

Western world celebrates the unrestrained versions of capitalism that Berger, a Marxist (on which he elaborates in the essays), finds both horrifying and dislocating. But, he points out, Marxism predicted that capitalism will have its day, and much of the deracination, human suffering and slavery inherent to modern-day consumer culture needs some sort of framework, some sort of hope. Berger's hope lies in paying attention to the everyday and the ordinary, what individuals go through trying to find food for themselves and their children, how violence disrupts lives from the West Bank to London to Istanbul.

When I presented on *Ways of Seeing* in a freshman art history seminar, one classmate freaked out at the suggestion that lust for *things* might lead to exploitation. So it is with *Hold Everything Dear*: Some critics have reacted with disdain for Berger's honoring of Palestinian lives, as if talking about the horrors of occupied life somehow means the speaker cares nothing for Israelis or the history of anti-Semitism. Nor do his attempts to justify suicide bombing help on that front. But in general, the last thing Berger wants to do is dehumanize anyone; his slow, allusive essays build a picture of someone who loves others with depth and a commitment to a better world. It's easy to disagree with Berger, but his ideas in this book deserve attention. — *Suzi Steffen*

Reading For Pleasure
THE HUMBLE LITTLE CONDOM: A HISTORY by Aine Collier. PROMETHEUS BOOKS, 2007. PAPERBACK, \$18.95.

What weighs less than a quarter, comes in a rainbow of fruit flavors and could save your life? A condom, of course! Historian, educator and literary damsel Aine Collier has stretched the

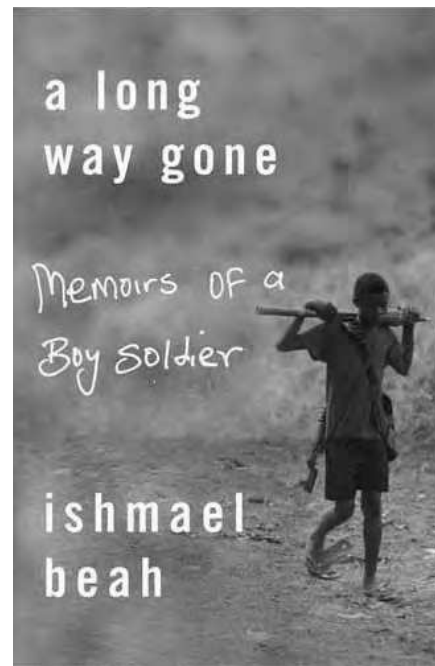


rubbery boundaries of high school health-class knowledge that limit most people's prophylactic familiarity in her historical overview, *The Humble Little Condom*. Readable as either a flip-through, sidebars-and-pictures experience or as a linear journey from ancient Egypt to the present state of sheathly affairs, Collier's book entertains as it enlightens, capturing a tone that honors the serious relevance of these little devices while at the same time acknowledging the fun and spicy nature of the acts for which they are designed.

A few little-known facts: Malcolm X supported himself during the Depression by selling condoms at local Boston dance halls; prior to the use of latex, condoms were secured by a little pink ribbons woven around the open edge; a British company is currently piloting an erection-enhancing Viagra condom, designed to reduce whining from "decreased sensation" camps. But far from being a collection of condom trivia, this book tells rich and detailed stories about the people who made and sold condoms, the people who used condoms and the people who thought no one should use condoms. From the days of papyrus and animal bladder sheaths to the AIDS crisis, the humble little condom has been with us a very long time and witnessed a cross section of history that many people, even today, are too shy to talk about.

What this book ultimately reveals is that a history of contraception and disease prevention is, in fact, a highly intimate human history, encompassing issues of gender, sexuality, morality, class,

religion, law, medicine, social movements; the list goes on and on. Collier's wit imbues *The Humble Little Condom* with enough wink-nudge humor to keep it highly readable, but it is her intellectual rigor that gives the book its magnificent scope and depth, making it a special and decidedly recommended bit of winter reading. — *Adrienne van der Valk*



Let Them Lead the Way
A LONG WAY GONE: MEMOIRS OF A BOY SOLDIER by Ishmael Beah. FARRAR, STRAUS & GIRDUX, 2007. HARDCOVER, \$22. A NEW YORK TIMES NOTABLE BOOK OF 2007.

No matter how much you've read or watched about child soldiers, Ishmael Beah's memoir will chill your blood. To quote the book's blurb, "This is how wars are fought now: by children, traumatized, hopped-up on drugs, and wielding AK-47s." Jesus.

Not that Jesus, or anyone else who might care or offer aid, seems much in evi-

dence as Beah's life in Sierra Leone collapses during a war that sweeps everything away — family, friends, villages, everything. Neighboring Liberia and Guinea also get sucked into the conflict, which began in 1991, when Beah was 11, and theoretically ended in 2002 with a truce. For a time, Beah and other boys he met as he ran from his destroyed village escaped being recruited either by the rebels (RUF) or the government forces. Both sides used child soldiers heavily, relying on drugs, random violence and calculated psychological control to keep the youth violent at the desired times. The government gets Beah first. He describes how he started taking "white capsules" that gave him energy and sniffing "brown brown" (cocaine mixed with gunpowder) while learning to shoot, to crawl through the forest, to kill on command. And there were other training methods: "We watched movies at night. War movies: *Rambo: First Blood*, *Rambo II*, *Commando*, and so on ... We all wanted to be like Rambo; we couldn't wait to implement his techniques." Because time eclipsed for him while he was in this drugged state, it's hard to follow exactly what occurred to him, but his narrative isn't just about his experiences at war.

He and other government army boys were taken into Freetown by UNICEF, which was trying to rehabilitate child soldiers. That proved massively challenging, but Beah's own healing began when a nurse brought him some cassettes and a Walkman. Soon, he was speaking at international conferences on child soldiers, but fighting broke out in the capital, and he barely escaped the country when he was 18. This memoir of his life provides horrifying examples of what happens when arms traffic meets the diamond trade and when adults let go of the humanity that should keep children safe. — *Suzi Steffen*

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 Eugene Garden Club
 1645 High St. Eugene

Time travel to 1856 Eugene City with visiting "Englishman Thomas Hutchinson, Amateur Thespian" (Al LePage) presenting the timeless holiday classic.

\$8.00 per person. Recommended audience ages: 10 and up.
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Image courtesy of David Krapes