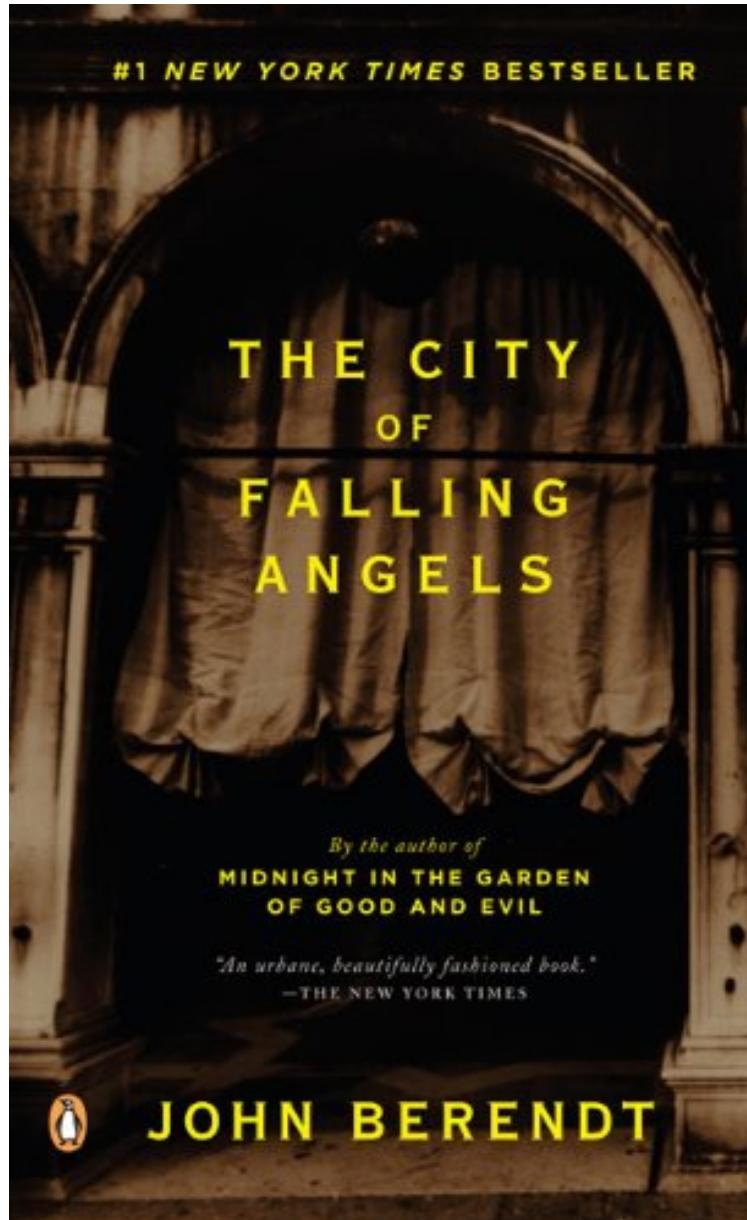


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The City of Falling Angels

John Berendt

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John Berendt : The City of Falling Angels before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The City of Falling Angels:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Don't expect Midnight in the Garden. By A. Howell An interesting book about the town of Venice and the people who actually live there- as opposed to the tourists. The people and

places you meet in the book are interesting, but he just couldn't find the quirks and the mystery that he found in Savannah. Sorry, John. "Midnight" is one of my favorite books- next time, try New Orleans. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. You will want to move to Venice

By Kurt Conner This is an enchanting set of observations about life in Venice at the turn of the millenium. Berendt wrote a brilliant story a few years ago about life in Savannah, and this book gives him another chance to spend time in an intentionally isolated community to chronicle their quirks and celebrate their uniqueness. He does a phenomenal job here, telling stories of high-society socialites, blue-collar electricians, lifelong scholars, artists who work in either glass or rat poison, and an unusual and lonely poet. The characters in the story really come alive as they allow Berendt behind their closed doors and onto their gondolas, and a reader will likely be tempted to plan a trip to Venice to meet them. As far as a structure, Berendt uses the fiery destruction of the Fenice opera house to guide his narrative, giving each character a chance to comment on the fire and what it means for Venice, and ending with a moving scene with everyone getting together once again at the scene of the fire. This book is informative and emotionally gripping, with textured heroes and villains slipping past each other for hundreds of pages, and I want to loan my copy to all of my friends.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Dissapointment

By Heidi Skarie This book was recommended to my husband so I purchased it for him. While it has some interesting facts and characters, I never finished it. It just bogged down and I wasn't interested enough to keep reading. My husband never finished it either.

Twelve years ago, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* exploded into a monumental success, residing a record-breaking four years on the New York Times bestseller list (longer than any work of fiction or nonfiction had before) and turning John Berendt into a household name. *The City of Falling Angels* is Berendt's first book since *Midnight*, and it immediately reminds one what all the fuss was about. Turning to the magic, mystery, and decadence of Venice, Berendt gradually reveals the truth behind a sensational fire that in 1996 destroyed the historic Fenice opera house. Encountering a rich cast of characters, Berendt tells a tale full of atmosphere and surprise as the stories build, one after the other, ultimately coming together to portray a world as finely drawn as a still-life painting.

.com Past Midnight: John Berendt on the Mysteries of Venice Just as John Berendt's first book, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, was settling into its remarkable four-year run on The New York Times bestseller list, he discovered a new city whose local mysteries and traditions were more than a match for Savannah, whose hothouse eccentricities he had celebrated in the first book. The new city was Venice, and he spent much of the last decade wandering through its canals and palazzos, seeking to understand a place that any native will tell you is easy to visit but hard to know. For travelers to Venice, whether by armchair or vaporetto, he has selected his 10 (actually 11) Books to Read on Venice. And he took the time to answer a few of our questions about his charming new book, *The City of Falling Angels*:

.com: The lush, cloistered southern city of Savannah was the locale of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. Venice, the setting for *The City of Falling Angels*, is vastly different. Was it the difference itself that drew you to Venice?

John Berendt: Savannah and Venice actually have quite a lot in common. Both are uniquely beautiful. Both are isolated geographically, culturally, and emotionally from the world outside. Venice sits in the middle of a lagoon; Savannah is surrounded by marshes, piney woods, and the ocean. Venetians think of themselves as Venetian first, Italian second; Savannahians rarely even venture forth as far as Atlanta or Charleston. So both cities offer a writer a rich context in which to set a story, and the stories provide readers a means of escape from their own environment into another world.

.com: I enjoyed your rather declarative author's note: that this is a work of nonfiction, and that you used everyone's real names. In your previous book you did use pseudonyms for some characters and you explained that you took a few small liberties in the service of the larger truth of the story. Why the change this time?

Berendt: When I wrote *Midnight* I thought I would do a few people the favor of changing their names for the sake of privacy. But when the book came out, several of the pseudonymous characters told me they wished I'd used their real names instead. So this time, no pseudonyms. As for the storytelling liberties I took in writing *Midnight*, they were minor and did not change the story, but my mention of it in the author's note caused some confusion, with the result that *Midnight* is sometimes referred to now as a novel, which it most certainly is not. Neither is *The City of Falling Angels*. In fact, I dispensed with the liberties this time and made it as close to the truth as I could get it.

.com: In *The City of Falling Angels*, a number of fascinating people serve as guides to the city, each with a different idea of the true nature of Venice. Who was your favorite?

Berendt: I don't have a favorite, but Count Girolamo Marcello is certainly a memorable, highly quotable commentator. "Everyone in Venice is acting," he told me. "Everyone plays a role, and the role changes. The key to understanding Venetians is rhythm, the rhythm of the lagoon, the water, the tides, the waves. It's like breathing. High water, high pressure: tense. Low water, low pressure: relaxed. The tide changes every six hours." I nodded that I understood. "How do you see a bridge?" he went on. "Pardon me?" I asked, "A bridge?" "Do you see a bridge as an obstacle--as just another set of steps to climb to get from one side of a canal to the other? We Venetians do not see bridges as obstacles. To us, bridges are transitions. We go over them very slowly. They are part of the rhythm. They are the links between two parts of a theater, like changes in scenery. Our role changes as we go over bridges. We cross from one reality ... to another reality. From one street ... to another street. From one setting ...

to another setting." Once I had absorbed that notion, Count Marcello continued: "Sunlight on a canal is reflected up through a window onto the ceiling, then from the ceiling onto a vase, and from the vase onto a glass. Which is the real sunlight? Which is the real reflection? What is true? What is not true? The answer is not so simple, because the truth can change. I can change. You can change. That is the Venice effect." I was not terribly surprised when he later told me, "Venetians never tell the truth. We mean precisely the opposite of what we say." .com: Now that you know Venice well enough to be a guide yourself, what would you say to a visitor looking for insight into the character of the city? Berendt: Tourists generally shuffle along, on narrow streets so crowded as to be nearly impassable, between the major sights of St. Mark's Square, the Rialto Bridge, and the Accademia Museum. All you have to do is to step off these heavily traveled alleyways, and in a few moments you will find yourself in quiet, much emptier surroundings. This is more like the real Venice. Another thing to do is to go into the wine bars where Venetians stand around drinking and talking. They will very likely be speaking the Venetian dialect, so you won't be able to understand them, but you will get a sampling of the true Venetian ambiance enlivened by the pronounced sing-song rhythm of the language. I'd also suggest stopping someone in the street and asking for directions. Almost invariably, you will be rewarded with a genial smile and the instructions, *Sempre diritto*, meaning "Straight ahead." This will only leave you more confused, because when you attempt to follow a straight line, you will be confronted by more twists and turns and forks in the road than you thought possible, given the instructions. This is part of what Count Marcello described as "the Venice effect." From Publishers Weekly Berendt reads his own nonfiction exploration of the seamy side of Venice with an insider's hushed tones, chronicling the life and times of the city's movers and shakers like a naughty child sharing an overheard secret. Following up his similar study of Savannah in *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, Berendt has cobbled together a series of entertaining tales of the legendary canal city, ranging from the squabbles of Venetian fund-raisers to the fire in the Venice Opera House. Like a cocktail-party raconteur with a particularly juicy story to tell, Berendt twists his listeners' ears with his book's seamless string of Venice-themed misbehavior and decadence. Only occasionally overemoting, Berendt mostly maintains the proper tone of high-society gossip delivered succinctly. Berendt's intimate voice helps to tie together the disparate strands of his sometimes-sprawling book. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From *The New Yorker* In his first book since the success of "*Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*," more than a decade ago, Berendt follows the same formula: he explores a mysterious, derelict city (this time, Venice), ingratiates himself with its leading eccentrics, and tells their stories. Berendt has a talent for letting characters sketch themselves. This book is less sensational than its predecessor, and the whodunit at the center, the burning of the opera house *La Fenice*, is really far less interesting than the smaller machinations and intrigues that Berendt finds along the way. The seduction and swindling of Olga Rudge, Ezra Pound's mistress, by the director of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, is enthralling; whether an electrician intentionally left a blowtorch burning is not. Berendt is happiest among the city's witty sophisticates and latter-day Milly Theales, and though his story forces him to include a few ordinary Venetians, he does so, it seems, reluctantly. Copyright 2005 *The New Yorker*