

# Fragment from an Untelevised Revolution

*by* Rick Moody

Norodom Sihanouk ruled my state. Canals, jungles, mountainous expanses. The way with no name was the way. Ruins of an ancient religion clotted the Northwest, where he trod barefoot, confusing our gods with our leaders. So many national tongues. Our ideals were unpronounceable. Sihanouk played alto saxophone and directed films in the French style. We lined the roads to see him.

What a nationality! The Mekong flowed backward in winter. The Tonlé Sap was so wide you could not see across it, though shallow enough to wade through. Landmines persisted in the interior, like the pottery of some halcyon regime, landmines and nothing more where the floor of the irrigation system collapsed. Subject to the brutalities of incursion, subject to sieges of millennial duration, we threw dice. Our gods resembled gamblers or opium addicts.

I remember Sihanouk passing through town on the way to Angkor Wat. Unvisited shrines crumbled in my corner of the state, according to probability and prophecy. A thriving black market in cut-rate electronic goods—intended for factions long subsumed into the coalition—grew up in my village. Bats circled overhead, over the exchange of goods. There was no hard currency. Then, we reached for the hem on any foreign personage. What difference if Sihanouk marched through town now?

I mention this only to remind you. I cannot recall the taste of words: the razor has worked its revisions and now my teeth relish the extra room. Oh, the luxury of the unexamined life.

Darkness and lamentation on state-run television and radio. The

Prince, our voice of the voiceless, heralds his return. Abdication, reconciliation, subdivision, reunification. How well he knows that none of us can afford the receiving equipment necessary to tune his limpid remarks, to recall the centuries of Khmer glory, to relish the monasticism of non-alignment. Not in my corner of the state. Our news is sprawling, unruly jungle wisdom. We have miracles cures and destinies and dilapidated materials.

The Prince has wept spontaneously in his pilgrimages from the Chinese capital, but his spectacle is just radio waves. Jammable. Who has not lost their family, as he has? Who will not come to love their country when it no longer exists, even in memory? I have ample time for these distinctions now, for my unaddressed correspondence with the West. All countries are Democratic Cambodia. All will know the thoroughness of our destruction. Available in all languages, all dialects.

In June of this year, Sihanouk was said to have been killed, his head mounted on a stake, his remains eaten by his captors—the liver first, as is the custom—to the glory of our history. Then, days later, he appeared again the streets, barefoot, carrying his saxophone. Long and low his plaintive solo, for poverty, expatriation, and compassion. No networks covered the mirage. The rumors themselves sustain us now.

My wife has gone in Laos to translate foreign tongues, and I await the day when I too may leave. It is just me here now. But you see my family has known the Prince, as has every family in Kampuchea. The bones here fertilize a new empire. There are trees everywhere. Famine engorge us! Best wishes to all Americans.

