

River of Smoke by Amitav Ghosh: A brief introduction to some of the characters you will encounter in the book. For more on the novel, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River_of_Smoke
For more on the author <http://www.amitavghosh.com/>

A. **Bahramji Naurojzi Modi** (called Bahram through the novel, and also referred to as Mr. Barry Moddie by the British and American traders in Canton) Born to a business family that fell on hard times, Bahram married into a rich family of shipbuilders, the Mistries, and singlehandedly built up the China (read Opium) trade as a lucrative subsidiary for his in-laws. To gain his independence from his in-laws he risked everything, took a huge loan, and acquired his biggest ever supply of opium. In what we read, he gets stuck in Canton at a difficult time. We also learn about his second family in Canton, and about his estranged son, Ah Fatt, or Freddie.

B. **Neel**. In the first novel of the trilogy we know him to be a rich, somewhat spoiled, landowner (zamindar) who falls foul of the new system put in place by the British in India. He is accused of forgery and sent for “transportation” that is to work as an indentured laborer overseas. He escapes, along with Ah Fatt, and in this novel is appointed Bahram’s *munshi* (more than a scribe or clerk – the literal meaning of the word).

C. **The “General”** you read about on pg. 160, is Napoleon Bonaparte. The scene is actually a flashback to 1816, when Bahram and his friend **Zadig Karabedian**, an Armenian watch-maker and a philosopher to boot, met “the General” when their ship landed in St. Helena. Napoleon was exiled there after his defeat at the battle of Waterloo.

D. **“Puggly”** literally means “the mad woman” but it is a term of affection used by the artist **Robin Chinnery** (half-Indian son of a European artist, born and raised in Calcutta) for his childhood friend, **Paulette Lambert**, daughter of a French botanist. Robin’s letters to Puggly from Canton are a device Ghosh uses to describe *fanqui*-town in Canton from the eyes of someone new to the place.

E. Then there are various real historical characters who populate the novel, such as the influential opium traders such as **Jardine, Dent, Burnham**, officials such as **Captain Elliot**, and, of course, **Commissioner Lin**.

F. **Chi Mei** - A Cantonese Boat woman and Bahram Modi’s lover.

- Ah Fatt – The son of Bahram Modi and Chi Mei.

G. **Vico** - Bahram Modi’s Purser.

H. **Zadig Bey** - Armenian Watch maker and old friend of Bahram Modi.

I. **Fitcher Penrose** - A Scottish Botanist on an expedition to collect rare plants in China. **Paulette Lambert** accompanies Mr. Fitcher on his expedition.