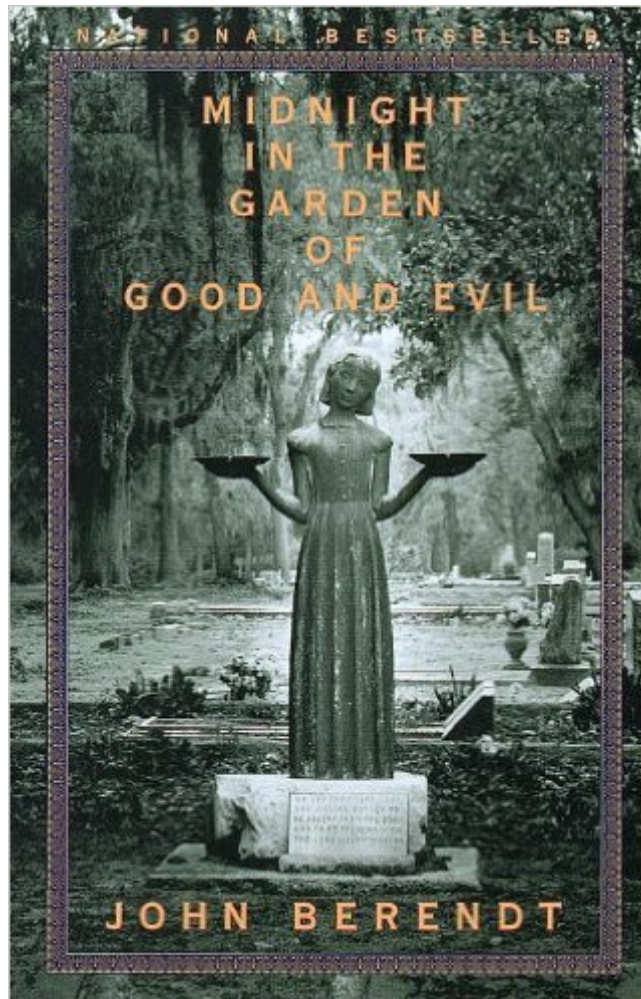


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# Midnight In The Garden Of Good And Evil: A Savannah Story



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I'm embarrassed to admit that I had this book on my bookshelf for over three years before finally picking it up. Better late than never, right?! Now that I've finally read it, I must say how truly wonderful and exciting it is. The characters are so eccentric and bizarre, I had to keep reminding myself that these are REAL people. And John Berendt did an excellent job recreating this true-crime story into something so readable, humorous and delicious. *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* is fabulous...I couldn't get enough of it! The main character in this novel is first and foremost, Savannah, Georgia. Such a glorious and mysterious backdrop for such an intriguing storyline -- and John Berendt fleshed it out so magnificently, that Savannah breathes and lives as easily as those who live there. Mostly this book is about a rich antique dealer, Jim Williams, who was accused of murder. However, it is not an ordinary murder case -- all sorts of twists come out of the woodwork for this one, making this novel not only a true-crime story, but a mystery as well. Surrounding the murder aspect are the citizens of Savannah that the author comes in contact with: Luther Driggers, a former pesticide employee, who has a vial of poison potent enough to kill every one in the county; Chablis, the potty-mouthed drag queen and performer; Joe Odom, a modern vagrant who uses his home(s) as a tourist stop; and Minerva, the voodoo priestess who uses roots, herbs, and graveyard dirt to weave her magic spells. Excellent writing and amazing storytelling make *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* a must-have book. One of the better novels I have read this year. I watched the movie afterwards, but the book, by far, tells the story better. I recommend this one to everyone -- southern fiction fans will delight in its eccentricities, true-crime lovers will enjoy the murder case, and armchair travelers will be booking trips to Savannah soon after the close of this book! Good job, John Berendt!

Non-fiction stories of a unique southern city are nicely interwoven by Esquire writer Berendt, who was lucky enough to live there. Basically, it is a true crime novel, but it is written with warmth, humor, and a remarkable eye for detail. Berendt takes the reader behind velvet curtains and antique walls into a society where pedigree is based as much on lineage, wealth, and power as on quirky southern traditions like knowing how to serve a fine platter of tomato sandwiches. Forget Eastwood's oddly disappointing film; this book is quite marvelous. True crime lover? You will enjoy the book's steamy setting and colorful characters, an almost poetic break from the repetitive and merely competent writings by the likes of Ann Rule. Aristocracy - watcher? You will savour the odd little schemes and intrigues exposed without any hint of malice. The tragic saga of one man's extraordinary ascent into high society is presented amidst many delicious (and often hilarious)

vignettes of all levels of Savannah's class structure. The author beautifully describes Savannah's magic, mystery, and achingly sad decay. Really, it is a fine tribute to this historic city of likeable conmen, sexy ne'er-do-wells, conniving politicians, and obsessive hostesses. It's a real page-turner, a good companion if you are planning to visit Savannah.

This is one of those books, like Mitch Albom's *Tuesdays with Morrie*, that for some reason captures the attention of the book-buying public, as the hardcover version was on the bestseller lists for years. Most readers have given you their opinions here at , 325 at last count, and so I figured I would put in my two cents as well. (Please note this review is resubmitted to correct technical errors in the previous version). Berendt seems to be the perfect example of a writer being in the right place at the right time - he appears in Savannah as a features writer to cover a lavish holiday party hosted by the extravagant antiques dealer Jim Williams, at the famed Mercer House, and is swept up in a murder and ensuing trial. There is no great mystery associated with the murder itself, everyone knows ... pulled the trigger, and yet Berendt manages to write a colorful, suspenseful page-turner that captivated the imagination of the public like few other non-fiction novels ever have. In *Cold Blood* by Capote comes to mind, but trust me this story is infinitely more entertaining. Ultimately, the book works on many levels. It is an effective chronicle of a series of high-profile trials, an extended travelogue in which the colorful city of Savannah stands out as perhaps the star of the book, and a profile of Savannah's aristocracy, in which the reader understands Williams' sense of wanting to belong despite considerable obstacles. (Williams was not "old money", and therefore not really accepted in the city's highest circles, and as the trial revealed he was gay). Most of all, the book is a smorgasbord of colorful characters (none more compelling than the Lady Chablis) and bizarre situations that create a timeless sense of Savannah as a mysterious, alluring city. You encounter men walking imaginary dogs, a voodoo priestess performing odd rituals in a graveyard, and a lawyer who takes off with the UGA mascot for the annual Florida v. Georgia college football game, in the midst of the biggest murder trial of his career. The language of the book is effortless, almost as if it wrote itself, which makes sense when you consider the author came from a magazine background and started out writing a "fluff" features piece. Berendt thankfully avoids the excessive crime scene minutiae and endless details of minor courtroom tactics that sometimes bogs down other true crime books, and keeps the reader focused on the sense of place, and the colorful characters, that are the true focus of his story. I enjoyed it thoroughly, read it very quickly and was sorry to put it down. A definite thumbs up.

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