



ONLINE BOOK CLUB KIT

JEANZIMMERMAN.COM

 JEAN.ZIMMERMAN.AUTHOR

 JEANCZIMMERMAN



DRINKS



Hugo Delegate along with his friends and family dined lavishly, and drank plenty of champagne, whiskey, and Chateau d'Yquem. For your own 19th century-themed social gathering, enjoy some of these recipes.

GILDED AGE MANHATTAN

Stir well with crushed ice:

1 ½ oz straight rye whiskey

1 ½ oz red vermouth

2 dashes orange bitters

Strain into chilled cocktail coupe, top with a thin lemon peel twist

BROWNWYN THE DEBUTANTE

Combine in shaker with ice:

1 oz gin

¾ freshly squeezed lime juice

2 teaspoons grenadine

a splash of Amaretto

Strain into chilled martini glass

If desired: Add a drop of orange blossom water

HOT CHOCOLATE WITH ORANGE

2 cups milk

4 ounces chopped bittersweet or semisweet chocolate

1 zested orange

Add cinnamon powder to taste

Combine milk and chocolate into saucepan, stir over low heat until chocolate melts. Add orange zest and bring to a boil. Pour into mugs and top if desired with marshmallows.



PLAYLIST



Before the invention of the vitrola, Americans of the Victorian era were likely to know such songs as *My Grandfather's Clock* (1876), *Clementine* (1863), or *Home on the Range* (1873), played on the piano and sung together in their homes. Or they may have enjoyed the work of the great composer Stephen Foster, such as *Beautiful Dreamer* (1864) or *Jeannie With the Light Brown Hair* (1854). At a ball, they would have danced a waltz – the most popular dance step of the nineteenth century – to compositions by Johann Strauss, Jr. famous for *Blue Danube*.

But for 21st century readers of *SAVAGE GIRL*, Jean came up with a list of her favorite ‘wild child’ songs that inspire her today and appeal to our less civilized nature.

WILD CHILD

by The Doors

FURR

by Blitzzen Trapper

**LITTLE CHILD
RUNNING WILD**

by Curtis Mayfield

YOU GOT THE SILVER

by The Rolling Stones

WILD CHILD (REMASTERED)

by Lou Reed

**RUNNING WITH THE
WOLVES**

by Cloud Cult

AXE & THE WIND

by George “Wild Child” Butler

**QUEEN OF THE
SILVER DOLLAR**

by Sarah Jarosz & Black Prairie

CALL OF THE WILD

by Johnny Cash

WILD THING

by The Troggs

QUEEN OF THE SAVAGES

by Magnetic Fields

WILD CHILD

by The Cult

**I'M WILD ABOUT THAT
THING**

by Bessie Smith

WILD MAN BLUES

by Louis Armstrong

BORN TO BE WILD

by Etta James



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How did you feel about the way in which the Delegate family removed Bronwyn from Virginia City and came to adopt her?

Were you familiar with the idea of the 'feral child' before? What do you think about about the Delegate's fascination with the concept?

It is difficult to distinguish truth from lies with these unreliable narrators – Hugo's confession and his madness, Bronwyn's life story and her jaguars – are there any parts of their stories you like to believe? What about disbelieve?

After Bronwyn is shot and her true identity is exposed, why do you think she abandons the Delegates so quickly?

Do you believe the characters of Tu-Li and Tahktoo are fairly treated in the family?

Were you surprised by the appearance of Bronwyn's mother? What did you think about her relationship to her daughter? What about her relationship with Hugo's grandmother?

Delia's story is especially tragic – what were some of your reactions? Do you believe Hugo is at all to blame for this course of events?

What were some of the challenges to core beliefs that Hugo faced when his family fell from financial grace?

Do you consider Bronwyn morally wrong or justified for her part in orchestrating Bev's death?

Before the big reveal, who did you believe the murderer was?

What similarities did you see between the Gilded age and our own?



Q & A WITH JEAN ZIMMERMAN

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE THE BOOK?

I'd always wanted to write about a wolf girl, that is, one afflicted with the genetic condition known as hypertrichosis that causes a person to resemble an animal in the growth of fur all over the body. Many children with the affliction were exhibited in American side shows in an earlier period. Related in my mind was the phenomenon of so-called feral children, a girl or a boy purported to be raised in a wolf pack, tales of which have come down through the ages. I ultimately crashed these two ideas together in *Savage Girl*. My story plunks down a mysterious side-show waif (minus the fur) in the middle of high-society New York in 1875. Our heroine is thought to have been raised in the wild, perhaps by wolves, and in her physicality and force of personality goes against the "shrinking violet" femininity of the day.

THE NOVEL COMBINES STORYTELLING WITH HISTORICAL FACT. WHAT SOURCES DID YOU DRAW UPON TO FILL IN THE HISTORY?

I had previously written a dual biography of a Gilded Age scion named I.N. Phelps Stokes and his wife Edith Minturn, so I had done a good deal of research into the period, all of which pertained. In addition I dove into all I could find about feral children, railroad expansion, silver boom towns, anatomical science, manufacturing tycoons, women's high society roles and fashions, and of course everything about the history of Gilded Age New York. A few actual people also came along to enliven things, the James siblings and Madame Restell, important figures of their day.

ANY SURPRISES ABOUT THE REAL WORLD OF THAT ERA?

In 1875, when *Savage Girl* takes place, Manhattan has just come off of the Civil War and is ratcheting up into major economic development. There are more millionaires per capita than anywhere else in the world. And yet the city was nowhere near what we think of as developed today, architecturally or geographically. The Delegate family, for example, lives in one of the grandest mansions in town, but it is located at 63rd Street and Fifth Avenue, overlooking a wasteland of rock outcroppings and wandering goats. The mansions stopped with theirs. The city hadn't yet moved further uptown. One scene in the book showing this betwixt status takes place when Hugo and Bronwyn visit the building site of St. Patrick's Cathedral – it's only half built, on a wooded lot, without any spires yet.

THIS IS YOUR SECOND HISTORICAL MYSTERY. WHAT ABOUT THE GENRE INTERESTS YOU?

In this case it's a combination Pygmalion saga and murder mystery. I guess I love history too much to not place a book in the past. It's where I want to spend my time as a writer. That said, this is a love story more than anything else. A love story that throws certain obstacles in its characters' way based in part on the time they live in.

YOUR LAST NOVEL WAS SET IN 1663. NOW WE ENTER A WORLD TWO HUNDRED YEARS LATER, SAME LOCALE. WHY THIS TIME PERIOD? AND WHAT'S CHANGED?

The houses, the dresses, the money, the manners! And there's also an element of the tragic, because the Civil War had just dipped New York in blood along with the rest of the country. Researching Gilded Age New York City for my earlier biography (*Love, Fiercely*) made me yearn to take on that fascinating milieu again. The world of the "uppertens" might be exceedingly comfortable, but it was also fraught with potential dangers of social missteps, especially when it came to expectations for adolescent girls as they came to maturity. I've always loved Wharton and James, and writing *Savage Girl* allowed me to enter their world.

WHY STICK WITH NEW YORK?

Savage Girl starts out in the western territories, in Virginia City, Nevada, but the Delegates high tail it back to Manhattan where they feel they belong. For me, there's no locale more fascinating, in any era. It's the center of the universe.

IF YOU COULD TIME TRAVEL TO ANY TIME AND PLACE WHERE WOULD IT BE?

Wherever I'm placing a novel at that moment.

BRONWYN IS A MIX OF ALLURING HEROINE AND POTENTIAL KILLER. WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO DRAW A PICTURE OF SOMEONE WHO IS BOTH FASCINATING AND TERRIFYING?

More than anything I felt sympathy for her. Because she comes out of nowhere and there are all kinds of expectations for her immediately that she doesn't necessarily know how to fulfill. To be a great lady when you've just got used to being a sideshow attraction, to pinch your figure in with a bone corset – it must all seem like madness to her. She finds herself in a world where she can want for nothing, but she's not sure she's comfortable there.

WHAT DOES BRONWYN'S LIFE TELL US ABOUT WOMEN OF THE VICTORIAN ERA?

The hoops through which a woman had to jump were both constricting and beautiful. Bronwyn learns to dress like a lady, with Parisian dresses, weighty crinolines and bustles and trains. It's all gorgeous stuff, but a lot to haul. She has to learn how to move in a certain way and speak in a certain way if she is to appear at her coming out ball and hopefully win the attentions of an eligible man. Her appearance and her manners are critical calling cards. Without them there is the dire possibility that she might not marry.

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO THE NOTION OF THE FERAL CHILD?

A child who has been raised in the wild is both incredibly independent and terrifyingly lonely. Then they might come to fame, receiving the attention of scientists down to the hoi polloi – and fame is the opposite of anything they've ever experienced. The rest of the world sees the feral child as a blank slate upon which to write its theories, but the feral child is simply a person. A recipe for unhappiness in almost all cases. The only way Bronwyn can solve this puzzle is through her sharp wit and force of personality.

WERE THERE DIFFERENT CHALLENGES IN SETTING THE STAGE
OUT WEST?

Quite a bit of first-person material has been written about Virginia City, starting with *Roughing It*, the memoir Mark Twain published about his time there as a cub reporter, so it's fun to have all that intimate detail about the time and place. The hardest thing about portraying it is doing so in such a way that it sounds remotely real, it was that over the top. Silver dust in the air, the constant refrain of gun shots and dynamite, all the crazy characters.

WHAT EXISTS OF THAT GILDED AGE NEW YORK WORLD IN THE
MANHATTAN OF 2014?

About the only place in Manhattan comparable in magnificence to the Delegate house is the old Frick Mansion, now the Frick Museum. Fifth Avenue has long since gone over to fancy apartments rather than freestanding houses. But if you stand at 63rd Street and Fifth Avenue and turn your glance over to Central Park the view is unchanged – Central Park had only been completed a decade or so in 1875 and it's a central location for the story. Of course the avenue would have been thronged with horses and carriages rather than cars at that time. Luckily it was the dawn of photography and a lot of people wanted to have their abodes documented, so we know much about genteel New York's appearance.

YOU OFTEN WRITE ABOUT THE STATUS OF WOMEN. WAS THERE
SOMETHING IN PARTICULAR ABOUT THE WOMEN OF THE GILDED
AGE THAT INTRIGUED YOU?

I found the debutante to be a fascinating creature and the coming out process one that was as constricting as it was lovely. Here were the grand dames of society, banding together when a girl reached the age of eighteen or so, helping to usher her into a new social status. There's some power in the process for women. The learning curve was steep. There are new gowns and dance lessons, teas, ritualized social visits and grand balls. The fashions are extraordinary. Yet debuting is filled with the strictest rules and obligations, and if you fail there is the threat of punishment (e.g. remaining single, a spinster). When Bronwyn in *Savage Girl* obtains a fantastic wardrobe in anticipation of her debut, it may incite envy, but there's a tradeoff. With every step she takes toward becoming a model debutante she loses some freedom. That tradeoff is the central problem in the story, and it really moved me as I was working on the novel. I wanted to search beneath the opaque surface of the debuting process to find deeper meanings. That meant talking about both corsets and bloomers. (The forces opposed to the debuting process include Victoria Woodhull, a free love proponent who is a character in the book.) The world of the fashionables might be exceedingly comfortable, but it is also fraught with potential dangers of social missteps, especially when it comes to expectations for adolescent girls as they approach maturity. I've always loved the portrayal of women in Wharton and James, and writing *Savage Girl* allowed me to enter their world.

