

Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil Study Guide

**Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil by John
Berendt**

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Contents

Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Chapter 1.....	6
Chapter 2.....	8
Chapter 3.....	10
Chapter 4.....	12
Chapter 5.....	14
Chapter 6.....	16
Chapter 7.....	17
Chapter 8.....	18
Chapter 9.....	19
Chapter 10.....	21
Chapter 11.....	23
Chapter 12.....	24
Chapter 13.....	26
Chapter 14.....	27
Chapter 15.....	29
Chapter 16.....	30
Chapter 17.....	32
Chapter 18.....	33
Chapter 19.....	35
Chapter 20.....	36
Chapter 21.....	37
Chapter 22.....	39



Chapter 23..... 40

Chapter 24..... 42

Chapter 25..... 44

Chapter 26..... 45

Chapter 27..... 46

Chapter 28..... 47

Chapter 29..... 48

Chapter 30..... 49

Characters..... 50

Objects/Places..... 55

Themes..... 57

Style..... 59

Quotes..... 62

Topics for Discussion..... 64



Plot Summary

This suspenseful story about a 1981 murder trial in Savannah, Georgia, was written in 1994. While based on true events and characters, and therefore not a novel by true definition, the book is full of descriptive narration and dynamic, strongly identifiable figures. The author, John Berendt, draws a vivid picture of Savannah's residents while creating a book that revolves around the themes of money, isolation, illusion, and good versus evil.

The book begins by explaining how the narrator came to simultaneously live in Savannah and New York. He describes his childhood fascination with Savannah, and his preconceived idealistic view of the city. Once he visits Savannah, he decides to rent an apartment and live there most of the year. He begins to adjust to Savannah and describes various eccentric characters in vivid detail. Among these descriptions includes Joe Odom, a swindling financially unstable musician, who works his way out of sticky situations using his charm and wit. Lee Adler, a confident, is the self-declared savior of Savannah society. Lady Chablis is an outspoken drag queen, who receives routine shots of estrogen. There's also Luther Driggers, a disturbed man, who possesses enough poison to kill the entire city, and Emma Kelly, a piano player and singer known throughout the state of Georgia. Berendt paints a vivid picture of Savannah's society by elaborating on characters' individual traits and peculiarities.

The tone and plot of the story change dramatically when Jim Williams, a wealthy, clean-cut, seemingly law-abiding citizen, is charged with the murder of Danny Hansford in Mercer House, Jim Williams' home. However, in true Southern Gothic fashion, Berendt shows that below the surface, Williams is a prideful, mystifying subject with hidden homosexual tendencies. Danny Hansford is his much younger assistant and lover and has a history of violent and destructive behavior. Though the evidence in the case is inconclusive, Williams has an extreme faith in his ability to use his acquired wealth, power and prominence to extract himself out of any situation. Williams represents the authority and destructive perceptions that self-righteous attitudes can bring, while Danny Hansford represents a less powerful, poorer population that others see as worthless and disposable.

While one is never sure whether Jim Williams is guilty or innocent, plenty of informative speculations are provided. The story consists of four separate murder trials. The first two are overturned, and the third is declared a mistrial. Williams is convicted of his innocence at the fourth trial after eight years of attorneys, jail cells, curious glances and abounding rumors. Throughout the entire eight years, Williams remains not only calm and collected, but strangely certain that in the end, as he says, "everything will be just fine." He has a great deal of confidence in his own wealth and status, though he recruits the powers of a root doctor and a strange psychological mind game to wield his power over those involved in his case.

While this story recounts the events surrounding Williams' trial, it also tells of a community that is dedicated to keeping up appearances. Savannahian residents are

uncomfortable with change and attempt to avoid it at all costs. While this can lead to unfavorable situations, characters tend to thrive and grow in the isolated community of Savannah.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

This suspenseful story about a 1981 murder trial in Savannah, Georgia, was written in 1994. While based on true events and characters, and therefore not a novel by true definition, the book is full of descriptive narration and dynamic, strongly identifiable figures. The author, John Berendt, draws a vivid picture of Savannah's residents while creating a book that revolves around the themes of money, isolation, illusion, and good versus evil.

The initial chapter introduces the life of Jim Williams. The wealthy, elusive and mysterious Williams boasts about his enormous home full of valuable antiques. The sudden appearance and violent behavior of Danny Hansford, who becomes an extremely significant character later in the book, brings his relationship with Jim Williams into question. This opening chapter foreshadows later events in the book and touches on themes such as isolation, illusion and inner conflict.

The book begins with a physical description of Jim Williams, Savannah socialite, wealthy antiques dealer, and self-assured "southern chauvinist." The narrator, who for unclear reasons, is visiting Mercer House, Williams' residence, explains how Williams had played a significant role in the restoration of Savannah's historic district in the 1950's. He is infamous for buying property, restoring it, and making huge profits. Williams owns several prominent plantation homes in Savannah, and is well-known for his annual Christmas party at Mercer House, one of these historical mansions. Unlike many Savannah residents, Williams is *nouveau riche*, rather than inheriting his fortune from a well-established family.

Williams goes on to describe eccentric local characters and their strange stories. He gives his company a brief history of Mercer House, constructed by musician Johnny Mercer's great-grandfather, and complains of all the movies filmed in Savannah because of the beautiful architecture and landscaping. He goes on to tell of a visit from Jacqueline Onassis and her admiration of Mercer House and its contents. As Williams is showing a valuable Fabergé box to his company, Danny Hansford, a twenty-year-old, who works part-time in Williams' antique shop, bursts into the room in a rage, furious at a girlfriend for standing him up. He crudely tells his listeners that Bonnie has made him angry, and he grabs a bottle of vodka and takes off in his car. Williams sits down and tells about Danny and his frequent trouble-making. He describes Danny as having two personalities, and says that, because Williams has hypoglycemia, Danny often stays at Mercer House to help him, when he's not feeling well. However, two weeks earlier, Danny broke windows and furniture in Mercer House and was taken into jail. The relationship between Williams and Danny is perplexing and mysterious.

After discussing Williams' large firearms collection, Williams introduces his gambling tactic he calls "Psycho Dice," in which he claims he can beat the odds simply by



concentrating on the numbers he wants to roll. Before his guest leaves Mercer House, Williams extends an invitation to one of his Christmas parties. He explains that one of his Christmas parties is more famous and covered by the newspaper, and the second party is more conspicuous and meant for gentlemen only. The narrator states he would like to go to whichever party does not involve gunfire.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The book is told from the narrator's point of view. This particular perspective filters information through a person, who is fascinated with Savannah and its characters. In the first chapter alone, Jim Williams recites extensive monologues. Though the story is told from a first person perspective, more information about Williams is presented in the first chapter than any other character.

In the initial paragraph of the book, two central themes of illusion and isolation are touched upon. Several times Berendt creates circumstances in which situations and people are not always what they seem, considering all sides before making a conclusion. Jim Williams' eyes are described as tinted windows that are difficult to see into, indicating that there is more about the man than what lies on the surface. He also introduces Danny Hansford, Williams' part-time caregiver and worker, and shows that while Williams' life may seem refined, calm, and comfortable on the surface, he also faces difficulty, poor health, and disturbed relationships. Berendt addresses this concept of multiple layers or illusions again, when Williams introduces his additional, more secretive gathering at Christmastime. Once again, things are not always what they seem to be.

The theme of isolation is also stressed by the pronunciation of the fact that Williams lives alone in Mercer House. This concept of impersonality and perhaps even loneliness resounds with the narrator as well, who has moved to Savannah by himself.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The narrator backtracks to explain how, as a writer for *Esquire* and editor for *New York* magazine, he developed a fascination with Savannah. He begins by explaining his realization that the cost of one evening's meal in New York City is comparable to a weekend in another location. One weekend the narrator and a group of friends travel to Charleston, South Carolina, and he decides to spend an extra night visiting Savannah.

The narrator describes the connotations he has of Savannah, all instances that reference historical events. He mentions the story of Captain John Flint, who dies of alcohol poisoning in the mid-1700s. He refers to Savannah as a refined, proper community mentioned in *Gone With the Wind*, and another experience in which an old newspaper displays the headline, "Tango Is No Sign of Insanity, Holds Jury." He also is familiar with the lyrics and music of Johnny Mercer, which remind him of his childhood. He is fascinated with Savannah and imagines it as an idyllic Southern town full of strange characters, alcohol galore, pleasing music, and Southern hospitality.

As the narrator approaches Savannah in his rental car, the environment is lush with vegetation and a neatly-planned grid of squares dictates the layout of the city. Mary Harty, a well-established elderly woman proud of Savannah's rich history and intriguing residents, shows the narrator some sites in Savannah. She dominates the conversation with descriptions of local characters and a firm knowledge. Miss Harty fixes two drinks and takes him to Bonaventure Cemetery, where most deceased Savannahians are buried. She describes eerie events from Savannah's past, such as a fire that occurred during an elegant dinner party at a plantation house. When they are seated near a double gravestone with their martinis in hand, Miss Harty tells her companion about the deaths of Dr. and Mrs. Aiken. According to Miss Harty, Dr. Aiken became frustrated with his wife's interest in hosting parties and killed both him and her. Their son was sent away to be raised by relatives, but returned to live in Savannah later in life as an accomplished poet. Miss Harty shocks the narrator by informing him that they are seated on the grave of said poet, which was engraved and created to look like a bench. The narrator decides to spend more and more time in Savannah until eventually regards Savannah as his home.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The fascination with Savannah is based solely on collections of stories and imagination, which help elaborate on the theme of illusion. Savannah is presented as mysterious and there is some foreshadowing into the possibility of matters hidden beneath the surface, especially as Miss Harty recites the darker parts of Savannah's history. The theme of isolation is revisited in this chapter, as characters acknowledge the remoteness of Savannah's location and lack of easy accessibility.



Miss Harty serves as a significant source of information about Savannah, and is a symbol of the town itself. Like Savannah, she is refined and aged, yet lively and deceptive, demonstrated by her delight in seating her companion on a gravestone. While her trickery is lighthearted, Savannah's deceptive acts are murders and fires occurring behind windows and fazades of established mansions and plantation homes. Miss Harty's monologues introduce another side of Savannah, a side full of tragedy and a dark past.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The narrator rents an apartment in the historic part of Savannah and begins to explore his surroundings. He notices piano music constantly coming from the house next door, 16 East Jones Street, and sees visitors coming and going through the unlocked door. After he witnesses an elderly lady breaking the front door windows with a hammer, he decides to wait until he investigates the house further. He visits the Savannah Historical Society, and receives a brief Civil War history of Savannah. He discovers that the woman declared sane despite her love for the tango was a black woman, and finds that Martin Luther King, Jr., referred to Savannah as "the most desegregated city in the South."

The introduction to the house next door begins with a visit from Mandy Nichols, a beautiful, curvaceous singer. She is the girlfriend of Joe Odom, the owner of 16 East Jones. Mandy states that the electricity has gone out, and asks to borrow some ice. The narrator accepts her invitation to have a drink, and the two see Joe on the side of the house, tapping electricity from another neighbor. Joe introduces himself as a tax lawyer, real estate broker, and piano player, and has already been married three times.

As Joe sits and begins to play the piano, company socializes in every room. Joe says that some locals are suspicious of the narrator's presence in the town, and gives him three rules to live by. One, always stay for another drink. Two, never go south of Gaston Street, where commercialization and the newer part of town begins. Three, observe St. Patrick's Day and the Georgia-Florida football game, which is the most serious, emotionally-charged event all year. Joe says he is known as the 'Sentimental Gentleman.' When the narrator returns home, he realizes that Joe has borrowed twenty dollars from him without him even taking note of it.

Chapter 3 Analysis

This chapter adds to an understanding of Savannah's rich past and effectively describes Southern charm at its finest, extending into the beginning stages of United States history. The city's strong foundation and firm sense of identity is stressed through an explanation of significant parts of Savannah's past.

Joe, another eccentric Savannah figure, is the epitome of a smooth-talking southern gentleman, who banter with company and acts nonchalant towards things that may be serious or disturbing to others, such as late night robberies or smashed in windows. By introducing where characters live, a more personal glimpse of their lives, habits, and surroundings can be offered. Berendt also revisits the theme of illusive characters, as it is odd to see someone living in such nice accommodations to be tapping into the electricity from someone else's residency. Many commonalities between Jim, Joe, Mary,

and Mandy exist. All are firmly established in Savannah's society, though not all are liked by everyone, and all four enjoy alcohol and love parties and socializing.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The narrator begins to settle in at his new apartment and ventures into the town to shop for furnishings. He enters a junk shop and is assisted by a salesman wearing purple eye shadow on only his left eye. He explains he has tried wearing it on both eyes once, but it upsets the shop owner, who sits in the rear of the store. Now the salesman wears it on only the left eye and is convinced the owner does not know, as the salesman always keeps his right side in the owner's field of vision. When the narrator returns to the shop, the salesman is gone so he speaks with the owner. The owner says the salesman, Jack, is trying to fool him but he knows Jack is still wearing eye shadow on one eye - he has seen it in the reflection of a mirror.

The narrator begins to have a daily routine in Savannah. As he is jogging in the park one morning, he notices a black man running with a blue strap, frequently exchanging glances with a blond woman exercising quite a distance behind. When Joe hears of this rapport, he says interracial relationships are taboo in Savannah. Later the blond woman is spotted walking her dog with the same blue leather strap the black man had been carrying as he was jogging.

Another black man, William Glover, is introduced. He is elderly, dignified, and seemingly senile, as he often talks to an imaginary dog named Patrick. After some conversation, William reveals that his former employer had stated in his will that William should get ten dollars a week for taking care of his dog. Though the dog has died, the judge pretends it is still alive so William can continue to receive the money.

Joe Odom is becoming increasingly unpopular in Savannah as a result of a failed real estate deal he has been managing. He loses nearly all of his possessions and begins playing the piano for money and giving tours of his house.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Several characters in this chapter have strange traits, such as the salesman, who wears eye shadow on one eye. Instead of the salesman hiding his eye shadow from the shop owner, the owner is the one hiding his knowledge of the salesman's secret. In addition to this situational irony, the theme of illusion is again addressed, first in the reference to the mirror in the junk shop, and again when William Glover appears to be turning senile. In truth it is both the narrator and the reader who are fooled, as William's explanation for talking to an imaginary dog is perfectly rational.

Racial attitudes are briefly touched on in this chapter. While Savannah residents accept the concept of integration, perhaps the town is not as progressive as Martin Luther King, Jr., indicated when he commended Savannah twenty years earlier. Romantic relationships between people of different races are prohibited. The return to Joe Odom's

unfortunate situation introduces Joe as a character that may seem innocent enough at first meeting, but below the surface has a troubled, mysterious persona.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

In addition to running around the park every morning, the narrator eats breakfast at Clary's drugstore. He describes Luther Driggers, another visitor to Clary's regular. Every day, Luther comes into the drugstore and orders breakfast, yet sometimes looks at his plate and walks out without eating or paying. According to the waitress, Luther is divorced, lives in a miserable house, and has a history of marijuana possession. He suffers from insomnia, lack of appetite, and because of his work with insecticides, there is a rumor in town that he possesses a bottle of extremely powerful poison and plans to poison the city's water supply. Luther ties flies to the ends of strings and carries them like balloons. He is known as 'the inventor,' because he has discovered a certain kind of pesticide that passes through plastic, leading to the invention of the flea collar. Luther's newest idea is to feed goldfish food laced with fluorescent dye, so a black light can spotlight the fish. He plans to debut the luminous fish at a bar, the Purple Tree, that night.

The narrator meets Luther at Serena Dawes' home in the evening. Serena is a stubborn Southern belle, who has once been a cigarette model married into a wealthy family. When her husband dies, she moves to Savannah, hires a maid, and gains weight. Her spoiled, self-centered attitude is not popular with Savannah's elite.

Serena insists that they go to several popular bars before Luther deposits his fluorescent fish, which he totes in a cardboard Chinese takeout carton, in the aquarium of a local hangout. Serena takes her time in socializing, and when they finally reach the Purple Tree, their final destination, Luther pours his fish into the tank. Much to everyone's chagrin, he has overfed his fish, filling the tank with fish with brightly glowing intestines.

As Luther is drunk, the narrator accompanies Luther back to his house. Luther goes inside and brings out the rumored bottle of clear, tasteless poison, sodium fluoroacetate. Luther speaks morbidly of having the ability to kill all of Savannah with the bottle's substance. The following day at Clary's, Luther is peaceful and eats his breakfast easily.

Chapter 5 Analysis

In this chapter, the tone becomes increasingly solemn. By introducing elements of death and symbolism, Berendt is foreshadowing later events in the story. While there are elements of humor in this chapter, especially in relaying Serena's habits, Luther Driggers suffers from an inner conflict that leads him to possess a melancholic view of life and a puzzling death wish. By using the symbolism of Luther's insects trapped inside their glass jar, it is hinted that Savannah is much the same for Luther and the rest of its longtime residents. As Luther describes the insects as experiencing their entire lives

without going outside of the jar, he metaphorically alludes to how he feels the same about Savannah. Some magnetic attraction keeps its residents there, no matter how much they may want to get out.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The chapter begins in Joe Odom's home, which is lively with various types of characters. Joe talks on the phone to a friend about waking in the morning to find two people he doesn't know in his bed. Joe introduces Emma Kelly, or 'the lady of six thousand songs.' Emma is a piano player and singer well-known throughout Georgia. She is about seventy, dresses elegantly, is a devout Baptist, and exudes plenty of Southern charm. She and Joe are owners and founders of a new bar in town, Emma's, in order to give her a place to perform without having to go on long trips throughout the state, but she continues to travel.

The narrator accompanies Emma one Sunday. They go to Emma's Baptist church in Statesboro, where Emma plays the organ for the senior assembly and the piano for the children. Emma then has gigs at Forest Heights Country Club and a wedding reception at a health club in Vidalia. On the way back to Statesboro, Emma recounts how she has impressed Johnny Mercer with her knowledge of over six thousand songs and how he convinced her to start singing along with the piano.

The focus shifts to Emma's, the bar owned by Joe and Emma, and how it is strange it draws such a large crowd yet is suffering financially. Upon consulting Darlene, an expert on bar finances, Joe discovers that Moon Tompkins, a bartender at Emma's, had a recent criminal history of robbing banks. He decides to catch Moon in the act one night, but Moon catches on to Joe's plan, takes all the cash in the register, and runs away. Joe informs Emma about his well-intentioned plan, and Emma tells Joe that Moon had told her about his bank robbing before she hired him. Emma believes everyone deserves a second chance. Joe's house is soon mysteriously gutted by a fire, so he moves to another home on Oglethorpe Street and his lively friends follow.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The narrator is becoming familiar and recognizable to people in the town, and he is feeling more comfortable as a regular at Joe Odom's home. Cars are becoming increasingly significant to the novel, as automotive interiors as well as characters' homes are where a majority of conversations and interactions between characters occur. The narrator has an entertaining day with Emma Kelly, yet the weight of the chapter's significance weighs on Joe's plot to catch Moon. The irony of the situation revolves around Joe and his good intentions to guard Emma's innocence, yet Emma knows all along about Moon's past, and it is Joe who is the uninformed party. The chapter is framed around events in Joe's life, hinting that future events in the story may refer to Joe.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The chapter begins by describing the driving habits of Savannah's residents, and how often they mix cars with alcohol. Numerous car accidents have occurred in Savannah's neighborhood after too much drinking. The narrator buys an old Pontiac and it sparks a conversation with Chablis, an attractive, dynamic black woman, who convinces him to take her home in his car. On the way to her house, she tells him about herself. She is a showgirl and says she was born a male but has been getting estrogen shots for a long time. When she is dropped off, Chablis speaks of her performances, but forgets to say where and when.

On a later day, Chablis calls the narrator to get a ride home from her estrogen shot appointment. She talks about her boss at work, and when they reach her house, her boyfriend Jeff-tall, blond, and hunky-is working on a car. Chablis is open about how sexually attracted she is to Jeff. Over lunch, Chablis tells about her past relationships with men and how they discovered she is biologically male. The narrator goes to The Pickup, a gay bar, to watch Chablis perform. She is an outgoing, somewhat humorous performer, and points out her friend to the rest of the crowd. Afterwards, Chablis gets in a fight with her boss about getting paid and quits on the spot. She gathers all of her dresses and costumes and leaves the bar, followed by the other Pickup performers in a caravan of drag queens parading down the street.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Though alcohol is referenced numerous times early in the novel, this chapter describes more about the characters' relationship with alcohol. The chapter begins with a description of how residents drive while under the influence so often that it is common and even accepted. Chablis herself is even nicknamed after a type of wine. Berendt gives a descriptive portrayal of Chablis, and provides a strong basis for the theme of illusion. Chablis wants to be a woman, but is biologically male. She fools many people, including her boyfriend's parents. At times Chablis seems to be deceiving even herself. A sense of triumph on behalf of Chablis exists, when she frees herself from the deceitfulness of her boss at The Pickup, yet it is unclear as to what options a character such as Chablis has as far as additional places to work.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

This chapter briefly describes Joe Odom's hardships. After Moon Tompkins runs away with the bar's profits, Joe plans on opening Sweet Georgia Brown's across the street from the former location of Emma's. In addition to owning the bar, Joe will be a featured performer in a jazz trio. Joe and Mandy are evicted for not paying their rent from the home they moved into after the house on East Jones Street burned. They begin squatting in a house that is on the market after the real estate agent goes on vacation. Joe fools tourists by pretending to live there and charging \$3 for a visit inside the house. Joe is dismayed that his friend would be socializing with a drag queen, but is pleased his friend is going to meet with Jim Williams, returning to events in chapter one.

Chapter 8 Analysis

This brief chapter gives a deeper look at Joe Odom. A glimpse of Joe's other side-one that is deceptive, manipulative, and self-centered-leads to questioning of the original characterization of Joe as a lighthearted, well-intentioned gentleman. Though some see him as a blithe, talented musician, generous with his space and money, Joe can overstep ethical boundaries. He struggles with some inner conflict, constantly pushing his luck and creating difficult situations for himself. He relies on charm and good-natured attitudes to rescue him from the situations he creates.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

This chapter reflects on the initial visit to Mercer House and focuses on Danny Hansford, described as a nameless presence driving a Camaro. A student at the Savannah College of Art and Design, Corinne, admires Danny from afar and decides to invite herself to Mercer House for a visit, when he is home alone. Corinne is a curvaceous flirt, who describes Danny as 'a walking streak of sex.' Danny gives Corinne a brief tour of the house, pretending that the house and its furnishings belong to his family. She is not fooled but pretends to believe Danny. He leads her upstairs to drink, play roulette, and smoke marijuana. After they have sex in the master bedroom, Jim Williams walks in to Mercer House. Danny is embarrassed and exits the house in a rage, leaving Corinne to play Psycho Dice with Williams.

Danny is waiting for Corinne, when she comes out of the house. He orders her to get in his car and pulls off, driving fast and dangerously. He drives them to Tybee, where two of Corinne's friends from school start talking to her. Danny acts withdrawn and sullen, and Corinne thinks he is jealous, though he denies it. In her mind, Corinne compares her school friends with Danny and finds her friends better choices for husbands, but thinks Danny has much more sex appeal.

Danny takes Corinne to Bonaventure Cemetery. They smoke a joint of marijuana and have a conversation about death. Danny says he has nothing to live for. He doesn't have a job, has been on the street since he was fifteen, and his girlfriend Bonnie doesn't want to marry him. Corinne and Danny start to fool around but are surprised by two people walking by. An older woman is complaining that the grounds at the cemetery are not kept up like they should be. Corinne and Danny are relieved that the visitors did not see them on the ground and they finish having sex. As they walk back to the car, Danny asks Corinne to marry him. Corinne thinks he is joking and says no, but realizes he is serious. Danny slaps Corinne across the face and drives off in a rage with both of them in the car. He gets pulled by the police and Danny pleads with Corinne to help him get out of trouble.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The perspective of this chapter shifts to an omniscient third person point of view. The interaction between Danny and Corinne is witnessed while simultaneously knowing the thoughts and feelings of both characters, especially Corinne. The plot unfolds through an interaction between two characters, neither of which is the narrator, who until now has been a part of the plot. Up until now the narrator can be trusted to tell an accurate perception of the story, yet now cannot necessarily be relied upon to interpret various events.



The serious, foreboding tone of this chapter reflects Danny's dark, angry, mysterious character. Like Luther Driggers and Joe Odom, Danny is tormented by some inner conflict. He is attempting to work out this conflict through his approach towards women, fast cars, and violence, though he seems to become more and more entrenched in his own misery. Danny's emotional isolation reflects the physical isolation of Savannah, and just as it is difficult to reach Savannah's location, Corinne finds it challenging to reach Danny's emotional side through his defensive, overconfident shield.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

This chapter focuses on Jim Williams, who has not been a prominent character since the first chapter. While Savannah society regards him with a great deal of respect, he has a bitter relationship with Lee and Emma Adler, his neighbors. Lee Adler presents himself as an advocate of historic preservation and charitable organizer of revolving funds. Many residents of Savannah resent Lee, because they think he gets more credit than he deserves. Both Jim and Lee are rich, prominent figures in Savannah society, and therefore, the Adlers are invited to Williams' Christmas party every year.

The narrator takes a tour of Savannah with Lee. Lee converses about the move to the suburbs in the early 1900's and Savannah's gradual decay. His mother helped start the Historic Savannah Foundation in 1954, and five years later Lee bought a row of homes on Oglethorpe Street and sold them to the Historic Savannah Foundation. The poet Conrad Aiken now lives on the end of the row of homes. They enter Savannah's Victorian neighborhood, which Lee claims he hopes will be a racially diverse district. He explains that since he started the Savannah Landmark Rehabilitation Project, federal subsidies make up most of the rent payments. He says there are some neighbors of the Victorian district, such as Jim Williams, unhappy about the arrangement.

Lee takes his companion to meet one resident, Ruby Moore. Ruby, a polite black lady, lives in a renovated apartment and works at the local motel. She claims she loves her apartment and asks the narrator to sign her guestbook. Before they part, Lee talks about being on 'Good Morning America' and receiving international recognition. He ends the conversation by saying that "it ain't braggin' if y'really done it."

The scene quickly shifts to Cynthia Collins' home, where members, their husbands, and guests of the Married Woman's Card Club are waiting outside. The Club, founded in 1893, consistently has 16 members. If a member becomes divorced, she must resign. Members and 32 guests gather once a month for dinner and cards, and there is a very precise schedule to follow in order for the wives to be home in time to greet and feed their husbands. On this particular evening, however, husbands are invited to the meeting.

Attendants are rolling their eyes at Emma Adler's latest article describing the Adlers' trip to England in order to be congratulated by Prince Charles. One woman says Emma only does what she does in order to have the recognition, and the woman's husband remarks that Emma is better than her mother, Big Emma. Big Emma, before her death, was notorious for her wealth and forceful personality. She would not let her chauffeur drive the limousine and was appalled at the idea of her daughter marrying Lee Adler, a Jew.



Cynthia Collins opens the door of her house and welcomes everyone inside. The plot focuses on a woman and man in the library, who have refrained from playing cards. The conversation remains on the Adlers, briefly touching on a vague issue related to the Hyatt. The women say Lee Adler always has to have his way, and that he is rumored to have pulled a gun on someone once in a meeting, because the other party would not agree with him. It is unclear whether it is a real or fake gun.

Cynthia says that while the Adlers convinced the rich population of Savannah to move downtown as part of his rehabilitation scheme, the Adlers themselves stayed away from downtown until they were sure everything was safe. Adler also was at odds with everyone on the Historic Savannah Foundation Board about the construction of a Hyatt next to city hall, and he was kicked out of the Foundation in 1969. Then he formed his Rehabilitation Project, which Cynthia says is actually a creation of another black ghetto, even though Lee tries to convince everyone it is a creation of a racially mixed neighborhood. The woman sitting in the library remarks that Victorian homes are wood frame, so they require high fire insurance and must be repainted frequently. Lee, however, is not restoring the homes properly, killing the real estate value.

The man in the library remarks that Adler has been successful, in that if anyone openly opposes his work in Savannah, they would look like a racist. He also has not been admitted into several elitist clubs, because he is a Jew. The man says that even though Emma Adler has a patronizing attitude towards blacks, the Adlers have the blacks' votes in any election, because no matter how you look at it, they have actually done something for blacks. The chapter ends with Cynthia becoming concerned about being on schedule for laying out napkins.

Chapter 10 Analysis

The shift to a focus on Jim Williams and his adversary foreshadows future events in the story. As shown through the description of Lee Adler and his relationship with the rest of society, most of Savannah's upper crust dislikes one person being singled out for a cause. It is also unclear whether Lee Adler's recollection of the events surrounding his leaving the non-profit foundation are precise, or if his perception is a reality only to him. Other characters described seem to believe his interpretations are illusive and misleading.

By describing a scene from a club that admits only married women, this chapter focuses on prejudices held by the elite Savannah society towards unmarried women as well as Jews and blacks. These biases demonstrate how narrow-minded attitudes may become the norm if an adequate number of people accept them, setting the scene for future themes in the story.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

This chapter begins with a description of the change of seasons in Savannah. Wintertime is strangely warm for someone familiar with New York winters. Savannah's residents compare Savannah with Charleston in many ways, yet rarely visit the other coastal town. Savannahians are content with their isolation, with the exception of Chablis, who makes it a habit of announcing each time she visits the doctor to have a shot of estrogen. One particular day, Chablis calls the narrator to find out if he had heard the news in the local paper. She tells him that Jim Williams has been charged with the murder of Danny Hansford.

Chapter 11 Analysis

This brief chapter, and the end of Part One, abruptly introduces the surprising murder of Danny by Jim Williams. The theme of isolation is directly addressed, and the physical location of Savannah reflects the emotional distance its residents keep from the rest of the world. The allusions to death, guns, and violence presented in previous chapters have led to this turn of events, leaving the remaining events of the story mysterious and uncertain.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

In this introductory chapter of Part Two, the sequence of events at Mercer House is summarized. Danny Hansford had been found on the floor of the study at 3 AM, shot in the head and chest. Many of Williams' antiques and collectables had been broken. Williams was taken in on a \$25,000 bond, but an unidentified person with a paper bag full of money came to release him. While no information was given in the newspaper article about Danny besides his age, Williams is identified as an antiques dealer, giver of parties, and a restorer of historic homes.

According to Williams, Danny fired a shot at him but missed, so Williams fired back. He claims Danny had been drunk and high, and went into a rage, yelling about his mother and girlfriend while destroying several things in the house. Danny went into a different room and returned with a German Luger, a type of gun. Williams says he called his lawyer, the police, and Joe Goodman, a former employee, to come to the house. Corporal Michael Anderson, a policeman on the scene, said he remembered Danny from other violent outbursts. At 7 in the morning, the police took Williams in. He called Joe Goodman, who was still at Mercer House, and told him to retrieve money from the top of a cabinet. Williams returns to his usual business, traveling and dealing antiques. The police claim to have the results of a test for gunpowder on Danny's hands in less than a week, but in a month they still have not received results.

The incident creates a huge stir in town. Most Savannahians put the blame on Danny by stating he was disturbed and had a death wish. Soon people discover that Danny had been a male hustler, and that was the reason Williams had been treating him so well. Mrs. Mooreland, an old friend of Williams, is shocked when she hears this, and is also confused as to the role of Joe Goodman, whom she has never heard of him before. She thinks Williams would have reached out to someone more well-known to Savannah society. Most of the public thinks the charges will be dropped. They also say that people who want relations with Danny will resent Williams for being involved in his death.

The District Attorney, Spencer Lawton, is fairly new at his job and is supported by Lee Adler, Williams' adversary. Lawton surprises the town by waiting only five days before the preliminary hearing to go before the grand jury. Williams is indicted with "first degree murder, premeditated and with malice aforethought." Williams must go on trial, and is being sued for \$10 million by Danny's mother. Williams continues to act normally, claiming he has done nothing wrong.

Chapter 12 Analysis

While this chapter is fairly straightforward in how Williams recounts the events of Danny's death, a great deal of information is collected about the significance of money



and power in Savannah society. Savannah's elite convey quite a cold and uncompassionate attitude towards Danny and his situation by stating that he got what he deserved. Even the newspaper, which provides a stark juxtaposition of descriptions on Williams but not on Danny, reflect the importance Savannah as a whole puts on those with money and power.

Williams' own attitudes and statements reflect the belief that money holds power and authority over all else. He is able to quickly be released from jail with large amounts of money he has in his home. Williams continues to be confident in his future and does not seem to wonder if he should be more humble in regards to the outcome of the trial.

The theme of illusion is touched on again in this chapter. Williams' apparent homosexual activity is unnoticed by people such as Mrs. Mooreland, who has known Williams for twenty years. Either the calm and collected figure Williams appears to be to society is just a cover-up, or residents of Savannah are so concerned with status and wealth that they tend to overlook details of others' personal struggles.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

The focus of this chapter is on Joe Odom, who is moving out of the Pulaski House in the middle of the night so he will not be found out by the real estate agent. Joe's circle of friends continues to grow in number and in diversity. He is summoned to court, because he has written a series of bad checks. Upon entering the courtroom, Joe greets the plaintiffs so congenially that they appear guilty, as if they have violated their relationships with Joe. At one point, Mr. Russell, an antiques dealer, is told he did his paperwork incorrectly, but Joe pulls him aside and convinces the judge to let Joe help Mr. Russell. His charm is too much for the judge, and Joe is released with the understanding he will pay the \$18,000 he owes within one month. Thanks to a loan from a new wealthy couple in town, Joe does pay back what he owes in the designated amount of time. He moves out of the Pulaski House before the real estate agent returns, and Joe moves into the Hamilton-Turner House, where he is friends with the landlord. Mr. Thorsen, the real estate agent, comes to Sweet Georgia Brown's and informs Joe that he saved the house for him while he was away.

Chapter 13 Analysis

This abrupt shift to Joe Odom's situation exhibits the inside a Savannah courtroom before Williams' trial. The picture drawn of the Savannah justice system benefits those who are well-known, have an attractive character, and are powerful. While Williams has power in the form of wealth and status, Joe Odom has power in the form of charm, friendship, and social connections. Joe not only writes bad checks, but manages to live for free for six months in a house he does not own. Joe's charismatic attitude and self-confidence helps him escape from difficult self-imposed situations. Williams, who is also extremely confident in himself, is sure that he will be able to do the same.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Williams, continuing with annual tradition, holds his Christmas party at Mercer House, though he foregoes the second party meant for gentlemen only. While some guests decline the invitation, about 150 out of 200 invitees show up. Williams explains that those who believe they are better than he are the ones who stay away, and the people who don't care what others think come to the party. He says the ones who accept his invitation are the secure ones. They have connections and well-known ancestors.

Williams describes the guests at his party, most of whom are wealthy and prominent. He points out Roger and Claire Moultrie, whom Williams says fought with local policemen the year before but were declared innocent in court, thanks to several character witnesses to testify that they are respectable figures. Williams and the narrator engage in conversation with Harry Cram, a fun-loving older man recovering from alcoholism, who shot two marines in the head, when they tried to rob his son. At this point Serena Dawes and Luther Driggers enter the party, and the conversation remains on guns. Colonel Atwood, a wealthy, Hitler-infatuated trader, exhibits a pistol to the group. Serena and another woman remark that their husbands killed themselves with the same kind. Additional characters chime in with their own remarks about what sort of gun they carry. Serena even brags that she attempted to shoot an old lover of hers at one time.

A nearby conversation revolves around the murder of Danny. The speakers, a man and a woman, think that even though no gunpowder is detected on Danny's hand and there are no fingerprints on the gun, Williams will be declared innocent because of his standing in society and his lawyer.

Williams' mother Blanche, a tall, thin, soft spoken woman who greatly admires her son, is present at the party. She says Williams has drawn a crowd and has been restoring antiques since he was young. She also remarks she had had a bad feeling about Danny even before the murder. Williams' mother believes Jim is too good to other people and needs to think more about himself. Williams intercepts the conversation and says everything always has been fine, and will continue to be fine.

Chapter 14 Analysis

An inside look at Williams' party shows how the opinions of those in powerful, prominent positions in society are readily accepted. Violence is treated as an entertaining pastime by Williams' party guests, indicating that societal attitudes are one reason why Williams has been taking his trial so lightly and with such a nonchalant attitude. Others in comparable positions in Savannah have come through court cases with no trouble, when they are obviously the guilty party. Even the overheard conversation solidifies the common opinion that even if Williams did intentionally murder Danny, he will be let off

because of his standing in society and his ability to hire a good lawyer. Williams' mother, who is well-regarded, nurturing, and admires her son greatly, can be juxtaposed with Danny's mother, who had been estranged from her son. Emily Bannister did not encourage Danny, and is seen by Savannah society as selfish and conniving.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

This chapter begins with a conversation between Williams' attorney, John Wright Jones, and the coroner, Dr. Metts. The coroner informs Jones that Danny could have been standing up when he was shot, but some aspects of Williams' story are questionable. There is no blood on the gun, though the blood on Danny's hand is smeared as if it had been dragged out from under his body. In photos taken by police on the scene, a chair had been placed on top of Danny's pant leg, indicating Williams may have placed it there after Danny fell. A cigarette was also stubbed out on Williams' leather desktop. Dr. Metts states that Williams could have shot Danny out of anger for putting out his cigarette on the desk. Despite this information, Dr. Metts remarks that Danny got what he deserved, and that Williams did his 'civic duty' by killing Danny.

Jones alludes to another trial a few months earlier involving an out-of-town visitor, who made sexual advances on four US Army Rangers in a pornographic bookstore. The Rangers had beaten the man to an unrecognizable state, though the Rangers were sentenced to only one year in jail with the possibility of parole. The District Attorney in the case was Spencer Lawton, Jr., the D.A. in Williams' case. The Lawton family had once been distinguished in society, had been involved in founding the American Bar Association, and had very large tombstones in Bonaventure Cemetery. However, their mansions burned down, the law firm was absorbed, and the Lawton Memorial Hall is now a Greek church. Spencer Lawton, Jr., is soft spoken, a little plump, with a concerned attitude. In the most recent election, Lawton had run against Bubsy Ryan, who had a family history of being the D.A. At the last minute, Lawton entered the race as a third party and won with the help of Lee Adler's support and the black vote. Lawton has little experience and an unimpressive track record in criminal cases.

Williams has hired Bobby Lee Cook, a lawyer well-known in criminal courts in the South. He has won 90% out of 250 murder cases. Cook picks Jones as a local attorney to represent Williams, because he knows Savannah would want to see a local figure in the courts. Jones is also the lawyer, who recently beat Lawton in the Ranger case.

Chapter 15 Analysis

The conversations and characterizations in this chapter show once again how prominence in society is incredibly important to the impending trial. Though the coroner describes several things that indicate Danny is not guilty of shooting at Williams, he believes Williams did the right thing for the good of society. This eerie reference to a 'civic duty' seems as if Williams had been cleaning up society for the good of Savannah, and therefore should not be thought of as guilty. Homosexuality is considered unacceptable in Savannah, which creates an interesting twist to Williams' case.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

The events of Williams' trial unfold in this chapter. The small, enclosed courtroom is full of curious locals. Williams' attorneys have listed Danny's mother, Emily Bannister, as a witness in a roundabout way to make certain she remains outside of the courtroom. Judge Oliver, an older, distinguished gentleman, enters, and opening statements begin. Lawton argues that Williams attempted to cover up the crime he committed, and Cook claims Danny had a history of violence and was the one at fault. A nameless man, who seems to be taking great pleasure in watching the lawyers, approaches the narrator outside the courtroom and informs him that the case is not about murder. He says it's about hermaphrodites.

Lawton calls several people to the stand, including the police dispatcher Williams called on the night of Danny's death, Joe Goodman, and other witnesses who speculate what may have occurred between the time Danny died and when Williams called the police. Perhaps Williams fired once, Danny fell to the ground, Williams fired twice more from above Danny's body, and then fired two shots at his own chair with the gun he placed near Danny's hand. The prosecution claims Williams made several mistakes. He fired the gun at his own desk from Danny's head rather than his feet. Pieces of paper were found on top of the gun Williams used to shoot Danny. Bullet fragments were found on Williams' chair. The blood on Danny's hand was smeared, and the leg of a chair was placed on Danny's pant leg.

Cook cross-examines Detective Jordan, who has tested Danny's hand for gunpowder using the atomic absorption test and found none. With Cook's prompting, he does admit that the positioning of Danny's body on the floor indicates he could not have been shot in the ear from above. He also admits the texture of the gun makes it difficult to gather a good fingerprint, and Cook provides evidence that 60% of the time the atomic absorption test is used to collect evidence it provides a false negative. Cook calls Dr. Burton, a medical examiner, to the stand. He says Williams' account is consistent with other pieces of evidence and agrees with Cook's statement on the inaccuracy of the gunpowder test. Other witnesses then testify to Danny's violent behavior.

Williams takes the stand. He emphasizes his own contributions to society and Danny's violent outbursts. On the night Danny died, Williams says Danny exploded in a rage. According to Williams, Danny was yelling that his mother hated him, his girlfriend didn't want to marry him, and accused Williams of not wanting to take him to Europe. Williams says he called Joe Goodman, who was supposed to go with him to Europe, to inform him the trip was off. Danny became more and more angry and then fired his gun at Williams. When Lawton cross-examines Williams, he claims Williams had told the newspaper Danny's gunshot had passed by his left arm, not his right, as Williams had indicated. Lawton also indicates that Williams gave money to Danny for sex. After Williams denies this, Lawton calls two of Danny's friends to the stand. George Hill and



Greg Kerr both testify that Danny said Williams paid Danny to have sex with him. Kerr, who claims he has not been involved in the homosexual scene in three weeks, hints that Williams mentioned to him once that Danny was good in bed. Williams' character witnesses, all of whom are highly respected, claim Williams is an upstanding figure, does not use drugs, and had not mentioned any relationship with Danny.

After Cook presents his closing argument, Lawton says Williams is well-respected, yet a Nazi lover. He claims Williams used and manipulated Danny for sex and power. He concludes his statement by suggesting Williams staged a separate incident in which he claims Danny went into a rage and shot a bullet hole in the floor of Mercer House. Lawton indicates that the bullet hole had already been in the floor, but Williams created the story about Danny creating the hole. Several hours later, the jury reaches a verdict. Williams is found guilty of murder. He is escorted out of the courtroom, and Danny's mother leaves with a satisfied expression on her face.

Chapter 16 Analysis

This chapter describes several aspects of Danny's and Williams' characters and reveals new evidence regarding the night of Danny's death. More and more information is revealed about Danny, whose estranged mother has arrived seemingly for the proceeds of the trial. Emily Bannister represents the chance for the disenfranchised and less fortunate to have some sort of power over the wealthy and highly regarded members of society. Emily is presented as someone who is involved in the trial for the money, indicating that wealth is seen as equivalent to worth for both the rich and the poor.

The somewhat shocking discovery of Williams' homosexual relationship with Danny hints at Savannah's prejudices towards things that are unconventional or unfamiliar. Though Cook's arguments are strong and convicting, the revelation of the relationship between Williams and Danny may affect the jury's decision. George Kerr's fervent claims that he has changed his homosexual ways and Williams' continual denial of having sexual relations with Danny show how unaccepted alternative lifestyles are in Savannah society.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Rumors abound that Williams is receiving special treatment in the county jail, but officials deny the claims. Though there is a possibility Williams will go to the state penitentiary, the judge releases him on a \$200,000 bond pending appeal. Williams returns to his normal activities in the antiques business but receives fewer invitations from friends. He speaks bitterly about the treatment of Mercer House by police and the public immediately after Danny's death. Williams says he is different from other members of Savannah's society, because he isn't part of the pecking order. He has earned his way to the top. He says if the appeal fails he plans to either transform Mercer House into a rehabilitation center for drug addicts, or blow it up so Danny's mother will not be able to live there.

The chapter concludes with Bobby Cook receiving an anonymous copy of the police report that clearly states the bullet hole in the floor of Mercer House was fresh, not old as Spencer Lawton had indicated. The jury had received a copy of the police report that had the information whited out. Cook appeals to the Georgia Supreme Court, which orders a new trial.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Williams' attitude toward his trial is becoming one of increasing concern, though he maintains an air of pride and arrogance. He continues to convey the dangerously self-assured attitude that wealth and power can create. Not only is Williams bitter towards Danny, but he resents the local public for treating Mercer House and the entire case like a form of entertainment. He also resents Danny's mother, who is not mentioned often but continues Danny's representation of the downtrodden. She symbolizes the complete opposite of wealth and prominence.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Williams, assured that he will triumph, invites the narrator to Mercer House. Williams says he has been concentrating on positive thoughts along with Minerva, the mistress of a deceased root doctor in South Carolina low country. Minerva, who makes a living out of communicating with the dead, regularly calls on Dr. Buzzard, the root doctor, to help her with her own techniques. Williams drives them to Beaufort, where Minerva lives in a small wooden house. The two enter the house and Williams introduces Minerva, a pale-skinned black woman with strangely styled hair and an eerie voice. She tells Williams that Danny is trying to work against him. Williams tells Minerva he wants a curse to be put on Lawton, so she instructs him to begin writing Lawton's full name on paper. Minerva receives a phone call, and she offers love advice to a customer with instructions involving a honey bath. She reminds Williams that "dead time" is from 11:30 PM until 12:30 AM, so they quickly go to Dr. Buzzard's grave in the flower garden. Minerva encourages Williams to think good things about Danny, and after some prompting, Williams says Danny was creative, a good artist, funny, and loved his car. Minerva says she feels Danny backing off. He knows Williams loves him, says Minerva, but Danny wants Williams to hate him so he is working against Williams. Minerva instructs Williams to plant the dimes she had told him to bring in the dirt, and to water them with fresh water.

The clock strikes midnight, signaling the beginning of evil time. As part of the curse on Lawton, Minerva attempts to contact nine dead women and performs some sort of chant to summon their spirits. After she tells them to leave the garden, Minerva has an angry conversation with Dr. Buzzard about her financial difficulties and her recent misfortunes. When she finishes, Minerva tells Williams to put Lawton's name in a jar of water in a dark closet. Then he is to cut Lawton's face out of a newspaper, cross out the eyes and mouth, put it in a coat pocket, let the preacher touch his coat, and then burn the photo in the spot where Danny died. She also says before they leave Williams must forgive Danny every day.

On their way home, Williams responds to the evening's events. Williams says Minerva's recommendations are a little corny, but he might do the photo-burning ritual. He is adamant about not forgiving Danny, however. He remarks that he likes working with Minerva, because she charges only \$25 while his attorneys charge an unbelievable amount. The chapter ends with the curious thought if Williams truly understands what Minerva was telling him about forgiveness.

Chapter 18 Analysis

The title of Berendt's book is explained in this chapter. The meeting between Minerva, Williams, and the narrator, elaborates on the conflict between good and evil and the



definition of both. In the garden during the half-hour of good, issues such as forgiveness, laughter, and love are addressed. During the half-hour of evil Minerva concentrates on finances and curses. However, for most of Savannah's upper crust, money and finances are seen as good and powerful. While other things such as love and forgiveness are not necessarily seen as evil by the elite in the book, they certainly are not high priorities. Perhaps some of the characters in the book have skewed ideas of what is important.

Once again, Williams shows his unwillingness to have compassion on Danny and extend forgiveness. Williams' stubborn, self-righteous attitude towards Danny becomes more and more puzzling. Williams is determined to see things from only his point of view and will not forgive even someone like Danny, a tortured young man in pain who, according to Williams and the rest of Savannah's elite, caused his own death.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

The next scene is on St. Patrick's Day, when the narrator and Joe Odom are watching the famous parade from the roof of Joe's home on Lafayette Square. One float passes by that carries a dead Union soldier in a wagon pulled by men dressed in Confederate uniforms. Joe comments that that is what could happen to a Yankee making trouble in Savannah. Joe, however, says he is fine with whatever the narrator is writing, because he will end up being the good guy in the end.

Joe lives in Hamilton-Turner House, a four-story elaborately decorated mansion. He continues to host tours, even though the interior is not well-preserved, has been converted into apartments, and is full of fixtures and antiques not original to the house. He hires Gloria, a black, cheery housekeeper, who leads tours with lots of dramatic stories. Joe is fortunate to profit \$500 in cash each week, because no bank in Savannah trusts him enough to give him an account. Even Sweet Georgia Brown's finances are handled through Mandy, who is becoming irritated with Joe's irresponsibility.

Joe's tours are the only ones in Savannah taking place in a private home because it is an illegal activity. Joe's neighbors are fed up with tourist buses and loud parties, so they send spies in on tours of the house. The first spy becomes charmed by Joe and emerges the house with a new hair style. The second spy is more discerning, however, and comments on how disgraceful it is that Joe lets his troublemaking friends mingle with tourists, and relentlessly advertises his nightclub to visitors. Joe receives a notice from the Department of Inspections stating he is violating the zoning code. Joe, however, shares his idea of starting the Hamilton-Turner Museum Foundation, a non-profit that will be funded by the expenses of paying tourists. Appropriately enough, cymbals in the parade crash loudly as Joe introduces his idea.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Once again, the juxtaposition of Joe Odom, and it is unclear as to whether or not Jim Williams will be able to work his way out of the trial just as Joe seems to wheedle his way out of every sticky situation. Joe Odom and Williams are very different characters, but their approach to life is the same. Odom is a fun-loving, likeable fellow, who works his way through life using his charm and good looks. He is not rich by any means, and therefore not highly regarded by Savannah's elite. Williams is much more serious figure, thriving on his own accomplishments and hard-earned wealth. Residents of Savannah hold a great deal of respect for Williams because of his composure and power in the form of money. Both Odom and Williams, however, seem to believe they can find their way out of every situation-Odom using his charm, and Williams using his money.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Williams continues to appear unconcerned regarding the status of his case. He is now being defended by Frank "Sonny" Seiler, an attorney born and raised in Savannah. Cook has had an unavoidable conflict in court dates. Sonny owns Uga, the University of Georgia's mascot, and has been the owner of all preceding Ugas as well. In his office in Armstrong House, Sonny points out the mistakes Cook made, such as hiding the homosexual aspect of the case from the jury. Sonny convinces Williams to confess his homosexual activity, and he will make sure the jury has no biases.

Sonny also addresses the tests done on Danny's gun. That particular model of gun, the German Luger, has an unusually heavy trigger pull, causing lots of jerk and erratically emitted gunpowder. No traces of gunpowder from Williams' gun were found on Danny's shirt, indicating Williams had to have been at least four feet away, when he shot Danny. Sonny also found new pictures from the crime scene. The photos show numerous people in the study at Mercer House that night moving evidence, including the chair placed on Danny's pant leg. Sonny plans to take advantage of Lawton's inexperience in court and is confident of a speedy trial.

The conversation turns to Uga, who is nationally known. Sonny displays all the mail Uga receives and pictures of Ugas I, II, III, and IV. Sonny invites the narrator to visit Uga's hotel suite before the next game. When he arrives at the hotel, Sonny, Uga, and Uga's attendants are preparing for the game. In the parking lot outside of the stadium, Sonny places Uga on top of the car and Uga is treated like a celebrity. He is put in an air-conditioned hydrant and wheeled onto the football field, where tombstones of deceased Ugas lie. When Williams hears about Sonny's view of the case, Williams continues to seem unconcerned about the case. He states that, because UGA won the game, he knows Sonny will be in a good mood.

Chapter 20 Analysis

This chapter introduces Sonny, Williams' new lawyer, who seems confident in his ability to win the case. Promising aspects of the evidence are introduced, though no individual piece of evidence is particularly convincing. However, Sonny seems sure of his ability to win the case without addressing the obvious pieces of evidence that indicate Williams' guilt. Sonny's passion for Uga and football supersede his interest in the trial, demonstrating once again how lightly most of Savannah is taking Danny's death. The idolization of Uga by football fans demonstrates not only the importance of the sport to locals, but shows how both Sonny and Williams are avoiding the gravity of the consequences if Williams is found guilty.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

The jury called to the retrial of Williams is not pleased with having to stay on trial for two weeks. Lawton begins by calling the police photographer to the stand. When Sonny cross-examines her, he shows her two different pictures in which a chair and a pouch have been moved. The photographer admits the positions of the chair and pouch appear to have been altered. As the trial goes on, the Judge Oliver continues to fall asleep at the bench. Minerva is outside the courtroom, waiting for her turn to testify. While on the stand, she plans to put curses on Lawton, Judge Oliver, and the entire jury. Emily Bannister also sits outside the courtroom. At Clary's drugstore, Luther Driggers says Williams messed up by not getting rid of Danny's body. Mr. Lovejoy, an elderly scholar, who overhears Driggers' comment, denies that Danny deserved to die.

The case continues into the weekend, and on Saturday both Judge Oliver and Sonny are more concerned about the UGA football game than the trial. Periodically Sonny approaches the bench to inform the judge of the game's events. When Williams testifies, he says that from time to time he and Danny had sex, because sex is "just a natural thing." The jury does not look convinced. When Lawton cross-examines Williams, he stresses how much younger Danny was than Williams.

Williams' shop foreman, Barry Thomas, testifies that Danny had a fit of violence about two months before his death. Danny attacked Thomas for no reason. When Thomas leaves the courtroom, Minerva grabs him by the ear and chastises him for saying negative things about Danny and making him angry. She insists they collect paper, a red pen, scissors, a candle, and a Bible. Thomas drives the three of them down to the water, where Minerva writes Bible verses on a sheet of paper, cuts it up, and burns the pieces. A policeman stares into the car window, so Minerva blows out the candle, hands it to the policeman, and drives away. Later, Minerva realizes she knows one of the jurors at the trial and refuses to testify.

Sonny calls numerous witnesses to the stand. A psychiatrist says Danny used to hold his breath, when he was with his mother, until he passed out. Dr. Stone and Dr. Burton present convincing defensive arguments about the gunshot residue, and Sonny then calls up two young women to the stand. The first, Vanessa Blanton, testifies that she saw a young man fire a gun about a month before Danny died into the trees near Mercer House. This coincides with the scene in which Williams says Danny shot a hole into the floor of Mercer House. The second witness, Dina Smith, heard gunshots from Mercer House firing rapidly the night Danny died.

On the last day in court, the attorneys present their closing arguments. Sonny brings up the excessive amount of activity on the scene the night Danny died, and Lawton continues to say that Williams staged the April 3rd incident. He lets his small female assistant fire Danny's gun, the one experts claim has an unusually heavy trigger pull.



The jury finds Williams guilty of murder, and Williams is escorted to jail. Minerva says Delia, one of the women she contacted during Williams' visit, is working against Lawton. The man, who gets pure pleasure out of going to see courtroom happenings, speculates that Williams might be out in seven years.

Chapter 21 Analysis

While Williams and others may believe that money and wealth can bring freedom and immortality, prejudice can hold even more power and authority. Though Sonny brings forth plenty of evidence that shows Williams' story is near accurate and very possible, the jury is put off by his sexual relations with Danny and quickly finds him guilty. This attitude of imprisoning or controlling those who may not be seen as worthy or acceptable is the same attitude Williams and similar-minded Savannahians express towards the shooting of Danny.

The concept of wealth and power versus poverty and vulnerability is demonstrated in the attire and personalities of Sonny and Lawton. The attorneys' appearances and personalities contrast with one another just as much as the parties and ideas the two represent. Sonny is sharply dressed in a stylish suit and impresses the jury with his dynamic presentation of evidence. He represents the appeal of wealth and charm, while Lawton symbolizes the less attractive poor and struggling. Lawton is described as boring, shy, and seemingly intimidated by the much more charismatic Sonny.

Minerva's actions do not seem to do any good, stressing again that it is money that gives someone power, not superstitions or curses. Her approaches towards manipulating the thoughts and actions of others seem to do no good, and become increasingly ridiculous and inane.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Williams is turned down by the judge for release on bond, but he is reassured that he will not be transferred to the state penitentiary immediately. County commissioners are unhappy about this and try to sue Williams for \$900 a day, but the judge advises them to withdraw their complaint. Williams' mother moves into Mercer House where she stays alone. She bakes a cake every week in anticipation for her son's arrival. Williams continues to run his antiques business from the jail and keeps in touch with Barry Thomas to discuss sales and purchases. Williams says he can often bribe his cellmates to be quiet while he is on the phone if he buys them candy bars. Williams has been placed in a tight cell called "The Pod," meant especially for homosexuals and the mentally unstable. His cellmates are mostly black, and Williams refers to them as the *noirs*. He complains about the food, says he has developed a nasty rash, and hates the minimal sunlight in his cell. He seems embarrassed for anyone to come see him.

Williams continues to maintain his innocence. He says the jury based its second decision on the outcome of the first trial. Williams sounds bitter towards his attorneys, whom he says are wasting his time and money. He claims that people only think he is rich, but in actuality, he is not. William says the conviction will be reversed and Lawton will be charged with misconduct, perjury, and denying Williams of his civil rights. He says his plan is to do it little by little. First he will encourage Sonny to work harder on getting the appeal, and will then focus on getting power over the thoughts of the seven justices of the state supreme court.

Chapter 22 Analysis

This chapter shows how Williams is determined to exercise his confusing, illusive behavior. He convinces his prominent contacts from the antiques business that nothing is wrong, and he is doing all business from Mercer House. Williams seems to believe he does not belong in the jail cell, and that he is better than everyone else there. His mother's complete denial of her son being in jail is eerie, unrealistic, and disturbing. Characters in the story are dedicated to preserving a way of life that they are determined to never change or alter. Williams' confidence about winning the next trial is consistent with his previous attitudes about his own power and immortality.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

The chapter begins with Mrs. Mooreland, Williams' longtime friend, pondering news in the paper as she waits for Mrs. Williams' luncheon to begin. The paper publishes an article that claims Sonny has two promising witnesses, who can testify that Danny offered them money on two separate occasions to seduce and kill or injure Williams. Mrs. Mooreland is fascinated and shocked by this news, and now views each young man she sees with suspicion and curiosity.

At Mercer House, Mrs. Williams welcomes the luncheon guests. Her son has planned all the details of the party and continues to call the house periodically to check in with the bartender, foreman, caterer, and his mother. As they arrive, guests wish Mrs. Williams the best in regards to her son's appeals case. In attendance are Joe Odom and Mandy, Emma Kelly, and Minerva, who is posing as a maid. Mrs. Mayhew remarks how much she will miss Williams' Christmas parties, and says her seamstress goes to the 'colored people's' debutante ball on the same night every year. A man and a woman talk discretely about Williams. The man says that even though at least one of the witnesses seems as if he is telling the truth, there is no physical evidence in the case that says Danny did anything wrong. Mrs. Williams gathers all the guests for a Polaroid so she can take the pictures to her son immediately following the party so "he'll feel like he's been at the party too."

Surprisingly, Lee and Emma Adler are invited to the luncheon and show up. Adler has continued to give large amounts of money to Spencer Lawton's reelection campaign, and Williams has been giving money to his opponent. Williams says he would rather keep Lee Adler close rather than at arm's length. Williams continues to be confident about the outcome of his case despite a lack of extremely convincing evidence. After the party, Mrs. Williams mentions the newspaper article to Barry Thomas and asks if what she has been hearing about her son's sexual activities is the same as what people say about King James of England. She seems somewhat satisfied, when Thomas tells her that King James, too, seems to have enjoyed male companions.

Chapter 23 Analysis

This chapter portrays how foreign and taboo the concept of homosexuality is to Savannah's elite. Mrs. Williams struggles with reconciling conservative, old-fashioned notions with her desire to love and accept her son. Berendt also emphasizes the out-of-date ideas characters hold towards relationships between blacks and whites, as Mrs. Mayhew's comments about her black seamstress's activities as well as Minerva's role as a maid indicate. Jim Williams' close involvement in the party is interesting, as even though he is in jail he continues to uphold his place in society. He tries to have control

over Lee Adler, and believes that by 'keeping his enemies close,' he will have some sort of power over him.

Mrs. Williams' is isolated in Mercer House, where she now lives all alone. The loneliness Mrs. Williams feels for Jim is expressed by her denial of the possibility of him spending several years in prison. She cooks for him and brings him pictures, saying it's like he is practically there with her. These coping mechanisms for her isolation seem foolish, and prevent her from facing and accepting reality.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Williams' is facing bad news. The judge denies his appeal for a new trial, and Spencer Lawton is reelected as District Attorney. However, Williams continues to avoid admitting to himself, Savannah, and his business contacts that he is still in jail.

The narrator decides he would like to go to the annual black debutante ball, sponsored by members of the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, who make up part of the upper class of Savannahian blacks. The group is well off financially but does not hold much political power. Chablis desperately wants to go to the ball too, but is refused out of a fear that Chablis will embarrass anyone she is with. The ball was begun by Dr. Collier, a cheerful gynecologist, who got the idea from a group in Texas. He outlines the qualifications for being a debutante. The girls are to have a high moral character, be high school graduates and enrolled in a school of higher learning, and have no history of misconduct. When looking through Dr. Collier's photo album, it is noticeable that throughout the civil rights movement, the skin tones of debutantes have shifted from light to darker.

The debutantes have had a long preparation process. This included community service, research papers, minuet classes, hosting a coming-out party, and attending Charm Week, when the girls are taught manners, etiquette and speaking skills. The debutantes' dates must be high school graduates and enrolled in college or the military and have no criminal history. They attend a dress rehearsal before the ball, which is a slightly more modest affair than the Cotillion, the whites' debutante ball.

When the ball begins, the president of Alpha Phi Alpha welcomes the guests, and the debutantes are introduced. Once they are presented, they form two lines and perform the minuet. A conversation about the prestige of hosting the ball is taking place, when Chablis enters the room. She starts a conversation with one of the debutante's escorts and dances provocatively with him. When breakfast is served at 1 AM, Chablis sits at the table and begins talking about how she wants to be a Cotillion debutante. She mentions her white boyfriend and thoroughly embarrasses the narrator, who makes a quick getaway.

Chapter 24 Analysis

This humorous chapter gives the narrator a more realistic feel by describing his emotions and experiences. He is a more dynamic, believable character, as he is embarrassed and mortified at being identified with a character as eccentric and tactless as Chablis. He tries to build a fabricated appearance at the debutante ball in hopes that no one present will identify him with Chablis. However, at the end of the ball, Chablis

reveals that they do know each other, and her friend escapes out of embarrassment and fear.

The brief conversation between sponsors of the black debutante ball shows that Savannah's rich, white upper class contingent is not the only group to acknowledge the importance of money in establishing one's place in society. The black women at the ball openly discuss the role of Alpha Phi Alpha and its importance to the status of both debutantes and sponsors. Wealth and status are universally regarded as desired concepts that hold power and happiness.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

This chapter describes how Savannah's news stories have shifted away from Jim Williams. Change is taking place in Savannah. Charismatic Christianity is beginning to influence Savannahian spirituality, much to the chagrin of more conservative Christians. The city is increasingly becoming more and more isolated from the rest of the world, and the economy is suffering because of it. Residents of Savannah are more and more dissatisfied with the local art college, which seems to breed liberally minded students, whose ideas often clash with those of longtime Savannah residents.

The relationship between blacks and whites in Savannah is discouraging as well. The city's crime, unemployment, dropout, and pregnancy rates are unusually high, as well as disproportionate to the ratio of blacks to whites living in the city. The prominent social scene also suffers. The number of members in the Married Women's Card Club has gone below sixteen, which is rarely heard of. Joe Odom is continuing to make money at the Hamilton-Turner House, but not without protest from the Department of Inspections. Serena and Luther Driggers have broken up and Serena is arrested for drunk driving. The relationship between Vera Dutton Strong, an extremely wealthy Savannahian all of her life, and her daughter, the family outcast, who insists on becoming a Savannah police officer, is described as tumultuous and bitter.

Finally, Jim William's second trial verdict is overturned on the basis of Spencer Lawton's closing argument and the police detective, who should not have been allowed to testify as an expert. Williams is confident he will win the third time, and says the deciding factor is money, as it always has been. However, he continues to have Minerva work on his behalf.

Chapter 25 Analysis

The downward shift in Savannah's economy and social scene is an indicator that by refusing change, the city is at a disadvantage. A newer breed of spirituality is on the scene, free-spirited art students are becoming more visible, and social clubs that have previously thrived are struggling with membership numbers as a result of strict rules. The relationship between obstinate Mrs. Strong and her determined daughter is representative of an unmoved Savannah surrounded by a progressive world. Williams' sudden hope for freedom is based on his wealth, possessions, and relationship with Minerva, despite the fact that she does not seem to have had an impact on his case at all.



Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Williams is living in Mercer House again, complaining about all the media attention devoted to the case. He continues to show more interest in Minerva's involvement in his case than he does in his attorneys'. Across the street from Mercer House, Minerva follows a small tour group up the steps of the Adlers' home and throws graveyard dirt on their flower garden. Unlike Williams, Sonny is discouraged with the lack of differences between the second trial and the upcoming third. He is worried about the holes in his argument, especially the lack of gunpowder on Danny's hands. He convinces Williams to refresh his testimony in order to be consistent with his last testimony, which was given over four years earlier.

Williams seems eager to tell what happened the night Danny died. He says that his story up until a gun was fired that night is true, but when Danny tried to shoot him, the safety was on. Before he could take the safety off to shoot Williams, Williams took a pistol out of his desk and shot Danny, then went around to the other side and shot at his own desk. Williams asks if his new story will hold up in court, because it explains the evidence, but the narrator is skeptical. When Sonny gets to Mercer House, he is excited, because he has evidence that suggests Danny's hands had not been bagged at the scene of his death, rubbing off gunpowder before he got to the hospital. Williams decides not to tell Sonny the 'true' story.

Joe Odom is at Sweet Georgia Brown's. He says Williams has given almost half of Savannah different versions of the events that occurred the night Danny died. Joe's opinion is that it was not a premeditated murder, Danny was out of control and violent, and the defendant was an older, frightened man. He believes Williams should be tried for manslaughter at the most. Joe then asks the narrator to follow a police officer, who has come to the club to arrest Joe for traffic violations. Joe swipes money for his tickets from the cash register and leaves the nightclub.

Chapter 26 Analysis

Berendt heightens confusion even further by recounting Williams' version of the events that occurred on the night Danny died. In this chapter, Williams represents a struggle to present oneself as competent and sensible. However, behind Williams' facade he suffers from overconfidence and a conceited faith in his own abilities. Williams desperately wants to emerge from the trial as if it had never happened, and his resistance to accepting the reality of the situation shows he is living in a world that he only wishes exists. The narrator's interaction with Joe Odom gives perspective on Williams' case, and shows once again how Joe himself denies the trouble he is in and wheedles his way out with quick mind and wit.



Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

The chapter begins with Williams, his mother, and his sister eating lunch and awaiting the jury's verdict. Mrs. Williams is worried, because the cat won't eat, and as she says, "you can't fool a cat." Jim Williams assumes his typically arrogant attitude. At the trial, Sonny brings a new witness to the stand, Marilyn Case. Marilyn is the nurse, who bagged Danny's hands at the hospital, which Sonny says indicates that any gunpowder on Danny's hands could have been rubbed off before tests on his hands were done. During Lawton's concluding statements, however, the faces of the jury appear solemn and grave. After two days of deliberating, the jury is still split, 10-to-1 in favor of Williams' conviction. The one stubborn juror is a woman, who claims she once had to wound her boyfriend out of self-defense and will not give in. The judge orders the jury to come to a unanimous decision.

The focus shifts to a conversation between Williams and Minerva. Williams urges Minerva to use an item of Dr. Buzzard's, when she casts her curses and charms that evening. Minerva says she will go to the flower garden and plead with Dr. Buzzard to give her a number, but Williams says he will give her one instead. He concentrates and gives her 6-8-1, which she says she will use to play the tracks.

The next morning, chaos abounds outside the courtroom because of news regarding the female juror, who refuses to convict Williams. She had called a paramedic and asked hypothetical questions about gunshot murders, but soon identified herself. Lawton wants the woman expelled from the jury, and Sonny asks for a mistrial. However, the woman denies her actions and the jury is still unable to reach a decision. The judge declares a mistrial and Williams becomes the first person in the state of Georgia to be on trial four times for murder. Williams is convinced it is Minerva's activity that has made the difference.

Chapter 27 Analysis

Williams' belief that Minerva's activity impacts the outcome of the trial shows that he continues to hold on to superstitious attitudes rather than face reality. The juror, who stubbornly votes against the rest of the jury in favor of Williams, represents the desire to maintain a surface appearance, yet becomes completely transparent to other characters in the book. By insisting on anonymity on the telephone with the paramedic, the woman tries to cover up her true identity. However, she eventually gives herself away on the phone, and her facial expressions and body language reveal her actions in court. The recurring theme of characters pretending to be someone other than their true selves, yet being unable to keep that truth secret, reflects the situation of Savannah and its resistance to progress or new attitudes.



Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

Filming of the movie *Glory* begins with actors and actresses dressed in time period clothing milling around outside of Mercer House. Williams has agreed with the producer on a fee of \$25,000 to use his home, which has been decorated to look like a 19th century mansion.

Sonny finally obtains a fourth trial for Williams about two years following the mistrial, and convinces the superior court to choose the jury from another location. The town selected is Augusta, Georgia, which is much further inland than Savannah and can provide a jury that has never heard of Williams' previous cases. In front of the jury, Sonny points out the inconsistencies between the testimonies given by Lawton's witnesses. He claims Danny's hands had not been bagged, Dr. Larry Howard had given very different testimonies, and state crime lab officials had deliberately hidden results from previous juries. The jury is charmed and amused by Sonny, and finds Williams not guilty within the hour. When Williams is asked if he will move somewhere else, Williams says he will stay in Savannah, because it will anger everyone he wants to make angry.

Chapter 28 Analysis

The speedy decision of the trial held in Augusta indicates a great deal about the isolation of Savannah and its members of society. Once the trial is moved to a location removed from Savannah, yet within the same state, the verdict is reversed. The jury has no past knowledge of Jim Williams, his influence on society, or the rumors around town surrounding details of the case. A singular perspective and way of looking at things can be misleading and confining, as portrayed through a description of such opposite reactions from the jury, a group of people uninformed about Savannah's socialites.



Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

Williams plans his first Christmas party in eight years, hiring a caterer, musicians, a bartender, and waiters. As Williams ponders the guest list, he thinks about various characters' situations. Serena Dawes, depressed and unhappy, has willed herself to die. Though struck by lightning, Luther Driggers is otherwise healthy. Unfortunately, his most recent girlfriend has died from the lightning. Joe Odom has been charged with forgery by Mandy, who had overheard Joe talking of marriage with another woman. Joe was sentenced to probation, and Williams invites him to his party in hopes of the attention focusing somewhere other than on himself.

At the party, Minerva, dressed in a maid's uniform, asks to be taken to an overpass to get some "devil's shoestring," because she feels Danny working against Williams again. After they collect the plant, she says they need to go see Danny's grave. They meet with Minerva's friend Jasper at a boat ramp on the inland waterway and take the boat to Bonaventure Cemetery. Danny's grave is marked with a small tile made of granite set flush with the ground. Minerva speaks to Danny's grave, but becomes angry because, as she says, she hears him laughing at her.

Jim Williams dies suddenly in Mercer House of natural causes less than a month after the Christmas party. There is speculation that Williams had had AIDS, but no physical proof. Minerva says Danny is the one who made Williams' death happen. When Williams died, he fell in the spot he would have fallen had Danny shot him in the study eight years earlier.

Chapter 29 Analysis

Berendt cleverly incorporates a narration of other characters' demises into Williams' task of eliminating people from the guest list, which brings together several seemingly isolated characters. The adventure with Minerva to Danny's modest grave is ironic also, in that Danny had boasted to Corinne that, when he dies, Williams would buy him a huge tombstone. The sadness of the situation is emphasized by the description of the mistreatment of Danny's grave as well. Williams' ironic death soon after his release from prison provides an unexpected twist to the story, as he is declared innocent only long enough to throw his final infamous Christmas party.



Chapter 30

Chapter 30 Summary

In the afterward, Savannah is described as being severely closed off from the rest of the world. Savannah wants to save the way of life it has known for a long time, and sees any outsiders as wanting to change that, and therefore threatening. He says Savannah has little long-term vision, but he admits this is something that allows the community to be distinguishable. Its insistence on remaining secluded and impenetrable allows residents to fully be themselves and to flourish in that awareness.

Chapter 30 Analysis

The narrator shares his perceptions of Savannah in the final chapter. By giving life to his personal thoughts, the narrator becomes a more real, dynamic character. He affirms what he has hinted at until now. Savannah is most concerned with preserving all things Savannah.



Characters

Narrator

Though a great deal of information about the narrator is not provided, he gives a brief autobiographical sketch in the initial part of the book. The narrator embarks on a strange journey by moving to Savannah in order to leave crowded, harsh New York City. The events of the story unfold as the narrator characterizes friends and acquaintances, and is a witness to the development of the murder trial of Jim Williams. Nearly the entire point of view is told from the narrator's standpoint, collecting information on the spot. He keeps up an impersonal tone throughout the book, interpreting characters' words and actions without imposing his own judgments or thoughts. Characters are aware that the narrator is writing a book about Savannah and the murder trial, so they seem to regard him as an outsider, a Yankee, and a foreigner. This works to the narrator's advantage, as there is no societal pressure to stay with a specific group or character and allows for freedom and flow between circles.

Jim Williams

Jim Williams is an upstanding figure in Savannah society introduced in the first chapter of the book. Williams represents everything that Savannah society seems to consider favorable, including money, poise, power and self-assuredness. His elitist attitude is seen as well deserved by other figures in Savannah. Williams is famous for throwing Christmas parties every year, preserving and selling antiques, and restoring historic homes.

The central storyline revolves around Williams' experience on trial for the murder of Danny Hansford, Williams' assistant, lover, and companion. When Danny is shot to death during a confrontation with Williams, Savannah's elite figures support Williams' claim that he has done nothing wrong. Williams is finally declared innocent at the fourth trial after declared guilty by the first two juries. The third trial is declared a mistrial.

Williams represents a dark side of wealth and power, one that can have destructive effects on one's personal character. Williams, as well as a great deal of Savannahians, have succumbed to the idea that the amount of money one has is equivalent to one's worth. He displays an excessive amount of pride, and the detrimental effects of attributing his entire life to wealth, power, and status make Williams narrow-minded, self-concerned, and overly controlling. He represents both the themes of isolation and illusion, in that he is a very sociable figure, when it comes to throwing Christmas parties and showing off his antiques. However, he leads a secret, mysterious personal life.



Danny Hansford

Danny is a tormented young adult suffering from inner struggles and an unfortunate background. He thrives on violence, sex, drugs, and alcohol, all of which play a role in his death. Ironically, Danny quickly becomes an extremely important character to the story *after* his death. His character represents the antithesis of Jim Williams. He symbolizes the poor, the unrefined, and the disgraceful. Unfortunately, his lack of money or well-known ancestors works against his favor. After Danny dies, members of Savannah's society claim to not have ever heard of him, or they praise Williams for being involved in his death. The lack of compassion for Danny and his situation serves as a warning of what can happen, when money is regarded as a reflection of a person's worth.

Joe Odom

Joe Odom, a fun-loving, charming musician, becomes the narrator's friend. Joe seems to win most people's hearts with his smooth talking and people skills. However, he suffers from irresponsible financial moves and often must manipulate himself out of sticky situations. Joe can be compared to Jim Williams, who believes his money and status will lift him out of any situation he is in. While Joe does not have much money, he does have charm and wit, and he believes these characteristics will help him no matter what circumstances he finds himself in. He borrows money from friends and acquaintances, lives in houses while they are on the real estate market, and earns money illegally by allowing tours to go through his home.

Lady Chablis

Lady Chablis is an extraordinary character, who stands out from most of Savannah's more traditional residents. Chablis was born a man, but receives regular shots of estrogen to increase her femininity. She is outspoken and loud, but her tactlessness is at times overshadowed by her charm and humorous comments. The narrator seems both fascinated and embarrassed by her lifestyle choices, which are unconventional in a city such as Savannah.

Lee Adler

Lee Adler is the nemesis of Jim Williams. Adler, along with his wife, Emma, has created a prominent name for himself because of his work with the Savannah Landmark Rehabilitation Project, which Adler claims creates diverse, affordable neighborhoods. During Williams' trial, Adler financially and politically supports Spencer Lawton, Jr., the District Attorney, as a way to express his enmity for Williams.



Spencer Lawton, Jr.

Spencer Lawton, the District Attorney arguing against Williams in the murder trial, is supported financially and politically by Lee Adler. Prior to acting as the D.A. in the Williams' murder trial, he has little experience in criminal court. Lawton is described as shy, unassuming, and easily intimidated by Williams' attorneys. However, he triumphs in the first three murder trials of the story.

Luther Driggers

Luther Driggers is a peculiar resident of Savannah. He is called 'the inventor' because of his discovery of a pesticide that can be used on flea collars during his work with insecticides. Luther is divorced, lives in a miserable house, and has a history of marijuana possession. He suffers from insomnia, lack of appetite, and is rumored to possess enough poison to kill the entire city. Luther has strange habits, such as tying flies to the ends of strings and carrying them like balloons in public.

Serena Dawes

Serena is a friend of Luther Driggers' and an obstinate Southern belle, who has once been a cigarette model married into a wealthy family. When her husband dies, she moves to Savannah, hires a maid, and gains weight. Her spoiled, self-centered attitude is not popular with Savannah's elite. She eventually dramatically wills herself to die.

Minerva

Minerva is the companion of a deceased root doctor. She earns her living in Beaufort, South Carolina, by casting charms and curses on people. Jim Williams is a regular customer, who consults her expertise during his trial. While Williams is convinced that Minerva's magic often works, her activities seem to have little or no effect on the outcome of the trial or any other aspect. The one useful piece of advice she offers to Williams, to forgive Danny of anything he did wrong, is scoffed at.

Frank "Sonny" Seiler

Seiler is Jim Williams' attorney following Bobby Lee Cook's court conflict. Sonny is a Savannahian, born and raised, and carries himself with an air of self-importance and masculinity. He is and has been the owner of all four bulldog mascots, named Uga I, II, III, and IV, for the University of Georgia. Sonny's life appears to revolve around football and the thrill of winning. In the courtroom, he represents status, acceptance on the basis of possessions and wealth, and the importance of charm and personality.



Blanche Williams

Mrs. Williams, Jim Williams' mother, is portrayed as an innocent elderly woman, who is in complete denial about her son's situation. She constantly convinces herself that her son will be released from prison very soon and must rationalize with herself in order to accept her son's homosexual tendencies. Mrs. Williams comes across as a weak character, unable to function in Savannah without the help of her son.

Bobby Lee Cook

Cook is Jim Williams' original attorney. His skill is well known all over the state of Georgia for winning criminal cases. However, he is defeated in the first murder trial by Spencer Lawton, and is unable to appear for the appeals case.

John Wright Jones

Jones is the local attorney Bobby Lee Cook chooses to help in Williams' case. Jones is a local figure, who has recently defeated Spencer Lawton in an assault case involving Army Rangers and a homosexual tourist.

Mandy Nichols

Mandy is Joe Odom's longstanding girlfriend. She eventually becomes irritated with Joe's lack of responsibility in financial and relationship matters, but is charmed by his personality and musical skills.

Emma Kelly

Emma, or 'the lady of six thousand songs,' is a piano player and singer in high demand in Georgia. The narrator accompanies her once, when she performs several times in one day. She calls herself 'the lady of six thousand songs,' because Johnny Mercer, a musician well known by all Savannahians, gave her the nickname.

Corinne

Corinne is a student at the Savannah College of Art and Design, who has a brief encounter with Danny. She finds him incredibly attractive, but is shocked by his violent nature and morbid outlook on life.



Emily Bannister

Emily is Danny Hansford's mother. Though she and Danny had rarely spoken or saw one another when he had been alive, after his death she sues Jim Williams' for \$10 million, plus the cost of Danny's funeral. Emily seems to take satisfaction in benefiting from her son's death and Jim Williams' demise.

Mary Harty

Mary Harty, an older, refined, typically polished Southern lady, is the first resident of Savannah encountered. She gives him a tour of the city, tells him a great deal about Savannah's history, and introduces him to Bonaventure Cemetery.

Johnny Mercer

Johnny is the musician and songwriter, whose family is from Savannah. Mercer House is named for his great-grandfather.



Objects/Places

Savannah, Georgia

Most of the story takes place in Savannah, a Southern coastal town with a rich history and firm sense of identity.

Mercer House

Mercer House is Jim Williams' residence and the place where Danny Hansford dies. It is an Italianate mansion, eloquent and the focal point of Monterey Square.

Bonaventure Cemetery

The Bonaventure Cemetery contains the remains of all of the city's deceased residents. The powerful, wealthy, prominent, and significant dead are buried here along with those from lower classes, including Danny Hansford.

Garden of good and evil

The flower garden, visited by the narrator, Jim Williams, and Minerva, is the site of Dr. Buzzard's grave and where Minerva conducts most of her spells and root activity.

Hamilton-Turner House

The Hamilton-Turner House is where Joe Odom lives and entertains friends and tourists. He uses the house to charge for tours, and though the Department of Inspection pesters him, Joe manages to charm his way out of the conflict.

The Pod

This refers to the prison cell Williams lives in after he is convicted a second time. It is meant specifically for homosexuals and the mentally disturbed.

The Hole in the Floor

The hole in the floor of Mercer House refers to the speculative doubt Lawton expresses to the jury that Williams is telling the truth about Danny's rages of anger. He claims that about a month before the trial, Danny went into a rage and shot a hole in the floor of Mercer House.



Emma's and Sweet Georgia Brown's

These are the two nightclubs Joe Odom has part ownership in. Emma's, owned by Emma Kelly and Joe, shuts down after the help is caught stealing from the establishment. Joe Odom and Mandy Nichols open Sweet Georgia Brown's after Emma's is closed.

Augusta, Georgia

Williams' fourth and final trial is conducted in Augusta, a town about 130 miles from Savannah that is not as self-contained or isolated as Savannah.

Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD)

This school attracts students, who have alternative interests and lifestyles that clash with those of residents of Savannah, at times. Corinne, Danny Hansford's romantic interest for a day, attends SCAD.



Themes

Illusion

Many aspects of the story incorporate the theme of illusion and deception. The first line of the book describes Williams' eyes as tinted windows, which stresses the fact that events in the book may not readily explain the reality of what occurs. A rug in Mercer House hides a bullet hole. Williams makes business calls from prison, unbeknownst to his professional contacts. Williams' mother is in complete denial about her son's impending trials. Williams' relationship with Danny is illusive. At first, the rapport is seemingly innocent and well intentioned, if a bit strange and questionable. However, as events of the trial begin to unfold, it is clear that their relationship has been tumultuous, secretive, and one defined by selfishness and lust.

Other isolated incidences throughout the book illustrate the concept of illusion. William Glover, who walks a non-existent dog, appears to be senile or hallucinatory. However, as the narrator discovers, a judge has told him to pretend to walk the dog in order to continue receiving money as written in his deceased employer's will. The presentation of Lady Chablis to the world is one of great deception and illusion, as she is actually a male, yet carries herself with a great deal of femininity. Several characters fervently attempt to portray themselves in the way they wish to be seen, though demonstrate that the struggle to hide one's true self is not always successful. The man wearing eye shadow on only one eye indicates the importance characters place on portraying the parts of themselves they only want others to notice. The shop owner then spots the man's makeup in a mirror, showing that at times characters deceive only themselves and no one else. Lee Adler's perception of his contributions towards Savannah's society falls into this category. He believes his work is respectable and valuable, but most residents of Savannah give lengthy tirades on why Adler's focus on historic renovation is deceptive and misleading.

Isolation

References to the physical isolation of Savannah and characters' isolation from each other consistently influence the tone of the book. The physical locality of Savannah secludes it from the rest of Georgia. It is difficult to reach the city by plane or train, and the description of the drive in to the city only emphasizes its contrast with the rest of the world. It is described as seeming like a different world, with different terrain and a distinguishably new feeling in the air. Some Savannah residents such as Mary Harty seem proud of this remoteness, others, like Luther Driggers, take on a depressed and submissive nature, when acknowledging Savannah's detachment from the world. However, all admit that it is its own unique world of customs and stability.

By introducing the isolation of Savannah early in the story, the physical and emotional isolation of certain characters is further emphasized. Danny Hansford's unwillingness to



express his emotions in any way other than violence, anger, or sex indicates a deep sense of loneliness and lack of trust in anyone. Jim Williams, a wealthy, middle-aged, bachelor, seems very alone in his surreal world of denying anything having to do with his guilt in Danny's murder. The narrator has transplanted himself into Savannahian society with no New England companions, and readily travels between social groups without reservation. The lack of personal disclosure on the part of the narrator throughout the book indicates that he suffers from loneliness and fear of expression.

Inner Conflict

The ancient conflict of man versus self is portrayed clearly through several interpersonal relationships in the book. Danny Hansford's angry and violent outbursts emphasize his struggle to express pain and frustration in more constructive, mature ways. He seems to fluctuate between needing another's care and acting completely self-sufficient and overconfident. He knows what he wants, but seems unable to make the steps to get there. He gets himself into trouble, creating difficult situations for himself and those around him. Jim Williams also deals with personal struggle. As the book unfolds, Williams has wrestled internally for a long time with a need for acceptance in an elite society with strict conformist rules while leading a homosexual lifestyle. For him to admit that he struggles with this would be an admittance of weakness, and he would rather portray a facade of prominence and confidence than admit his need for compassion and understanding from others.

Like Danny and Jim, Joe Odom exemplifies a character, who struggles with a conflict between a deep love for life and the practicality of being financially and relationally responsible. Joe represents those who expect life to treat them well, simply because that is how it has always been. However, at times, they are caught in difficult situations, because they neglect to face reality. Loving and anticipating the spontaneity that his life brings, Joe's apparent lack of concern for others, such as his devoted and loving girlfriend Mandy, hinders him in becoming an upstanding character. While his fun-loving and lighthearted attitude is attractive at first, his inability to care for himself is worrisome.



Style

Points of View

The story is told from a first person point of view largely from the perspective of the narrator. While very little information is given about personal opinions or perceptions, the story can be witnessed from a standpoint that allows for personal evaluation, opinions, and personal judgments. The story traces the narrator's journey from the very beginning stages of his life in Savannah to eight years later, when he is still an outside observer but has learned a great deal about Savannahians and their ways of thinking. Though the entire book is recounted in first person, only the very beginning and ending of the story give personal thoughts and opinions. The remainder of the book is relatively objective and consists mostly of a collection of observations.

At a few select times the point of view shifts to one outside of the narrator. The chapter that recounts events that occurred privately between Danny and Corinne is told from an omniscient point of view in which the narrator knows the thoughts of characters, particularly those of Corinne, and is aware of their intimate interactions. This allows for a deeper understanding of Danny, shows him in relation with someone other than Jim Williams, and demonstrates the difficulty he has in socially relating to someone his age.

Though the first person point of view indicates that usually only one perspective is portrayed, it does not keep characters' thoughts and true selves from being revealed. A great deal is disclosed by Joe Odom, Luther Driggers, Jim Williams, Danny Hansford, and other major characters in the story. Though the narrator is present most of the time, he is a silent presence that allows for the complete immersion in other characters' thoughts and actions.

Setting

The setting of the story in Savannah, Georgia, is central to the greater significance of the book. Savannah is described as being physically isolated on its own island, which reflects the theme of personal isolation of characters in the story. A significant portion of the chapter is devoted to describing the surrounding scenery and terrain of Savannah, and the feeling that one is entering a completely different world as the journey from mainland to island is made. The prevalent number of old trees and historic buildings that characterize Savannah's classic beauty reflect the importance Savannah's residents place on preserving the past. The preservation of the buildings and traditions show their desire to uphold these customs and ideas into the present, no matter how inconsistent they may be with more modern concepts explored by the rest of the country.

A considerable amount about Savannahian life is shown by introducing residents, who have lived all or most of their lives in the city. Old-fashioned beliefs and attitudes often held by members of Southern societies come to life in characters such as Lee Adler,



members of the Married Women's Card Club, and other Savannahians. The fact that the story takes place in the South, which at times is portrayed as having a reputation for old-fashioned ideas and judgmental attitudes, only strengthens the depiction of Savannah as a self-contained, isolated community that insists on seeing life from an unchanging point of view.

Language and Meaning

As a result of the journalistic style of writing, the information presented by Berendt can be used to formulate opinions, thoughts, and judgments based on characters' stories and self-presentations. The straightforward, descriptive nature of the writing helps create visual images that enhance the reading experience. The language is not difficult. It reads much like a magazine or newspaper article, using relatively simple vocabulary and sentence structure.

Descriptive passages create a visual image of the surroundings, including the setting and characters' appearances. The language does shift from one of expressive passages about Savannah's surroundings nearer to the beginning of the book to one that is a bit choppy and direct, when the plot shifts to events surrounding the murder trial. This matches the flow of action in the book. The extended descriptions of characters and surroundings are appropriate, when Savannah is introduced and described. The pace of events quickly speeds up, when Williams goes on trial, requiring more direct statements and observations.

Each character's manner of speaking is not drastically different. The Southern drawl is understood but not strongly emphasized. The style of language does vary, when Minerva and Lady Chablis speak. The vernacular typically attributed to black characters is consistent in this book with words and phrases such as "chil," when Lady Chablis refers to the narrator, and Minerva telling Williams needs to forgive Danny "for what he done." This creates additional separation between black and white characters, putting emphasis on the racial divide that exists in Savannah throughout the story.

Structure

The structure of the story is organized and logical, as the first portion of the book concentrates on describing Savannah's characters and the city's physical appearance and isolation. Berendt briefly introduces Jim Williams, but spends more time elaborating on the eccentricities of various figures and introducing central themes of illusion, isolation, and inner conflict. These themes are introduced in more minor characters in preparation for the events and indications surrounding Williams' trial.

Once the plot shifts to events surrounding the murder trial, more attention is given to Williams, his lawyers, and others who play significant roles in the trial process. The book becomes rather lengthy, because it describes each trial and the development of and events in characters' lives between each trial. Eight years pass from the beginning of the book until the conclusion, and Berendt effectively inserts portions of information



throughout to describe the movement of time. When a new character enters the story, a thorough description of the person is given either when others recount their perceptions of the person, or when the character is directly introduced. The plot of the book appropriately comes to an end, when Jim Williams dies suddenly, giving closure to a very ambiguous, seemingly subjective, verdict. The closing chapter is a personal statement by the narrator/author, who discloses his conclusions about Savannahians and the lessons learned while recounting the story.



Quotes

"He was tall, about fifty, with darkly handsome, almost sinister features: a neatly trimmed moustache, hair turning silver at the temples, and eyes so black they were like the tinted windows of a sleek limousine." Chapter 1, p.3

"But actually," she said, 'the whole of Savannah is an oasis. We are isolated. Gloriously isolated! We're a little enclave on the coast - off by ourselves, surrounded by nothing but marshes and piney woods. We're not easy to get to at all, as you may have noticed. If you fly here, you usually have to change planes at least once...We're a terribly inconvenient destination!" Chapter 2, p. 29

"We don't do black-on-white in Savannah...especially black male on white female. A lot may have changed here in the past twenty years, but not that." Chapter 4, p. 55

"I've often thought of changing my life completely, but it never works. I moved to Florida once, but I came back. I've got too much Savannah in me, I guess. My family's been here seven generations, and after that long a time I suppose it gets into your genes. It's like the control insects at the laboratory...some of them have been breeding for twenty-five years. That's a thousand generations. All they know about life is what goes on inside their jar...If we released them into the outside world, they'd die. I think something like that happens after seven generations in Savannah. Savannah gets to be the only place you can live. We're like bugs in a jar." Chapter 5, pp.74-75

"Jim Williams is a stellar individual. He's brilliant. Successful. Much admired. A little arrogant, maybe. But rich. And the house ain't bad either." Chapter 8, p. 128

"She had watched Danny from afar for months - studied him, worshipped him, stalked him. In all that time, it never entered her mind that he might turn out to be so volatile. She had thought of him only as a walking streak of sex, and about that, at least, she had not been wrong." Chapter 9, p. 141

"But then Savannahians rarely went anywhere at all. They could not be bothered. They were content to remain in their isolated city under self-imposed house arrest." Chapter 11, p. 168

"In his interview with the *Georgia Gazette*, Williams described Hansford as severely disturbed. He said Hansford had once told him, 'I'm alone in this world. No one cares about me. I don't have anything to live for.'" Chapter 12, p. 177

"[Jim Williams] was not even slightly remorseful. He had no reason to be, he thought. As he had told the *Gazette*, 'I haven't done anything wrong.'" Chapter 12, p. 181

"Once a day, every day, you must close your eyes and tell that boy you forgive him for what he done to you. And deep in your heart you must truly forgive him." Chapter 18, p. 253.



"Money is ammunition, and as long as I have some I'll use it." Chapter 22, p. 298

"There was no discernible black activism in Savannah. But it was evident that underneath their apparent complacency, Savannah's blacks were beset by an anguish and despair that ran so deep and expressed itself with such violence that it had made Savannah the murder capital of America." Chapter 25, p.336

"What would be the deciding factor? 'Money,' [Jim Williams] said. 'My case has been about money from the very beginning.'" Chapter 25, p. 341

"Savannah was invariably gracious to strangers, but it was immune to their charms. It wanted nothing so much as to be left alone." Chapter 30, p. 387

"Savannah's resistance to change was its saving grace. The city looked inward, sealed off from the noises and distractions of the world at large. It grew inward, too, and in such a way that its people flourished like hothouse plants tended by an indulgent gardener. The ordinary became extraordinary. Eccentrics thrived. Every nuance and quirk of personality achieved greater brilliance in that lush enclosure than would have been possible anywhere else in the world." Chapter 30, p. 388



Topics for Discussion

How does the point of view affect how the story is perceived? Would a different point of view change the story?

How does the physical isolation of Savannah reflect the theme of isolation in other parts of the novel?

Describe the theme of good versus evil in the novel, and how each concept may be interpreted differently.

What roles do money and power play in the story? How important are they to the presentation of the characters, and the outcome of the murder trial?

What sorts of prejudices are introduced in the story, and how are they rationalized by the characters?

When Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke, he remarked that Savannah was the most racially integrated city in the South. How is this ironic in relation to citizens' attitudes about social dynamics between blacks and whites in the story?

How can one explain Jim Williams' self-assuredness that no matter what, "everything is going to be fine" in regards to the outcome of the murder trial?