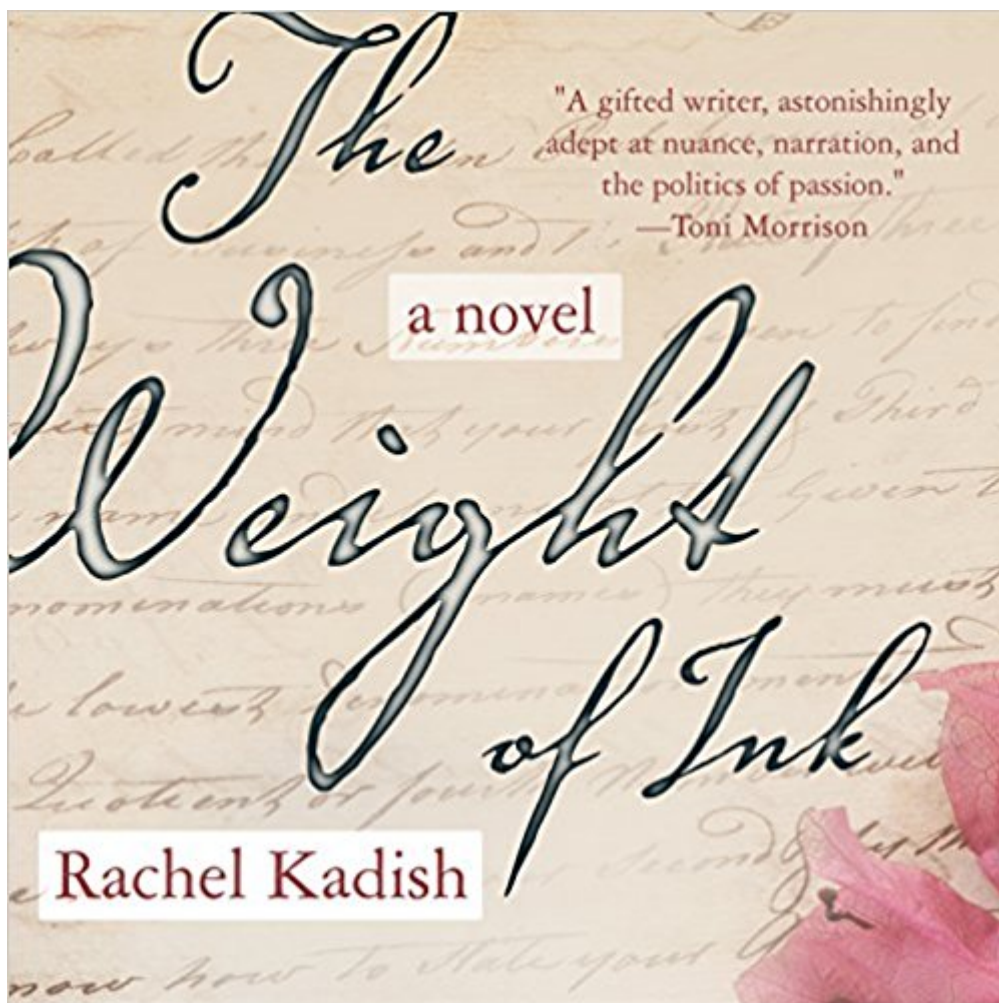




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# The Weight Of Ink



## Synopsis

Set in London of the 1660s and of the early twenty-first century, *The Weight of Ink* is the interwoven tale of two women of remarkable intellect: Ester Velasquez, an emigrant from Amsterdam who is permitted to scribe for a blind rabbi, just before the plague hits the city; and Helen Watt, an ailing historian with a love of Jewish history. As the novel opens, Helen has been summoned by a former student to view a cache of seventeenth-century Jewish documents newly discovered in his home during a renovation. Enlisting the help of Aaron Levy, an American graduate student as impatient as he is charming, and in a race with another fast-moving team of historians, Helen embarks on one last project: to determine the identity of the documents' scribe, the elusive "Aleph." Electrifying and ambitious, sweeping in scope and intimate in tone, *The Weight of Ink* is a sophisticated work of historical fiction about women separated by centuries, and the choices and sacrifices they must make in order reconcile the life of the heart and mind.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An Best Book of June 2017: I often have trouble staying engaged by literary novels starring characters separated by centuries. But *The Weight of Ink* hooked me so deeply that at no point did I want to wiggle free of this story of two historians investigating 300-year-old letters written in plague-ridden London by a young Jewish woman with a white-hot intellect and no acceptable outlet for it. British history professor Helen Watt immediately recognizes the historical value of a bundle of rabbi's letters and books discovered behind the wall of an old house, and she recruits American graduate student Aaron Levy to help her with translations. Months from retirement, Helen

hides her Parkinson's disease, while Aaron struggles with his Shakespeare-focused thesis that's going nowhere fast and with Helen's curmudgeonly ways. But when Helen and Aaron realize that the rabbi's letters were penned for him by a woman, not the typical male scribe, their historical significance skyrockets. As Helen and Aaron's investigation accelerates, author Rachel Kadish plunges the reader into the smoggy, socially circumscribed world of Ester Velasquez in 17th-century London. A Jewish woman living in a community that doesn't support thinking in females or speculation beyond the accepted dogma, Ester has survived much tragedy in her young life and now quietly but steadfastly refuses to be squashed further. As plague stalks London, Ester finds ways to let her intellectual passion free despite pressures to marry and be domesticated in mind and soul. Gorgeous writing that might, in isolation of the story, risk coming off as overwrought instead perfectly renders the strong emotions that run through Ester, Helen, and Aaron as they face down opponents and seize opportunities. Kadish, with storytelling genius, mirrors events and eureka moments across the centuries, binding the characters to one another. And an enormously satisfying ending wraps everything up while leaving enough rough edges to mimic the loose ends of real life. --Adrian Liang, The Book Review --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

"A gifted writer, astonishingly adept at nuance, narration, and the politics of passion." •Toni Morrison "The Weight of Ink is the best kind of quest novel •full of suspense, surprises, and characters we care passionately about. How thrilling it is to watch the imperious Helen and the scholarly Aaron turn into brilliant literary detectives as they uncover the identity of a woman who lived more than 300 years ago, and how thrilling it is to get to know that woman intimately in her own time. A beautiful, intelligent and utterly absorbing novel." •Margot Livesey, author of Mercury "Rachel Kadish draws us deep inside the vivid, rarely seen world of 17th-century Jewish London, conjuring the life and legacy of an extraordinary woman with an insatiable hunger for knowledge and education. A vital testament to the importance of books and ideas, The Weight of Ink unfolds like a revelation." •Kate Manning, author of My Notorious Life "From its opening pages, The Weight of Ink signals its reverence for words, both those from which the narrative is constructed and those which lie at the heart of its story •for this a novel about the importance of words: written and spoken, historical and contemporary, hidden away and brought to light. Rachel Kadish has fashioned a literary mystery spanning centuries, continents and languages; a mystery of great moral stakes and elemental human desires." •Leah Hager Cohen,

author of *No Book but the World* – “The Weight of Ink” tells of the struggle and the triumph of a woman trying to do justice to the largeness of her intellect and ambition. As audacious in its conception as it is brilliant in its execution. – •Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, author of *Plato at the Googleplex: Why Philosophy Won’t Go Away* – “Rarely have I read a contemporary novel that so immersed me in its world and drew me so deeply into the lives of its characters. Rachel Kadish is a brilliant storyteller, with a mystery writer’s instinct for pacing and a willingness to take on the largest human questions. The Weight of Ink is astonishing.” – •Carol Gilligan, author of *In a Different Voice* – This text refers to the Paperback edition.

– “The Weight of Ink” by Rachel Kadish lives up to its title in many ways. At 560 tightly-written pages of magnificent prose, this novel can under no circumstances be called “light reading.” Indeed, the only reason I was able to complete it despite the protest of my arthritic hands and aging eyes was because it is unquestionably absolutely enthralling to a person with my specific interests. Those interests include theology and the incredible injustices which dogma-driven society has perpetrated against women, homosexuals, Jews, and others. This book touches on all these aspects, and many more. As the plot summary indicates, Helen Watt, an aging British historian and expert in Jewish studies, is invited by a former student to assist in the evaluation of some manuscripts found during the renovation of a house in a London suburb. Helen, suffering from Parkinson Disease, needs help in studying what she realizes is a treasure-trove of documents, and calls upon a colleague to recommend a post-graduate student to assist. Enter Aaron Levy, a young American secular Jew who has run into a roadblock on his own research attempting to find a “Jewish Connection” in the writings Shakespeare. Helen and Aaron find their collaboration both uneasy and deeply rewarding. Further dramatic tension is provided by the fact that Helen’s ploy of having the college (from which she is about to retire) acquire the documents for conservation and archiving immediately raises the specter of academic competitiveness. It soon becomes obvious that the papers include the writing of Ester Velasquez, the ward of the blind Rabbi Moseh HaCoen Mendes, a Portuguese Jew. Having fled Portugal for the relative safety of Amsterdam after the Inquisition killed his parents and blinded him, Rabbi Mendes has been sent to London to try to assist the struggling Jewish community there. The existence of a female scribe writing in 17th Century London just before plague and then fire decimated the city is remarkable enough. However, as Helen and Aaron continue to delve into Ester’s

writings an incredible back-story emerges. This woman was not only a scribe, but a philosopher as well, determined to connect with some of the great Jewish and, in the opinion of most other people of that era heretical Jewish thinkers of her time. As the story weaves back and forth between Ester's traumas and those of Helen and Aaron as they seek to discover the reality of who this woman was and what she really represented (before being "scooped up" by other investigators), great depth and richness of thought evolves. As mentioned in my opening comments, this is not a book I could recommend to someone seeking light or trivial reading. However, it is profound, fascinating and deeply engaging for anyone who is concerned with the fundamental issues Rachel Kadish so brilliantly addresses through the words and thoughts of her extraordinary characters.

This is a beautiful, complex, engrossing, and engaging novel that is more than worth the time it takes to read it. The best part of "The Weight of Ink" is that it doesn't sacrifice readability or character development for the sake of the story, which takes place in both the 1990's and the 1660's. I'm finding that a lot of recent novels that take place in different eras in history try and "mold" their narrative style so they sound like they were either written in that time period or somehow evocative of that time period, and in doing so they turn the book into one long "accent", sacrificing readability for style. Rachel Kadish did none of that- she managed to weave an engrossing story with rich, compelling characters that come to life on the page. And the fact that this is a 576 page novel about documents and correspondence between rabbis and remains more of a page turner than any recent "thriller" is not lost on me. The basic plot: Helen is an aging historian, and near the end of her academic career she's called out to the home of one of her students, after he's unearthed a trove of historical documents during a renovation. Aaron, an American graduate student who is finding his dissertation to be a dead end, is tasked to help her. What they found- and the implications of it- astound them both. Through Kadish's skillful writing, the reader is effortlessly shifted between the worlds of both Helen and Aaron's situations in modern-day London, Israel in the 1960's, London in the 1660's and the characters that inhabit all these worlds. I cannot recommend this novel enough. It's beautifully written, a pleasure to read, and the kind of book that keeps you invested from the first page to the last.

I haven't quite finished the book, but I love the story and the writing. The title is a great play on words, and the characters are similarly revealed in a back and forth way throughout the book. The author alternates between the present and the 17th century, and the present becomes somewhat

intertwined with the past to create an engaging and thoughtful story.

I chose this book because it was reviewed as relating to a historical past I was unfamiliar with. I did learn a lot but also frequently got lost, bored, confused with the long passages of theology. It was, beneath it all, a good story.

This is a heavy novel with many different themes. I enjoyed the book but it takes a good deal of concentration. I did think the past and present could have been tied closer together in their themes. I ended up liking the past characters a lot more than the present. I am in a book club and would not recommend this as I think it is an interesting read, but many would find it too intense.

Very well written, beautiful language. Intriguing story with deep character development and so many parallels throughout. Strong women with an unrepentant thirst for knowledge. Great book club novel. Our club had a fabulous discussion that lasted much longer than usual due to the wealth of topics to touch on. Steeped in history, learned so much about Spinoza, and the scandals that ensued. Loved the way Kadish tied up each story thread in the end. A completely satisfying read!

This is an amazing read! I enjoyed every minute reading and as much as I anticipated learning the conclusion, I just did not want it to end.

Definitely not a light summer read. This book was very well written, however, I feel it could have been shortened by at least 100 pages. The letters between the philosophers and Ester, as well as Ester's own musings, became too weighty and cumbersome after a time. Again, very well written, very different, but curl up with a cup of tea and cozy blanket for winter reading.

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