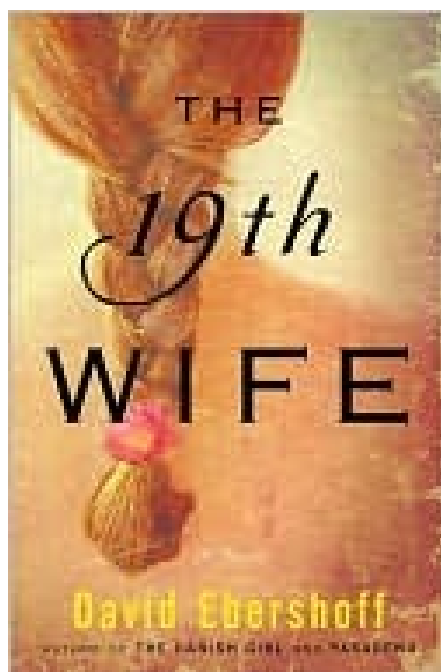




The 19th Wife

David Ebershoff

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) ➔

The 19th Wife

David Ebershoff

The 19th Wife David Ebershoff

Faith, I tell them, is a mystery, elusive to many, and never easy to explain.

Sweeping and lyrical, spellbinding and unforgettable, David Ebershoff's *The 19th Wife* combines epic historical fiction with a modern murder mystery to create a brilliant novel of literary suspense. It is 1875, and Ann Eliza Young has recently separated from her powerful husband, Brigham Young, prophet and leader of the Mormon Church. Expelled and an outcast, Ann Eliza embarks on a crusade to end polygamy in the United States. A rich account of a family's polygamous history is revealed, including how a young woman became a plural wife.

Soon after Ann Eliza's story begins, a second exquisite narrative unfolds—a tale of murder involving a polygamist family in present-day Utah. Jordan Scott, a young man who was thrown out of his fundamentalist sect years earlier, must reenter the world that cast him aside in order to discover the truth behind his father's death.

And as Ann Eliza's narrative intertwines with that of Jordan's search, readers are pulled deeper into the mysteries of love and faith.

The 19th Wife Details

Date : Published August 5th 2008 by Random House (first published 2008)

ISBN : 9781400063970

Author : David Ebershoff

Format : Hardcover 514 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Book Club, Fiction, Adult

 [Download The 19th Wife ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The 19th Wife ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The 19th Wife David Ebershoff

From Reader Review The 19th Wife for online ebook

Jonathan Peto says

Good book.

I've noticed a few reviews that have panned the novel for religious reasons or because of differences over the intersection between fiction and nonfiction, but neither issue affected me. The foul language and the gay relationships in one of the plot lines didn't distract me either. I was surprised to read complaints. The language suits the characters. The focal character's sexual orientation was just an aspect of his character and was not something the author emphasized. I thought it was interesting to read about falling in love from his perspective and can see why someone who has strong moral objections to homosexuality would be uncomfortable, but, hey, isn't that one reason we read fiction?

The book is not flawless, but it's ambitious and entertaining. There are two plot lines. I hesitated to begin the story because of the historical plot line involving members of the early Mormon church, but it did not bog down, though I can imagine readers skimming parts of it. The author incorporated historical documents and other texts that enlivened the telling. The second plot line is a mystery taking place in modern times and its resolution took me by surprise. Both plot lines address polygamy.

I plan to read another David Ebershoff book.

Vanessa Druckman says

When I heard about The 19th Wife by David Ebershoff, I was immediately desperate to get my hands on a copy. I love historical fiction and have a strange fascination with polygamy and other cults. As soon as it arrived, I sat down to read it cover to cover. It did not disappoint.

This novel weaves the stories of two women, both the 19th wives of polygamists, and paints a thorough and captivating portrait of plural marriage from its inception in the 1830s to its current existence with fringe groups. The first 19th wife is Ann Eliza Young, Brigham Young's wife who divorced him and campaigned tirelessly on the lecture circuit to educate America about polygamy. She was instrumental in convincing Congress to outlaw the practice and forcing the Mormons to renounce it. Ebershoff fictionalizes her story but also references diverse original sources to bring to life Brigham Young, Ann Eliza Young, her parents and siblings. The details about life on the frontier as well as the dialogue are authentic and intriguing.

The other 19th wife's story is radically different from Ann Eliza Young's, and reveals how far from grace plural marriage has fallen. It is really a murder mystery tale, told through the eyes of Jordan Scott, the wife's outcast gay son. He is researching the Mesadale Firsts community (fictional but inspired on communities such as the one led by Warren Jeffs) to free his mother from being unjustly convicted of killing his father. The contrast between the struggles of the Mormon pioneers with their hand-drawn cart journeys to Utah with the present-day Internet and IM technology used by the men of Mesadale to recruit new wives is striking. Regardless of the advances of technology, however, the hardships of plural marriage to the wives and children remain unchanged.

Ebershoff condemns the practice thoroughly, but he does a great job of showing the fears and beliefs that drive women to choose being a plural wife. The chapter when he describes Ann Eliza's parents' struggle with

Joseph Smith's commandment to embrace polygamy is especially poignant. It is her mother who tearfully ends up forcing her husband to take on a second wife, in fear of not being with him in heaven. Once convinced, the husband fully embraced it, taking on multiple wives, and the ensuing strife destroyed their marriage.

Ann Eliza's character is a little murky, one of the hazards of using such a controversial historical figure. It is hard to believe that she is much of a victim after three failed marriages under her belt in her life. She is a good illustration of how high and low you could be in early Mormon culture as well as how much women were forced to rely on their own means to provide for themselves.

The modern sections of the novel do the best job of showing the true victims of "celestial marriage": the children. Jordan's descriptions of their home life really illustrates their plight: "We slept in triple-decker bunks; or five to a bed, head to foot; or on the couch, four boys elbowing over three cushions; or on the living room floor, on blankets and pillows, twenty kids laid down like tiles. Shirts and sweaters in plastic garbage bins labelled by size. Shoes handed down. Tennis balls and kickballs handed down from one kid to the next. The only thing in that house that was all my own, that I never had to share with anyone, was a drawer in my dresser, twelve inches wide by fifteen inches deep... If you're bad at math, that's 1.25 square feet, which was really more than I needed because I didn't have anything to keep inside."

The novel ends on a mixed note. The 1800s story concludes with the Latter Day Saints renouncing polygamy. The current day story concludes with Jordan's mother being freed after another killer confesses, but she elects to return to the compound. Her fear of hell is stronger than a desire to escape a harsh life as a cast-off widow. The Nineteenth Wife is a thought-provoking expose of polygamy's evolution in America and its presence today. It's particularly relevant considering all the recent news coverage, but it's also a wonderfully written and captivating novel.

Judith says

Loved the 19th Century Brigham Young/Ann Eliza part (3 1/2-4 stars), the modern part I could have done without (2 stars).

Marci says

This book is a novel (based on historical people and events) that intersects the stories of two people in different times growing up in a polygamous home. The first is the story of Ann Eliza Webb Young (a real historical figure), who was Brigham Young's 19th wife (technically his 19th, depending on how you count them). The second is the story of Jordan Scott, a young man in present times who is kicked out of his family's polygamous compound (think Colorado City and Warren Jeffs), then is drawn back in when his mother is arrested for killing his father. To tie it together, his mother is also the 19th wife of his father.

The book is very well written and I was immediately drawn in to the stories, but it did get a little tiresome switching back and forth. The author also switches between narrators and mixes historical documents with fictional stories, so it does get a little hard to separate actual fact from fiction.

Overall, it really was a great book, especially the Ann Eliza Young story, which was very compelling. I haven't heard much about her before, but it really made me want to read more about her and her story as the

first woman to actually leave a marriage to Brigham Young and speak publicly against the practice of polygamy, based on first-hand experience. Jordan's story is also very interesting and is very timely with the YFZ Ranch raid just this year and the prosecution of Warren Jeffs. I would recommend this book to anyone, I liked it a lot.

Sharlene says

I was thoroughly put off by the gay characterizations/sex/language in the contemporary story. I felt it was crude and disrespectful to weave that plot along with descriptions of religious rites and rituals that are sacred to some. I also felt it was misleading to weave in seemingly real letters and references to "sealed" "archived" documents that might lead the reader to believe they are in fact the real deal when they are not. It is fiction--based on fact, I will give you that--but, still fiction. In an area where there is so much speculation and curiosity, why not write a non-fiction book and share the real journals, the real documents, the real facts. Each of the subplots failed me in the end. I was disappointed in not knowing what happened to Eliza Ann Young, the contemporary murder plot of the 19th wife from Mesadale was never developed enough to satisfy in any way, and the gay sexcapades of the son was pure trash. Don't waste your time -- find Wife No. 19 online (<http://www.archive.org/details/wifeno...>) and read that -- skip David Ebershoff's interpretation entirely.

Candace says

Recently, I have been seeing a lot of reviews and advertisements for 'The 19th Wife' popping up everywhere. Whatever the reason, after this book popped up on my recommendations for the umpteenth time, I was intrigued. I downloaded the Audible version and started listening.

This book was absolutely fascinating! Aside from the stories being told, the format was unique. This book blends fact and fiction, telling the present-day fictional story of Jordan, a young man whose mother has recently been charged with the murder of her polygamist husband, alongside the journals and "non-fiction" accounts of early Mormon polygamists. Most notable is the story of Ann Eliza Young, Brigham Young's "nineteenth" wife. Of course, how accurate these accounts of early Mormon polygamy in the United States are is a source of great controversy.

As I was listening to this book, my heart went out to the women in these stories. It is hard to imagine having to put up with some of the stuff that these ladies did. The control over their lives was absolute. As a mother of two young girls, I cannot imagine the horror of having daughters not much older than mine being forced to marry dirty old men.

More than anything, this book sheds light on terrible abuses committed in the name of religion. I am always amazed when I read these types of stories and see the lengths that some people will go to, just because some nut job "said it was so". It seems laughable, but there is no doubt that it was very real to these "believers".

As this story unfolds, I gained a better understanding of exactly how absolute the control of the "Prophet" was. The manipulations and crimes were multiple. Even if somebody wanted to escape their nightmarish existence, they had very little knowledge - if any - of how to do so or any means to get out. These communities are, by design, the perfect breeding grounds for victimization.

While the fictional plight of Jordan and his mother was entertaining and suspenseful, I found myself more

strongly drawn to the historical aspects. Ann Eliza's story was captivating. She was such a strong and rebellious woman, born into an unthinkable situation. I could not quit listening to her account of life growing up in a polygamist community.

Aside from Ann Eliza's personal story, the history of polygamy in the United States and its ties to the Mormon Church were very enlightening. This book did a fabulous job of "connecting the dots" for me, as I admittedly haven't read much on the topic. Although the present-day Mormon Church has renounced the practice of polygamy, it remains a shameful part of the church's past.

In the meantime, that shame and unwillingness to speak openly about this practice has fostered an environment where this practice is allowed to continue. It seems that the church and the government are content to look the other way and pretend that this practice is not still thriving in the shadows. As a result, the Mormon Church and law enforcement have inadvertently created an environment that actually perpetuates the cycle of abuse in these cult communities.

From start to finish, this was a captivating read. I was completely absorbed in this story. I highly recommend this book. I only wish that I had known about it years ago.

Check out more of my reviews at www.bookaddicthaven.com

Angie says

Whew. That was quite a read. I really don't know how to even discuss this book but this will probably be my longest review yet. I'll be discussing it with my Book Club in June and I honestly don't even know where to start with it when we delve into discussions. Here are a few of my scattered thoughts about this book:

1- Despite the fact that it's historical FICTION many parts of the book are written as "documents" which gives it a authenticity a very convincing feel. It made me want to verify and research things because they were presented in such a legitimate way (that's not necessarily a bad thing, to want to do further research I mean). I almost wish the author's notes at the end of the book reiterating the FICTION aspect of the story had been printed at the FRONT of the book. I had to constantly remind myself: fiction Fiction FICTION!!!! Of course many of the events, circumstances and people described in the book were real, but the bulk of the story was created by the author and it was a little hard while reading the book to remind myself that the story (and "documents") were author creations.

2- I'll probably read historical fiction novels with a lot more caution in the future. When reading others before this I've let myself get swallowed up in the story and trust that details are accurate. This one helped me realize that historical fictions are still just made up stories within the parameters of a real historical time or event. (And as the author pointed out in his notes at the end of the book, even history is tainted by perspective and the same event or circumstance can be described by two different people in completely different ways. So ultimately, it seems to me that with historical fictions, the author gets to pick and choose which perspective to take so you can't read a historical fiction novel as if it's a more entertaining substitute for a historical document.)

3- I appreciated the author's distinction between early Latter-Day Saints, the modern day "Firsts", and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints as it is today.

4- I thought the book was really REALLY long with really small margins and really small font LOL. It was a long book. Some of it felt like work because it was so long.

5- I was extremely frustrated with the language used in the telling of the modern day story. It was the worst in the first few chapters of the modern day story, but it was peppered throughout the entire book whenever the modern story was being told. I thought it was unnecessary.

6- I didn't think the modern day story was very well told and the characters weren't very well developed. The relationship between Tom and Jordan was awkward and rushed and unrealistic. Johnny was almost just a caricature of a runaway boy. The resolution in the modern-day story was somewhat satisfying with a bit of a twist, but overall I didn't care for the modern-day story and didn't feel like it was nearly as well developed as the rest. And a few modern-day LDS references were off and that pulled me out of the story a bit.

7- There were some unique perspectives in the Ann Eliza time period story that I really liked. I appreciated reading various peoples' perspectives of polygamy, including (and particularly!) several men's personal stories. I thought that was an interesting touch. I would have liked to have read a story or two from women who actually loved and valued the practice of polygamy as an alternate view point to Ann Eliza's story. I thought there were some really touching parts of the Ann Eliza time period story and I liked the inclusion of some important historical events in the early LDS church (although they were somewhat glossed over because they weren't really the focus of the overall story). Since the bulk of the story was from Ann Eliza's perspective it's no shock that it's very critical of Brigham Young and the early church practices. Again, I would have really liked to read a few more positive perspectives, but it's pretty clear that the author had no intention of singing any praises of polygamy in his book.

8- This is totally a random remark, but something of note in my opinion. The author tried to depict how closed the early records and journals and such were kept by the LDS church, how difficult they were to obtain when trying to do research, etc. I thought it was interesting that even fictitiously, Gordon B Hinckley was the prophet used in the book to show a swing in a different direction as far as releasing information. He was known as a leader in our time who was very much an open book, very willing to talk to the media and very well-loved and respected for that. I liked that the author portrayed that :)

My final thought? I'm really REALLY glad to be done with this book. I just didn't enjoy it at all. I didn't feel like the modern day story and the Ann Eliza story paralleled well enough to go back and forth as companion stories, and in the end it just felt like two really long stories shoved together in one book cover. I could have done without the modern-day story altogether, as I didn't feel like the author spent nearly as much time researching and digging into that culture and that story as he did the Ann Eliza one and it came across that way in the writing and story-telling.

Dave says

This is a provocative work. It deals with difficult issues in areas of community, doubt, faith, family and marriage. The author loosely interweaves two fictional stories; one of the effects of Mormon polygamy on a few people in the 19th century and another focusing on a fictional contemporary polygamous group in southern Utah that strongly resembles the FLDS group led by Warren Jeffs and his predecessors. Blending a contemporary murder mystery set in a fundamentalist/polygynous enclave, with a fictionalized account of the life of Brigham Young's infamous 19th wife, Ann Eliza (Webb) Young was an interesting, and for me successful, device. I found both story lines engaging. The book makes me want to read more of Mormon history and the psychology of mass movements, though I had those interests before reading Ebershoff's story.

I found the main characters were sufficiently well developed to be credible and complex. Apologists for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (The Mormons) could feel the book's approach polemical though I feel the author was more interested in illuminating some historical problems with the system officially abandoned and proscribed by the LDS church, and the continuing lack of candor about the practice along with questions of individual faith and the tension between coercion and support in human communities, especially authoritarian religious communities that stifle dissent and questioning.

In some ways, the book was hard to finish because of the painful situations of characters in both the 19th century practice and the contemporary polygamous community. Though it was difficult reading at times I feel the story was sufficiently thought provoking to be worth the effort. I found resonance with my own personal concerns about the relationship between faith and doubt, the importance of belonging/community and the perils of unquestioning obedience and fanaticism.

Caveat: This book may be unsettling to devout Latter-day Saints who have not read much about 19th century or contemporary polygamy. I recommend reading Mormon Enigma or Mormon Polygamy before reading this book for those with no previous background outside of official LDS lesson manuals.

Elyse says

What was wrong with me? Didn't I review 'any' books when I first joined Goodreads? (guess not)

This book blew me away!!! I loved it --and gave it as a gift a couple of times. A VERY strong 5 star novel! A phenomenal polygamous fundamentalist-murder-mystery page- turning story....which alternates with a fictionalized memoir of Ann Eliza (the 19th wife of Brigham Young).

I come here today --because I just discovered 'yesterday' that a movie comes out this year called "The Danish Girl", which David Ebershoff wrote also.

So---I mustRUN -(not walk) --and find time to read "The Danish Girl" soon --(before seeing the movie...which looks 'fantastic' by the way).

I can't wait to read "The Danish Girl" !!!!!

Chase says

A fascinating book at times and at other times I had to force myself to read it. One story is set in the mid-late 19th century as historical fiction while another, a murder mystery, is a contemporary tale. The two stories have parallel themes of course and even slightly overlap.

My main grief was in the long-winded style of the 19th century characters, but I had other problems with this part of the book. Several "authors" were used to tell this antiquated story, a device I found distracting. I know they probably wrote like that, but I felt like I had to plow through their overly verbose descriptions and exhaustive ruminations just to get to the plot! Also, the history of the mormon church and it's eventual rejection of polygamy (and the resulting outcast societies who refused to let it go) is very interesting, but not in minutia.

The modern-day story was a lot more relevant and proceeded at an exciting enough pace to keep me

interested. The characters seemed more real as well. Eventually this part of the book (the two stories were told in interchanging chapters) was the carrot that kept me plodding along.

If the novel had been only set in the 19th century it would've been a snooze-fest (even though I typically DO like historical fiction.) But perhaps I've read one too many books on polygamy and was bored because I've simply exhausted the subject?

Candi says

I was asked to answer questions at a Library Book Club about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that sparked because of this book. On doing research to know how to respond to some of the questions many have on why our faith practiced polygamy over 100 years ago, I came across an article that I felt answered a lot of questions that I agree with.

http://www.fairlds.org/Misc/Polygamy_...

The book club was very excited to ask difficult questions in a setting that was not offensive. I found the experience to be valuable, and faith promoting. I also thought it was nice of them to ask... going right to the source to ask about our history and beliefs.

On that topic, I suggest also to visit <http://www.mormon.org> or <http://www.lds.org>
These are the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' official websites.

Overall, I feel that this book is not worth anyone's while to read. It is full of opinions and part-truths. However, the subject is interesting. You could read ABOUT polygamy, and never run out of things to read. I personally enjoyed reading biographies about Brigham Young called "Brigham Young, Modern Moses/ Prophet of God", and "Lion of the Lord".

The website http://en.fairmormon.org/Purpose_of_p... also had many other documents that were interesting to read. These are not official church books or websites, however, they do look at it in a positive way, which is a needed twist after this book.

I'll end with this quote: "The sole "danger" which historical information [about polygamy:] poses to members [of the Church:] or sincere investigators occurs only if they stop their research too soon. Church critics are quite happy to lead their marks part of the way, only to abandon them when the story is just getting good." - by Gregory L. Smith, M.D.

Kim says

This book made it into the realm of the I-can't-put-this-down! I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in Mormon history or religion in general (both topics which interest me). The major theme of this book is truth - who decides what is truth, does everyone have their own truth based on their desires?

I first heard about this book on NPR. Serendipitously the author was visiting Pasadena (where he is from) when I was on an extended trip there. I was fortunate to be able to attend his reading at an amazing

independent bookstore, Vroman's.

The book weaves together the story of Ann Eliza Young, Brigham Young's infamous 19th wife, who divorced him and lectured around the country about polygamy. It seems to be agreed upon that she was instrumental in forcing the Mormon church to renounce this practice in 1890. The other story is that of another 19th wife, this one a modern polygamist, akin to the Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints that have been much in the news. The modern 19th wife is accused of killing her husband, which her son finds out by chance, as he has been kicked out of the community. This story, told from her son's point of view, was the most compelling to me. I found myself looking ahead to see how many pages I had to get to those parts!

BAM The Bibliomaniac says

Ebershoff weaves a tale of the past and present polygamist Mormon church in this stunning work of historical fiction. The past is represented by the accounts of Ann Eliza Young, wife of Brigham Young who sued for the end of the practice and left the church. The present is a convoluted story of homicide by the 19th wife of her insatiable husband. Her son, Jordan, decides to instigate his own investigation into the murder and into the compound where he spent the first fourteen years of his life.

I assume Young is portrayed accurately. He is the religious equivalent of a Tammany Hall representative, blustering, pompous, imposing, controlling, swollen both physically and psychologically.

Also the author of *The Danish Girl*, he has a propensity to factualize fantasy. He has a rich narrative imagination, which makes it difficult to siphon the reality of the story. This, however, does not detract from the excellent recounting of the tale.

I was saddened over the ending, but I don't think it could have gone any other way. Also, the character of Tom was nauseatingly clingy.

2017 Reading Challenge: genre I'm not familiar with

Jackie says

This book is rather unusual because it's actually two books in one. One of the books is a well researched historical fiction novel about Ann Eliza Young, Mormon leader Brigham Young's "19th wife" who fled polygamy in the late 1800s and made it her life's mission to abolish it (succeeding, at least legally). The second book is a murder mystery involving a present day polygamist group, with a gay "lost boy" (polygamy sects often abandon young boys to the world so that they are not competition for wives for the older men) as the central character, trying to find the truth in a snarled nest of lies. Both stories are engrossing, with the historical aspects reinforcing the modern day drama. I found it involving and timely given the court case that rages on even now with Jeffs and his crew in Utah. The challenges to spirituality and faith that both sides of the polygamy issue present are very nicely handled in both time periods. Fans of *Under the Banner of Heaven* and *Escape* will certainly like this book.

Florence (Lefty) MacIntosh says

We've got the same story playing out right here in Bountiful, BC Canada. I've read a few books on polygamy, I like that this one focuses on how nasty it is for boys as well as women. Although I usually find it annoying I also enjoyed how the author jumped between past & present telling 2 stories at once. Ann

Young's struggle to end polygamy in the late 1800's became fresh & relevant, while the telling of polygamy's impact on a gay young man in present times was really poignant. Some good lines in it, I particularly liked the description of "The 1st's" as the Greta Garbo of cults"

Shannon says

I was really looking forward to reading this book; it has great reviews and mixes historical fiction with a modern mystery. About polygamy, history, and mystery - I expected to love this novel. I was deeply disappointed. First, the reader can't tell when the author is writing a fiction part of the historical fiction and what is indeed part of history. There are no chapter notes of any kind to give the reader an idea of what is true and what he made up. An uneducated reader may be left believing things about the Mormon religion that are simply not true. The author ought to have noted what was a work of his imagination. The modern mystery throughout the novel had more foul language than necessary. However, the most disturbing part for me, was the carelessness with which the author wrote about the Mormon religion; detailing (with inaccuracy) sacred covenants that any faithful Latter Day Saint would be offended to hear is written about frivolously in a novel. Too bad, I thought this book was a good idea!

Erin says

The 19th Wife shocked me, but not because of its content. As a person who has, in the past, sped through a 1000 + book on a weekend, this 500 pager staggered for me. I never felt completely immersed into the world in which David Ebershoff is trying to bring me into. A dual narrative that "volleys" back and forth between the 19th and 21st centuries, The 19th Wife focuses on the polygamous lifestyle of the Mormon church.

I am giving this book a three star rating because what I found fascinating was the bibliographic information which is entwined with much of the narrative. Sad too! Especially when I read about the Latter Day Saints massacre. No matter how much history and historical fiction I read, it never fails to boggle my mind that we(humans) talk about "freedom and rights" out one side of our mouth and on the other hand participate fully in persecuting religious beliefs we don't understand.

All in all, I'm not sure I would re-read this book, but I am curious as to what other reader's reactions to the book were.

David says

This is a book about polygamy, in Brigham's time and today. It uses the divided time frame technique, trying to link two stories; and liberally mixes history with fiction (to the point that it's very hard to discern what is history - and there's not much history by the time he's done).

There are two 19th wives. One is the real historical figure Ann Eliza Webb Young, married to Brigham. She was his 19th wife (on some lists - depending on the criteria). When she became disaffected and left the marriage (and the Church), she wrote a best-selling expose called "Wife No. 19, or the story of a life in bondage." She became a public crusader against polygamy's "abuses." That part is true; however, excerpts which are supposedly from her book, and extensive conversations and descriptions and explanations of

motivations, are all from the author's vivid imagination.

The other 19th wife is a fictional woman named BeckyLyn Scott, living in a modern fictional southern Utah town with the rest of the fundamentalist "Firsts." Early in the book, her polygamous husband, one of the community/church leaders, is murdered; because of circumstantial evidence, BeckyLyn is accused of the crime and imprisoned.

Meanwhile, we meet Jordan Scott, son of BeckyLyn and the polygamist patriarch. He was cast out from the church as a 14-year-old and became one of the "lost boys." Six years later, he is living a gay lifestyle in California. Reading about his mother's situation, he is drawn back to Utah to try to unravel the mystery. He meets a new "boyfriend" once he gets to Utah, and is unfaithful to his supposed partner. (Was it really necessary to introduce homosexuality into this novel? Wasn't the analysis of the complexities of plural marriage enough for one book?)

The author gives some insight into the practice and challenge of polygamy in both eras; but I felt he presented a mostly limited, one-sided interpretation. Fortunately, he does attempt to distinguish between modern fundamentalist churches and the main LDS body.

Whatever value the book might have provided for me was dramatically lowered by frequent obscene language and too much sexual description. There are much better sources for learning about the challenges of polygamy in a "safer" way.

Margitte says

In a world where the term 'marriage' has taken on such a variety of forms, as well as meanings, this book, with its focus on American, Christian polygamy, and the history behind it, fits in perfectly.

The novel centers around the story of Ann Eliza Young, who, in the 1800s, was married to the Mormon prophet and leader Brigham Young. The church is also known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In 1875 she fled the marriage and the church and spent practically the rest of her life campaigning for the legal abolishment of the system in the United States.

Parallel to this story, is the one of Jordan Scott's mother, BeckyLyn, who allegedly murdered her husband, a modern polygamist from Utah. Jordan tries to prove his mother's innocence through skillful sleuthing. The two stories interconnect at the end.

Both women were Mrs.19 in their plural marriages.

The book raises questions about marriage, and religion, and allow the reader to form an independent opinion. What I found interesting about the theme, is that so many forms of polygamy existed in the world, still do, and that this 'barbaric' practices by this religious group was not appreciated at all, but mostly because of the spiritual and moral enslavement of women and children in this system. Sins plural marriages were illegal, the women and children captured in it had, and still have, no legal protection. In the extreme cases, such as the Warren Jeff case, it even exposes pedophilia and child rape.

(** Edit **: These heinous barbarity can be classified under the same religious crimes, such as Female Genital Mutilation of little girls in certain Muslim groups. It is also legal in ±30 countries.**end of edit **).

When **freedom of choice** and **movement** is denied, especially in our modern world, all red flags should be up and furiously billowing in the wind. This book is about those red flags that almost destroyed this sect/

church.

The murder mystery thrown in, focuses the attention on the modern state of affairs, the existence of totalitarian theocracies within democracies, and is certainly relevant after the Warren Jeff debacle.

Yet, although this particular religious groups are vindicated for the abuse of women and children in this particular form of a mating strategy, the alternatives (and just as polygamous) relationships in modern society almost obtained general consent:

- * chain marriages - one person marries and divorces one partner, marries and divorce a second and often third partner, and have children with all the partners;

- * unmarried individuals have different relationships with different partners over a long period of time (i.e. basketball player, Wilt Chamberlain, who claimed to have slept with 20 000 women);

- * and in upper society it is common knowledge that a wife is chosen to produce the heirs, being contractually rewarded with property, jewelry, and money. It is often used to merge companies and other business interests and has nothing to do with love. The male partner is allowed to have mistresses on the sideline for his 'other' needs.

These mating preferences are regarded as alternative forms of polygamy, by its own definition.

Historically, marriages took place within an extended family, where parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters with their spouses and offsprings all cohabitated on the same land and it was possible for children to be raised by more than just the parents. It relieved the pressure on the nuclear family and provided a much-needed support system. *"It takes a village to raise a child."* is an African proverb confirming the century-old practice of polygamy on the continent.

Polygamous marriages offered the same benefits for young women, who did not enjoy a support system, who otherwise faced a difficult road on their own (often immigrants who struggled to survive). It becomes even more relevant in the modern society where single parent homes are challenging environments for children in which the single parent often must work two to three jobs to survive.

Professor Cheshire Calhoun of the Philosophy Department at Arizona State University: *"... failing to recognize polygamous marriages results in a kind of black market that comes with all of the familiar problems of black markets in other domains. If a woman informally enters a polygamous marriage and then gets a divorce she can be left without any legal rights to financial support, etc. By analogy, drugs aren't a good thing but a world with legalized drug markets is better than one with black markets in drugs. Similarly, polygamy might not be a good thing but a world with above-board polygamy is probably better than one where it is driven underground."*

The only reason to appose the legalization of polygamy from within these theocratic communities in Utah, Twin Cities, Arizona et al, is the fact that the husband of so many 'single' mothers and children draw millions in social benefits which becomes a major source of income for him. Anyone apposing them are in danger. They have their own heavily-armed security forces! Mmmm, can it be regarded as legitimate robbery of government resources? A goal in itself, perhaps? [Just thinking ...]

A religious fanaticism and paranoia drive these subgroups, not to mention hatred of the federal government who can cut their wealth and prosperity by legalizing polygamy and force these 'priests' to marry their 'concubines' to protect the women financially as well. I even suspect that it will eradicate this practice on a grand scale if legalization can happen! As soon as these single mothers become married women, they lose their social benefits from the government, and one man will be the fool of a century to take on so many

wives! Didn't Warren Jeff, or his father, had more than 100 'wives'?

The only measuring stick to condone any practice is to ask the question: does a person willingly consent to and choose an arrangement, and maintain freedom of choice and movement? If 'yes', then compare the benefits of each possibility, since the modern world is not about being right or wrong, it is about being free to make choices. Minor children should not be allowed to marry. We choose the consequences when we choose the action. The choice should always be a free one. And that does not happen in all these different religious groups. Hence books like these are so important to be written. Both sides of the coin is being addressed relatively well.

****Oh well, pardon me, I'm getting off my soapbox here! :-)) ****

It is from this perspective that I read the book. Yes, looking at both sides of the coin was my main aim! I have read hordes of other books, reports, papers, news articles and whatnot on modern polygamy, including the Mormon version, and thus enjoyed reading the historical background once again in this particular form. The author really managed to bring the background of the characters alive.

Unfortunately, the sleuthing part of the book just did not cut it at all. It felt unnecessary and not well executed. Totally lame. It cheapened an otherwise brilliant piece of work.

If the murder mystery in its current form, was a stand-alone I would have put it down after the first chapter. Perhaps it was the reason why the book contained two parallel stories. On the other hand, the historical fiction, as well as the dramatization there of, was very well done and could have, and should have, been offered as an excellent book on its own.

Hence the three-star rating.

?Karen says

3.5 stars.

I enjoy reading about other religions and learning what makes them unique. I have some Mormon relatives, and that religion has always seemed mysterious to me, with only the most devout being allowed to enter the temple and wonderings about who might after all be a secret polygamist. That last part isn't anything I suspect my cousins of, but it fascinates me nevertheless.

In The 19th Wife the author has done his research on a wife of Brigham Young's, his 19th, who became somewhat famous after leaving him to crusade against polygamy because of what it did to the neglected wives and children. Much in thanks to her, it was outlawed in 1890 and the Prophet at that time told his people to stop as well; but polygamy continued as a separate faction for those who still believed it was an edict from God. Or for those needing an excuse to own a private harem.

There are alternating modern-day chapters (too few in my opinion) of a 19th wife of a polygamist whom she is accused of murdering. Her son, a young gay man excommunicated from the church as a young teen, comes back to Utah to seek the truth from his mother and the very secretive "commune"-ity of sister wives and their plethora of offspring.

The meat of Ann Eliza's story took a long time to get to, between the 350-400 page mark. That's because Brigham's chapters gave a great deal of minutiae and were drawn out. Most interesting was that the way they count wives gets very complicated, subtracting out those who no longer receive conjugal visits and those who disappear. So Ann Eliza was in fact Brigham's #52 out of 55 total(!).

For another view of a fictional modern-day polygamist family, I recommend watching HBO's 5 seasons of "Big Love" if you can find it on OnDemand or video (starring Bill Paxton and Jeanne Tripplehorn). For me it was addictive.
