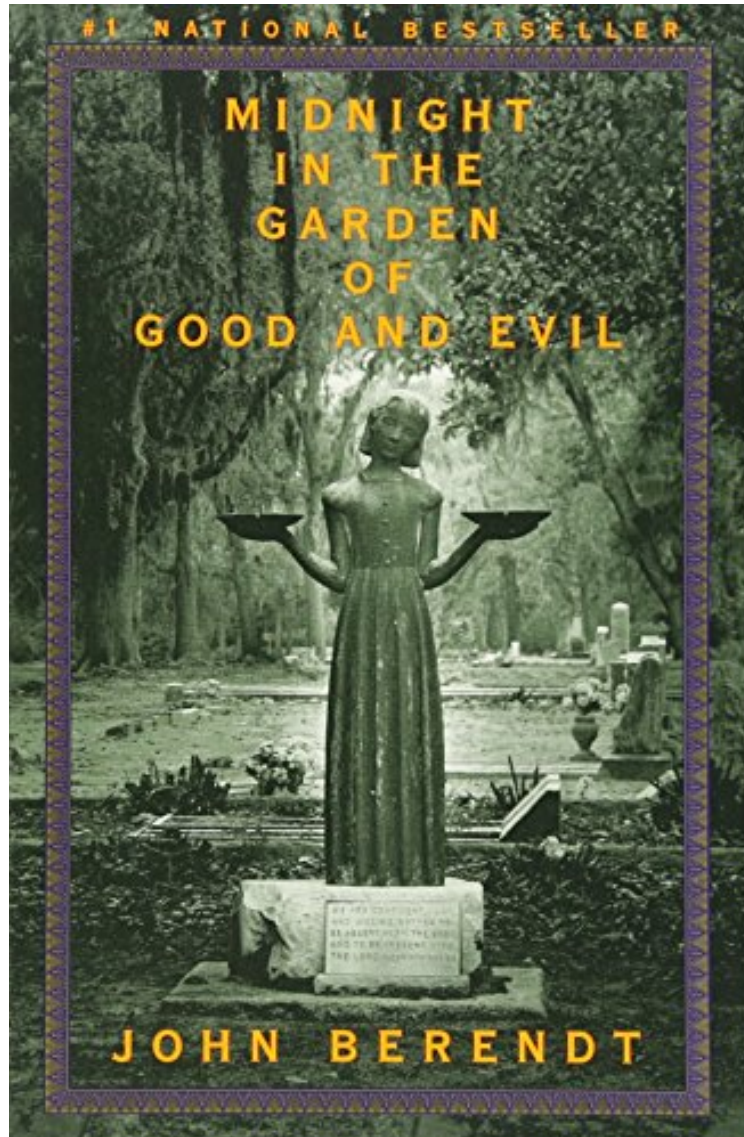


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## **Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil: A Savannah Story**

*John Berendt*

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**John Berendt : *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil: A Savannah Story*** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil: A Savannah Story*:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Interesting, strange, entertaining By John A. Brissette I really liked it. I know there is some criticism of this book claiming it not to be "great literature". It never claims to be. It is very popular, in true, and it should be. It is an entertaining look into the inner workings of a rather private, somewhat

quixotic, very quirky altogether strange southern city. A pirate town that guards secrets to this day still. It does read like a magazine article as some detractors have said, and this makes sense. It is written by a periodical writer as a sort of non-fiction expose. That said it is still charming, funny, interesting a good read. I think a trip to Savannah is in order

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Loved this booktwice!By leslie bakerRead this book many years ago. Wanted to revisit it. It is extremely well written (was on the New York Times bestseller list for many weeks when it was first written.) Really a number of smaller stories (or actually character profiles) woven together to give the reader a view into a charming and fascinating Savannah Georgia in the 1990's. And there is a mystery! What more could you ask for?

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Intriguing and straight to the pointBy claire ford fullertonI loved this book! A New York writer takes up residency in Savannah, Georgia where the glaring nuances of this cloistered southern town beg every instinct the writer has to document the social swing of an old society steeped in blue-blood histrionics. At the core of this nonfiction book is a murder in an opulent mansion owned by a prosperous antique dealer that brings a handful of eccentric characters into play during a riveting trial. All the characters that make up the talk of the town are written with a keen eye and described in a setting so vivid you can feel the humidity in the historic squares which comprise the grid of Savannah. What struck me about this book is the clean, economic writing: it clips along fast-paced and precisely, much in the manner of an investigative reporter's findings. I found this book to be an entertaining, spell-binding page turner well worth the read.

Shots rang out in Savannah's grandest mansion in the misty, early morning hours of May 2, 1981. Was it murder or self-defense? For nearly a decade, the shooting and its aftermath reverberated throughout this hauntingly beautiful city of moss-hung oaks and shaded squares. John Berendt's sharply observed, suspenseful, and witty narrative reads like a thoroughly engrossing novel, and yet it is a work of nonfiction. Berendt skillfully interweaves a hugely entertaining first-person account of life in this isolated remnant of the Old South with the unpredictable twists and turns of a landmark murder case. It is a spellbinding story peopled by a gallery of remarkable characters: the well-bred society ladies of the Married Woman's Card Club; the turbulent young redneck gigolo; the hapless recluse who owns a bottle of poison so powerful it could kill every man, woman, and child in Savannah; the aging and profane Southern belle who is the "soul of pampered self-absorption"; the uproariously funny black drag queen; the acerbic and arrogant antiques dealer; the sweet-talking, piano-playing con artist; young blacks dancing the minuet at the black debutante ball; and Minerva, the voodoo priestess who works her magic in the graveyard at midnight. These and other Savannahians act as a Greek chorus, with Berendt revealing the alliances, hostilities, and intrigues that thrive in a town where everyone knows everyone else. *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* is a sublime and seductive reading experience. Brilliantly conceived and masterfully written, this enormously engaging portrait of a most beguiling Southern city has become a modern classic.

.com John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* has been heralded as a "lyrical work of nonfiction," and the book's extremely graceful prose depictions of some of Savannah, Georgia's most colorful eccentrics--remarkable characters who could have once prospered in a William Faulkner novel or Eudora Welty short story--were certainly a critical factor in its tremendous success. (One resident into whose orbit Berendt fell, the Lady Chablis, went on to become a minor celebrity in her own right.) But equally important was Berendt's depiction of Savannah socialite Jim Williams as he stands trial for the murder of Danny Hansford, a moody, violence-prone hustler--and sometime companion to Williams--characterized by locals as a "walking streak of sex." So feel free to call it a "true crime classic" without a trace of shame. From *Publishers Weekly* After discovering in the early 1980s that a super-saver fare to Savannah, Ga., cost the same as an entree in a nouvelle Manhattan restaurant, *Esquire* columnist Berendt spent the next eight years flitting between Savannah and New York City. The result is this collection of smart, sympathetic observations about his colorful Southern neighbors, including a jazz-playing real estate shark; a sexually adventurous art student; the Lady Chablis ("What was your name before that?" I asked. "Frank," she said.); the gossipy Married Woman's Card Club; and an assortment of aging Southern belles. The book is also about the wealthy international antiques dealer Jim Williams, who played an active role in the historic city's restoration--and would also be tried four times for the 1981 shooting death of 21-year-old Danny Handsford, his high-energy, self-destructive house helper. The Williams trials--he died in 1990 of a heart attack at age 59--are lively matches between dueling attorneys fought with shifting evidence, and they serve as both theme and anchor to Berendt's illuminating and captivating travelogue. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Library Journal* It's difficult to categorize this book. On one level, it is a travelog, recounting former New York magazine editor Berendt's eight years in Savannah, Georgia, that beautifully preserved hothouse of the South where eccentric characters like black drag queen Lady Chablis and charming con man Joe Odom blossom in rich profusion. It is also a true crime tale, the saga of antiques dealer Jim Williams whose 1981 shooting of his sometime lover Danny Hansford in the historic Mercer House obsesses Savannah denizens; they watch as Williams endures four trials and is eventually acquitted, only to die of a heart attack a few months later, haunted (some say) by Hansford's vengeful ghost. Although nonfiction, Berendt's book reads like a novel (he admits he has taken "certain storytelling liberties"), and this reviewer sometimes wondered where the truth

ends and the fiction begins. Still, this entertaining book will appeal to many readers. Previewed in Prepub Alert, LJ 9/15/93.- Wilda Williams, "Library Journal" Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.