes an assistant position in an old house in Providence. He never meets the man he works for, communicating only in letters. The house is believed to be haunted, there is unexplained phenomena throughout, and the book follows these reveals slowly throughout.

The most frustrating part of reading this book is that Jacqueline Baker makes a conscious decision to place all quotes within italics instead, which is something I never got used to and really drew me out of the story instead of perhaps drawing me inward as intended. The result is that the narrative itself, while an interesting, slow burn, feels more than a little stilted as one tries to get back into the tale. Other readers might not have the same issue, though.

There's not a lot of *obvious* mythos here, and the payoff isn't what I personally expected, but this is still a fun read. Things are just uneasy and creepy enough to keep the reader engaged, and the Providence of this book feels appropriately Lovecraftian (even though people aren't fornicating with the sea monsters as far as we can tell), so there's a lot to love here for those interested in weird fiction or Lovecraft in general. There's just too much here that doesn't *quite* work that keeps *The Broken Hours* from being great instead of the very good that it is.

Laura Jones says

This is the most tightly written Gothic horror story I've ever read. That's a seriously impressive feat for a book that relies heavily on atmosphere. It's probable that my lack of knowledge about H.P. Lovecraft had a effect on my enjoyment of the novel. This a worthwhile read. I liked the protagonist, but I didn't really care about him, and that's what kept this from getting a higher rating. Given the opportunity. I would love to read more from Baker.

Amy Sturgis says

This is a delicious slow burn of a reading experience. And "experience" really captures it for me; the haunting prose kept me in the moment, fully engaged with disbelief suspended. I purposefully did not try to anticipate where the mystery was going or what the end point would be, and I think that's the best way to enjoy this dreamlike and deeply psychological book.

If you're looking for non-stop action, you'll be disappointed. That said, I was riveted the entire time.

The more you know about the life of H.P. Lovecraft, the more you will appreciate this novel. I felt especially connected to Jacqueline Baker's masterful descriptions because I have walked those streets in Providence and seen that house, that library, that cemetery, etc.

I won't say much more, because this really needs to be experienced, not spoiled. The novel is disturbing in a good way. I finished it a couple of days ago, and it's been following me around ever since. I know I'll be thinking about it for a good while to come.

Mike Perschon says

I dislike giving the impression I'm a literary snob, so let me set the record straight, immediately: I love horror, and I love good writing, and I'm as likely to read Stephen King as I am to read Shirley Jackson. Nevertheless, there are some who question if modern horror can ever transcend its genre ghetto, and having just finished Jacqueline Baker's *The Broken Hours*, I'm optimistic it not only can, but already has. Google literary horror, and you'll get lists pointing you toward Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, and Joyce Carol Oates. With rare exceptions, these lists don't contain anything written in the past 30 years, as though literary status is denied to horror until it's aged sufficiently to have lost much of its potency. However, like SF and Fantasy, literary writers are turning their attentions towards horror. And since I finished it with *Halloween* just a few days hence, it is my recommendation for those who not only appreciate good storytelling, but careful wordsmithing and poetic prose.

Baker's writing has always been haunted. From her short stories in *A Hard Witching* to her stark vision of Canada's western prairies in *The Horseman's Graves*, there's always a sense of the uncanny stalking at the edges of the page. In those works, her ghosts are more subtle. In *The Broken Hours*, they take center stage in a tale about a man who comes to work as a personal assistant for H.P. Lovecraft. In Baker's hands, the setting of Providence, Rhode Island during the Great Depression is haunted enough, and so the first 96 pages read much like her previous work, albeit in a more compelling, concise fashion. It wasn't until that 96th page, when I read the words "It was in my room," that I felt the chills crawl up my spine. But don't expect that *The Broken Hours* suddenly becomes a Cthulhu-inspired horror-fest at that point. There are no Elder Gods in these pages, no physical portals to worlds of madness, though Baker's creation of Lovecraft's voice feels terribly authentic. Instead, Baker slowly doles out the remaining moments of atmospheric horror in small doses, slowly revealing the presences behind closed doors, in the darkness on the landing, in the garden out the window, or in the blinking lights of the castle-like structure across the city.

One of my favourite passages in *The Broken Hours* speaks to the desire for horror, but also demonstrates what sets reading Baker's horror from writers like Dean Koontz.

"What is it about the darkness which draws us? At once inward and outward. I had always been too easily drawn, too easily, Jane would have said, too easily enveloped. I, who feared once, as a child, not the witching autumn, but spring, that clear-lighted season of ghosts when Jesus rose from the tomb, bloodless

and terrible, rolling away the stone in the sunlight with his own deathless hands. I imagined Jane's shock at hearing such a confession.

Oh yes, the darkness drew me. Had drawn me always.

There was something in me, I knew, something perhaps in us all which, no matter our rational selves, was haunted."

It is this beautiful prose, this beautiful terror, which makes *The Broken Hours* my top literary recommendation for the Halloween season. While the chills of *The Broken Hours* are admittedly slow in coming compared to King or Koontz, once they arrive, they are the kind that creep up to leech the warmth and light from a bright autumn afternoon, an experience I was shocked to have on my way to pick my children up from school. Scaring a reader in the night watches is relatively easy - scaring a reader in broad daylight, especially one who cut his horror teeth on King's *Pet Semetary* is another. And yet there I was, reading while walking, the hair on my arms standing on end, the sun shining down on me. And unlike recent King or almost all Koontz, Baker knows how to end a book, leaving me lingering over the last page, reading it over several times, to let it sink in, beneath the skin.

Will Mayo says

An excellent biographical novel concerning the American horror writer Howard Phillips Lovecraft in which three characters merge, become two and then one. I could see the ending coming but I followed it through to the end enjoying the read while remaining sympathetic to a long dead recluse whose stories delighted me when I was but a boy. Superbly written, this was a feast for my eyes.

James says

i will admit to some initial surprise at the lack of what one comes to expect from a novel of H.P. Lovecraft... but that hardly seemed to matter, as i tore through this book in one sitting (OK, i got up to make tea, so two sittings technically)... the writing for this tale was period perfect, and full of wonderful phrases and word choices... just grand... definitely an odd literary trip, but quite enjoyable... one was consistently left to wonder what was happening, and what one might have missed, or what was not being said/told... a palpable sense of dread or wrongness or doom threaded throughout, all that though it's not even that kind of story at all... one might think that would disappoint, but not so, it simply adds to the strength of the author's talents that such a misdirection, brought solely by the reader, as one is never told *The Old Ones* will be seeping from the void in any way, so it seems to merely take the mention of Lovecraft to make one assume certain things... ultimately an unsettling story, and one that asks that you think and feel, and possibly suspend rationality just a little... darkness is closer than you expect...

Cats of Ulthar February Weird Fiction says

Review: *BROKEN HOURS* by Jacqueline Baker

I have been extraordinarily blessed in the last few years by discovering several "perfect" books. *BROKEN HOURS: A NOVEL OF H. P. LOVECRAFT* is one. I don't even feel capable of doing this novel justice in my review. *BROKEN HOURS* should be an award winner, multiple times.

Mike Davis at LOVECRAFT EZINE highly recommended BROKEN HOURS, and I was impelled to pre-order it (even though more expensive than I usually buy) and it is worth every single penny. I read it in just a few hours and want to read it again, right away.

If you love the Lovecraftian Mythos; if you enjoy fictional biographies of authors; if you want to be stunned by enormously graceful writing; if you are drawn to depth psychology and abnormal psychology, BROKEN HOURS is your book.
