



*Boston Authors Club*

## December 2018 Newsletter

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### ***The Annual Julia Ward Howe Awards Competition Is Open for Submissions***

The BAC welcomes submission of all eligible 2018 books written by Boston-area authors. The JWH Awards include a cash prize for winning authors, as well as featured interviews in the BAC newsletter and other book promotion activities during 2019. Prizes are awarded and finalists are honored at our well-attended awards event at the Boston Public Library each fall.

**Outstanding books by Boston area authors are eligible for prizes in four separate categories:**

- Fiction
- Nonfiction
- Poetry
- Young Readers (including children's books)

To enter the competition, publishers should submit two copies of each eligible title, along with a fee of \$35 dollars per title. Authors may also submit their books directly, with the same fee. Eligibility criteria are detailed on the BAC web site at: <http://bostonauthorsclub.org/2011/>

The submission deadline for qualified books published in 2018 is January 31, 2019. Please send 2 copies of each submitted book, with the submission fee (checks made out to the Boston Authors Club) to:

*Boston Authors Club, Inc.*  
c/o Mary Cronin,  
2400 Beacon Street, Unit 208,  
Chestnut Hill, MA. 02467

## Featured Author: Rachel Kadish



**Rachel Kadish** is this year's Julia Ward Howe Winner for Fiction for **The Weight of Ink**, which has been praised as "the best kind of quest novel...full of suspense, surprises, and characters we care passionately about."

*In this interview, Rachel talks about her historical and literary inspirations, the depth of her research into Jewish communities in seventeenth century London and Amsterdam, and the challenge of interweaving historical and contemporary plot lines.*

**Q:** First, congratulations on **The Weight of Ink** winning this year's Julia Ward Howe prize for fiction and a National Jewish Book Award. It's an amazing novel! Could you tell us what inspired you to engage with the historical context of Jewish life in London in the 1660s?

Thank you! I'm delighted and honored that this book is part of the BAC conversation.

Back when I started *The Weight of Ink*, I was troubled by Virginia Woolf's remarks about what would have happened to an equally talented female Shakespeare. Woolf, of course, was right to say that such a woman most likely would have died without writing a word--this is, after all, the most likely fate for a woman of prodigious talent in an era when women's talents were given no outlet. But I couldn't help asking: *what if?*

I wanted to write a book that explored the question of how a woman with outsized intellectual gifts might nonetheless have found a way to live a life of the mind.

In looking for the right time period in which to set my story, I stumbled across the history of the seventeenth-century Jewish communities of Amsterdam and London--communities made up predominantly of refugees from the Portuguese Inquisition. What stopped me in my tracks as I read about these people was their fear. Reading a translation of the excommunication ban Amsterdam's Jews imposed on Spinoza, I suddenly felt how brittle their sense of security was--how deeply they worried that one wrong move by someone associated with their community might unleash some new wave of persecution. I thought: *I know these people. They're refugees.* I grew up around refugees: my grandparents were Holocaust survivors, my mother was born on the run. Even across the centuries, the fears of these seventeenth-century refugees made intuitive sense to me, as did their fierce desire to rebuild. It all felt so familiar.

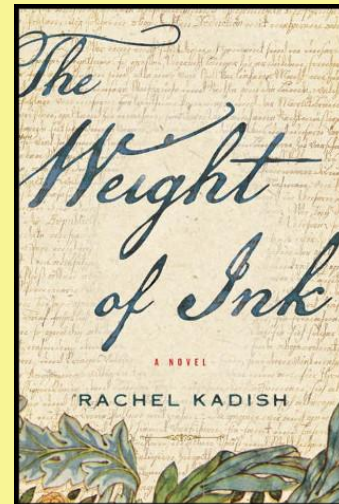
From that point on, I knew that the seventeenth-century refugee Jews of Amsterdam and London were the people I wanted to write about.

**Q:** How did you go about learning all the historical details that you include in the book? Did you do extensive primary research?

For years, the walls of my study were covered with London maps and my shelves were crammed with books on topics like seventeenth-century philosophy, medicine, sanitation, and fashion. I frequented rare books rooms and spoke with document conservators. I read primary sources for language and detail, and dozens of histories and books of philosophy. Ultimately I reached out to a few of the historians and philosophers with questions, and was amazed by their helpfulness and patience in answering my questions.

I went to some arguably ridiculous lengths to get details right. Once I made an appointment to 'visit' a rare sixteenth-century book at Harvard's Widener Library. In a scene I was writing, I wanted a character to be reading aloud from that book--and although I didn't plan to offer a translation of the line she read, I had a sense for what mood and subject matter she'd choose for her reading.

The book in question was in Medieval Portuguese, which I don't read...but I do read French, which--so I reasoned--would allow me to get a sense of the general subject matter of the Portuguese. I made a plan to photograph promising sections of text and email those photos to a Portuguese-language scholar for translation. Sure enough, I found a beautifully illuminated section of the book whose words seemed to hint at the right subject matter. Photographed it, sent it along. And was shortly informed that I'd



photographed the table of contents. Back to the rare books room to try again.

*Q: The juxtaposition of your two female protagonists, contemporary historian Helen Watt and the inspirational, boundary-breaking Ester Velasquez, is so moving. Did you start writing with this structure in mind? What were the challenges of interweaving the plot lines?*

Ever since reading A.S. Byatt's *Possession*, I'd wanted to write something with that past-juxtaposed-with-present structure. There's something in it that feels natural to me—maybe it's because I grew up with the constant superimposition of my relatives' very foreign-seeming history on my American present, which could crop up in the middle of an everyday conversation (*that's when we were in Russian prison...pass the salt...*). I'm fascinated by the question of how much we—today—should let ourselves be changed by our encounters with the past.

On a technical level, interweaving contemporary and historical plot lines felt risky, because it's so easy for one storyline to be more appealing than the other...particularly when one is set in the distant past. I tried to introduce the reader to the seventeenth-century world gradually, so that by the time that storyline launched for real, the history and language would no longer feel intimidating. And I struggled for quite a while until I figured out a workable approach to using seventeenth-century vocabulary in a way that would be accessible to the modern reader.

*Q: What do you hope readers of **The Weight of Ink** will remember and reflect on long after they have finished the book?*

I'm not sure I can answer that, since nothing would make me happier than knowing every reader had a different 'takeaway' from the book! But I can name two things the writing process left me with. The first is a humbling awareness of the prodigious struggles once required to do things I now take for granted—whether that's mailing a letter (never mind email / text), or obtaining light for nighttime reading, or having access to things like antibiotics. Beyond that, though, writing an historical novel has reminded me of the hazards of viewing history as though we're looking at a diorama—that is, looking arrogantly and from a too-safe distance. No matter how tidy history may look on a timeline or in a museum display, the people in the era we study were just as smart and vulnerable and bewildered as we are. What looks inevitable in retrospect didn't seem inevitable at the time. Those people were swimming in history and had no idea what the next wave would bring...just as we, today, are swimming in history, with no idea what the next wave will bring.

*Q: Do you have a new novel and setting in mind or underway?*

I have a setting in mind, and I'm doing some initial reading and research...but the idea is too new—and I'm too superstitious—to say more!

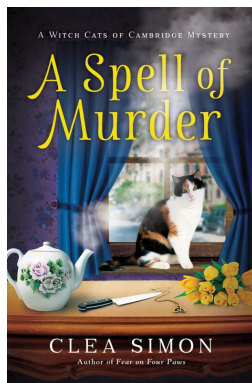
*Interview by Mary J Cronin*



authors!  
AUTHORS!

## News About BAC Authors and Events

### Clea Simon, *A Spell of Murder*, Book Launch and Reading on January 3



Clea Simon's new cozy mystery, **A Spell of Murder** will be published by Polis Books on December 11.

A celebratory reading and book launch event is scheduled at **Porter Square Books, Cambridge, on January 3, at 7 p.m.**

More info about this new series on Clea's website at <http://www.cleasimon.com>

### Helen Marie Casey Reading from Zero

## Degrees at the New England Poetry Club Series on December 9 at 2pm

Helen Marie Casey is one of four poets reading from their recently published books at the New England Poetry Club program on Sunday, December 9 at Harvard's Yenching Library, 2 Divinity Ave, Cambridge



New England Poetry Club

presents the  
Members with New Books  
Reading Series

featuring  
Helen Marie Casey  
Phyllis Beck Katz  
Jean L. Kreiling  
Carla Schwartz  
followed by Open Mic

Sunday, December 9th  
2 to 4 pm  
Harvard's Yenching Library  
2 Divinity Ave.  
Cambridge, MA



**The BAC newsletter is published the first week of every month.. Please send news about your activities, speaking, and new books (along with related pictures) to [bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com](mailto:bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com) by December 28 for publication in the January 2019 newsletter.**

## Yesteryear at the BAC by Scott Guthery The First JWH Award Winners

**The Boston Authors Club started its Julia Ward Howe Awards program in 1997.** For the first three years,

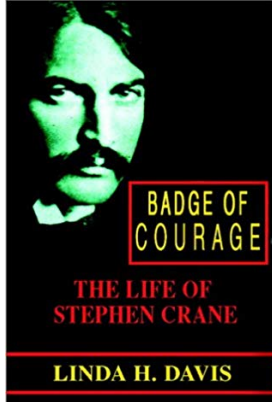


all the eligible books competed against each other for a single prize. In 2000 the BAC board decided to offer a separate award for books written for Young Readers. The board also created special and lifetime achievement award categories to be presented from time to time to recognize Boston authors that transcended a single book title or category.

The winner in the first year (for books published in 1996) went to Igor Lukas for his *Czechoslovakia between Stalin and Hitler: The Diplomacy of Edvard Benes in the 1930s* published by Oxford Press. The book, which is centered on the Munich agreement, received favorable reviews in *Slavic Review*, *The American Historical Review*, and *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Judging from the reviews, the Munich agreement was still all the buzz in academic circles sixty years after the fact but one can't help but wonder what Lukas' competition was among the other eligible books published in 1996. David Fischer's *Paul Revere's Ride* was also published that year by Oxford Press. *Paul Revere's Ride* was a Boston Globe Top 10 Book of the Year and still sells briskly today. Did Oxford submit Lukas' book but not Fisher's? Was Benes' story more exciting than Revere's? Only the Boston Authors Club archive could provide those details. For now, the answers are stored out of reach in the Boston Public Library Rare Books & Manuscripts Department which is closed for renovations until 2020.

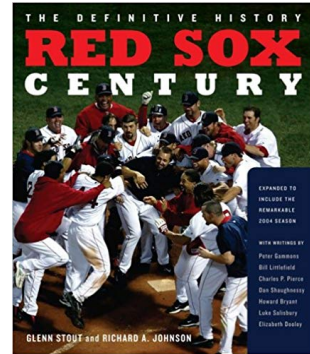
In 1998 the Julia Ward Howe award winner was novelist Anita Diamant for *The Red Tent*, which was reissued in 2010 by St. Martin's Press. In 1999 the award went to Linda H. Davis for *Badge of Courage: The Life of Stephen Crane*.

The first winner in the newly established Young Reader category awarded in 2000 for books published in 1999 went to Deborah Savage for *Summer Hawk*, published by Houghton Mifflin. "After encountering an abandoned baby hawk, Taylor's life is forever changed..." *Summer Hawk* garnered a favorable mention in 2011 in *The Science Teacher* in a table titled "Additional young adult titles related to environmental consciousness." Twelve years on and still in play. Only a very few young reader books can make that claim. Living on in your memory, however fondly, doesn't count.



The first Julia Ward Howe Special Award was bestowed in 2001. It went to Glenn Stout and Richard Johnson for *The Red Sox Century: The Definitive History of Baseball's Most Storied Franchise*, published by Houghton Mifflin. *The Red Sox Century* was reissued in 2004, "expanded and updated" to include the World Series win. I'm thinking that sports books are unique in this regard-- we don't see updated books about World War I to include World War II or books about earth, air, fire, and water to include the periodic table.

A final note: Stout and Johnson just published *Pats: The Illustrated History of the New England Patriots*. Perhaps that work will be in contention for a future Julia Ward Howe award, along with new books by some of the other early winners.



## One More 2019 Membership Reminder!

***Full membership dues are \$50 annually and Associate memberships are \$25 annually for the calendar year. If you renew or join any time after October 1, you will be a paid up member through December 2019. You can join and renew online by [clicking here](#). If you would rather pay by check, please make your check out to Boston Authors Club and mail it to the following address:***

**Nancy Tupper Ling  
Boston Authors Club  
1600 Providence Highway #247  
Walpole MA 02081**

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