

Proposals for Spring 2023 are due by November 9, 2022.
Spring Session: January 30 – May 15

RIVER OF SMOKE, FLOOD OF FIRE:
Amitav Ghosh's Ibis Trilogy, Books Two and Three

We continue to follow the real history of the British East India Company as it convinces Parliament to launch a war in China to protect its opium trade. At the same time we pick up the fictional story of the Ibis where we left off, in the grip of a cyclone in the Bay of Bengal, loaded with a cargo of indentured servants and prisoners, five of whom have just escaped on a longboat and are presumed dead.

We also encounter the clipper ship Anahita, containing the largest consignment of opium ever to leave India for Canton, and the Redruth, a nursery ship, carrying a horticulturist determined to track down the priceless plants that have the power to heal, beautify, or intoxicate. They'll all converge in Canton's Foreign Enclave: a powder keg awaiting a spark to ignite the Opium Wars. As war breaks out, opium will pour into the market, accompanied by embezzlement, profiteering and espionage.

Anyone can join this group, whether or not they were with us for Book One, *Sea of Poppies*. It won't take long to pick up the story.

Sue Yellin has been a member of LP² since 2017. She has coordinated and/or co-coordinated three previous study groups: Russian short stories, post World War II espionage and the first book in this trilogy, *Sea of Poppies*.

Type of Study Group: Reading and discussion

Readings and other Materials/Online Services:

River of Smoke: A Novel by Amitav Ghosh, (2012, Picador imprint of Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, paperback: new \$13.99, used from \$3.00 on Amazon);
Flood of Fire: A Novel by Amitav Ghosh, (2015, Picador imprint of Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, paperback: new from \$13.00, used from \$4.36 on Amazon);

Recommended only (relevant sections provided by coordinator)–

The Opium Wars: The Addiction of One Empire and the Corruption of Another by W. Travis Hanes and Frank Sanello, (2004, Sourcebooks, Inc. Paperback: new, \$19.99; used from \$2.19 on Amazon).

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We will be reading between 80 and 100 pages per week of the novels; there will be minimal additional reading.

***** SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS *****

WEEK 1

TOPIC: *River of Smoke*: Picking up the story

READING:

River of Smoke, Chapters 1-3

QUESTIONS:

Where were we at the end of *Sea of Poppies*? Who else was caught up in the typhoon? What new characters do we meet; what are their stories?

WEEK 2

TOPIC: Converging on China

READING: *River of Smoke*, Chapters 4-6

QUESTIONS:

How is Paulette faring aboard the Redruth? With whom does she become reacquainted? What changes must Neel make to continue living in freedom? How do Bahram Modi and Zadig Bey meet Napoleon?

WEEK 3

TOPIC: Settling into Canton

READING: *River of Smoke*, Chapters 7-9

QUESTIONS:

What is the physical set up as we proceed upriver to Canton – and in Canton itself? How does Robin approach the city? What do we understand about him as he reports back to Paulette? How has Canton changed for Seth Bahram Modie since his last visit? Since he began coming here more than two decades earlier? How is Neel adjusting to his new life as a munshie? How do the current political factions line up?

WEEK 4: On Honam Island

WEEK 5: Lin's ultimatum

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WEEK 6: The end game

WEEK 7: Book 3—*Flood of Fire*: Picking up the story

WEEK 8: Havildar Kesri Singh and the Pacheesi Regiment

WEEK 9: Neel Meets the High Commissioner

WEEK 10: War breaks out

WEEK 11: Shireen Modi and Zadig Bey

WEEK 12: Finale: Tying up the loose ends

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