



Discussion Questions: *The Weight of Ink*

“Words, Words, Words” Book Club—February 2022

1. What are your first impressions of the novel? Are there any passages that stuck out to you?
2. What did you think of the parallel story structure? Did you find it an effective approach to telling the story? Were you drawn to one time period/set of characters more than the other, or did you find them evenly balanced?
3. What connections, similarities, and differences do you see between Ester and Helen? How does each inform your understanding of the other? Who was your favorite character and why? Who would you have liked to have seen more of?
4. Ester berates herself for abusing the rabbi’s trust through her falsified correspondence, only later to discover he knew all along. What do you think of Ester’s deception? Is her guilt justified? Why do you think the rabbi chose not to directly address it but to maintain the facade?
5. Why do you think John abandoned Ester? Were you sorry to see them separated? How does John and Ester’s relationship compare to other couples in the book—Mary and Thomas, Manuel and Ester, Helen and Dror, Aaron and Marisa—and which, if any, do you consider examples of “true” love?
6. Ester’s story contains much rich historical detail, yet the Great Fire is largely passed over. What do you think of this decision? Were you anticipating the event while reading?
7. What choices and sacrifices do the women of the novel make? Do you think these are choices that women still face today? What can we learn from this book about how women in different historical periods have grappled with gender expectations?
8. Helen and Aaron strive in competition with the history scholars to unravel the mystery of Ester’s papers. How do you think Ester would feel if she knew what she left behind would be studied in this way? What do the attitudes of the modern scholars say about the idea of credit and authorship and has that changed?
9. Ester’s correspondence explores questions of theology and philosophy. Were there any arguments that resonated with you? What philosophies do you see embodied in Aaron and Helen?
10. The discovered papers reveal only a small portion of the larger story of Ester’s world. Whose stories have we lost through history due to fate or circumstance? If a trove of papers was discovered tomorrow, what about history would you hope them to reveal?