

Ask Not For Whom the Bell Tolls: A Review of Rose Earhart's Salem's Ghosts

by Amy Montz

Earhart, Rose. *Salem's Ghosts*. New York: Pendleton Books, 1998. 316 p.

As a follow-up to her first novel, *Dorcas Good*, Rose Earhart's *Salem's Ghosts* re-explores the world of the Salem Witch Trials. Instead of focusing on the past, however, Earhart's novel returns to the present, examining the effect of the Trials on the 20th century. Ghosts haunt Salem Town and attempt to right the wrongs of their past lives. While Earhart again explores the very real tortures of the Trials, the plot seems contrived and extremely far fetched, even for the horror genre. Readers can never suspend reality for very long, even in the series of flashbacks and flashforwards.

Among the ghosts haunting Salem are Mary and Phillip English, two victims of the 17th century hysteria. Their spirits are still trapped in Salem. Their existence over the past 300 hundred years consists solely of observing the locals and protecting their descendants. George Corwin, one of the witch accusers, still haunts the town as well, wreaking havoc among the locals and destroying the Englishes' descendants.

The plot truly becomes confusing when Lilith, a modern-day lesbian witch, her daughter Lynn, and Nora English enter the scene. Lynn is brutally raped and murdered by George Corwin's descendant, who is, at the time of the crime, possessed by the ghost of his famous ancestor. Later, the possessed rapist attempts to do the same to Nora. The ghosts of Salem decide to right these wrongs by banding together to free the village from the wicked spell cast over it all these centuries: Mary and Phillip join forces with Lilith to rescue the town. Meanwhile, Nora, accompanied by Lynn's ghost, returns to the 1600s to find out when exactly the Devil entered Salem Town. Unluckily (but predictably), the two are accused of witchcraft themselves.

The problem with *Salem's Ghosts* is that Earhart's plot is twisted, confusing, and highly contrived. The characters are unbelievable, and the situations almost laughable, particularly when Lilith lays hands on Corwin's descendant and Nora to cure them of the AIDS virus. And worse, the misspellings and typos prevalent in Earhart's first book are present here as well. The best I can say to readers is don't bother with this sequel. Reading real accounts of the trials will serve a better purpose than these novels. At least in those the horror can't be suspended.

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