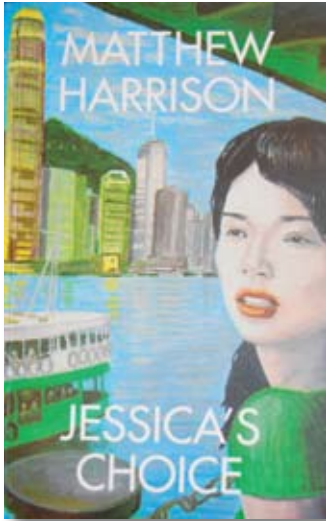


JESSICA'S CHOICE

By Matthew Harrison



Matthew Harrison has lived in Hong Kong for 20 years as a researcher, publishing non-fiction titles as varied as a textbook on the Asia Pacific securities markets to a delightful collection of short stories under the heading Queen's Road Central.

His latest work, *Jessica's Choice*, is in its way an attempt to pursue the themes of the short stories at greater length. An essential part of Harrison's remit is to render a true picture of cross-ethnic relations; as in life these are invariably relations between western men and Chinese women.

To a large extent he succeeds in portraying the additional pitfalls of cultural misunderstanding that can make such matches such a challenge. Also, to his credit, there is none of the pandering to foreign fantasies of oriental sexual lust and expertise.

In the return of Jessica to Hong Kong she is drawn as a sexually naïve woman intent on directing her energies into good deeds on the corporate level. Not surprisingly she runs into a great deal of resistance when attempting to introduce the concept of corporate responsibility.

More surprisingly perhaps is the queue of potential partners that rear their heads within a few pages, considering her previous lack of success in this area.

As a backdrop to Jessica's increasingly complicated social and business life Harrison evokes that worst of times since the handover when SARS and the Security Bill staked the streets of Hong Kong.

Jessica's need to stand up and make a choice about her future is contrasted with that of the people of Hong Kong who choose to stand up against the tyranny of the Security Bill and a frightening disease.

At times Harrison's writing can be pedestrian but he can spin a convincing and involving story enhanced by our presumed knowledge of the sights and locations in which the action takes place.

Jessica's Choice is a brave attempt to avoid the clichés often found in western literature when it attempts to address eastern climes. But as yet the great Hong Kong novel is yet to be written.

A HISTORY OF HONG KONG

By Frank Welsh

Frank Welsh's welcome revised and updated *History of Hong Kong* covers the period from the "Opium Wars", that led to Britain's acquisition of the "barren island", up to the handover of the territory to China in 1997.

In a highly readable account Welsh relates in detail some of the more famous incidents in Hong Kong's history that still resonate to this day in the 60th anniversary of Communist China.

Welsh takes an apologist approach to the "Opium Wars", insisting that the drug was merely a side issue in a spat that was really about international trade in general.

But in his description of the greedy unprincipled behaviour of the likes of Messrs Jardine and Matheson and the bumbling, ineffective British Government, his argument is not entirely convincing. Even if his angle on the affair was right, in that context Britain's gunboat diplomacy, which led to China ceding Hong Kong, appears no more heinous than the loan-withdrawing bullying of the International Monetary Fund today when it deals with weak developing countries.

Less easy to defend was the extension of the British territory with the cession in 1898 of the New Territories, which seems largely to have been obtained out of jealousy because of mainland incursions by the Russians, Japanese, French and Germans.

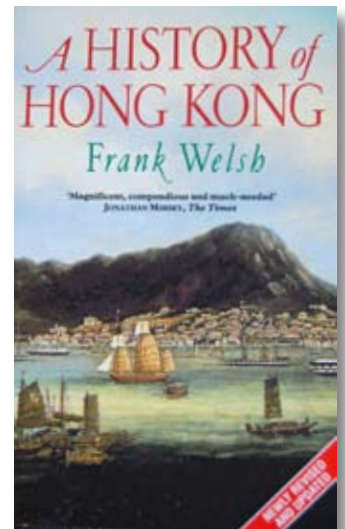
Welsh provides an always intriguing gallery of British tyrants and eccentrics who ruled or operated in the territory during the bulk of the 20th century. It's a fascinating period, which takes in the fall of the territory to the Japanese in 1941 and the Communist riots in the 1960s. Sadly Welsh devotes less space to these upheavals than he does to the establishment of Hong Kong.

At the other end of the lifetime of British rule in Hong Kong, perfidious Albion is still up to its tricks when Britain's ruling Conservative party tries to exclude Hong Kong residents from a home in the UK if China was not to fulfill its promise of no change for 50 years.

While there is much to bring a blush of shame to a liberal Brit – our colonising ancestors were notoriously worse behaved the further they were from home – a feeling of pride can also be felt for the achievements, particularly from 1971, when Sir Murray Maclehoose took up the Governorship.

Maclehoose was tasked with reducing the vast economic disparities that existed and discarding many of the old colonist traditions. This he did with a remarkable degree of success.

Thankfully, through his efforts and that of those who followed, Britain's presence here is remembered for how it was left rather than how we gained it in the first place.



THE SEARCH FOR LOCH NESS MONSTER

Premieres exclusively on **BBC Knowledge** on Now TV channel 220 on Tuesdays, October 27 at 9:05pm



THE LEGEND OF a monster lurking at the bottom of Loch Ness gained increased credibility when 20th-century technology, contrary to expectations, provided hard evidence of what appeared to be a strange creature in the Loch. In the 1970s and '80s sonar images and underwater photographs convinced eminent naturalist Sir Peter Scott that something did indeed lurk in Loch Ness.

This film documents the very first complete sonar survey of the length and breadth of the Loch. A boat loaded with the latest sonar and photographic equipment probes the 800 feet depths of the Loch. Sophisticated real time imaging means that any strange signals can be detected and investigated immediately.

The search for the monster ranges further than the length and breadth of the Loch. The

programme reveals in graphic detail how the Loch was created 8,000 years ago by melting glaciers flooding into the giant rift valley in the rocks of the Caledonian shield. It also demonstrates how the unique structure of the Loch creates strange wave patterns and eddies that can look like a monster.

Moving images of the various monsters that have been suggested as the inhabitant of Loch Ness are recreated in detail. Naturalists and palaeontologists discuss the possibility of any of these life forms surviving in what has been described as one of the most lifeless bodies of water in the world.

Past evidence doesn't escape scrutiny either. Films and photography purportedly showing flippers, strange sonar images, hidden caves, and unexplained objects leaving mysterious wakes, are all examined. As the evidence from the sonar and photographic survey is accumulated and the past evidence fails to stand up to scrutiny, fiction is separated from fact at last. In the words of Dr Morris from London's Natural History Museum, "We see with our mind, not our eyes. If people want to see a monster, they'll not see a trick of the light they'll see a plesiosaur." The truth of the Loch is that people believe what they want to believe, and for them a monster will always exist.

OZ AND JAMES DRINK TO BRITAIN (SERIES 3)

Premieres on **BBC Lifestyle**, Now TV 221, on 21 October 2009, Wednesdays at 8.00pm

OZ CLARKE AND James May travel through Britain and Ireland to discover the amazing array of drinks that is on offer for the delectation of a wine ponce and an incorrigible scruff bag.

In *Oz and James Drink To Britain*, James gets to drink a pint (or two) on home soil. The improbable duo travels the length and breadth of the UK, sampling the broad range of booze on offer, in an attempt to find the drink that defines Britain.

For their latest adventure, James produces the wonderful combination of a classic Rolls Royce and an appallingly kitsch Sprite caravan from the 1970s. Living in cramped, leaky conditions, the bickering reaches new heights



as James discovers that Oz is as knowledgeable about beer, stout, cider, whisky and lager as he is about wine. As James tries to air his knowledge, Oz struggles to keep the upper hand.

In their quest, the pair tries extreme beers – from the world's strongest to the world's most expensive pint; they pit the best in German technology against the best of Oz's know-how in a brewing competition; James discovers Oz's Irish ancestry; and they even drink some wine – much to James's horror! But will Oz be able to convince James to try cider after more than 30 years of not letting a drop past his lips? And will the pair manage to overcome their fear of Morris dancers.



ARCTIC MONKEYS

Humbug

Sheffield's Arctic Monkeys released their remarkable debut to much fanfare and hype, becoming the fastest-selling debut album in UK chart history and later winning the prestigious Mercury Prize. Their edgier second album was a hit with fans but not generally as well received. *Humbug*, their third album, has taken their music in another direction – experimental, heavier and darker.

The music, if not the lyrics, contained in *Humbug*, marks a significant shift from the band's previous two albums. The Monkeys no longer tip their hat to a palpable Libertines' influence and *Humbug* amounts to a genuine effort to move on from the band's unsustainable role as all things to all people.

With seven of the 10 tracks produced by Queens of the Stone Age's Josh Homme, the band has become heavier, citing Black Sabbath as a source of inspiration.

In *Secret Door*, frontman Alex Turner is almost balladic despite a strident bass and drum. But the best track for those seeking melodies must be

Cornerstone, which brings together yearning guitar chords and some of Turner's most poignant lyrics.

Dance Little Liar and *Pretty Visitors*, acceptable variations on what has gone before, don't quite hold the attention in the same way and perhaps the weakest track on *Humbug* is *Dangerous Animals*, sung D.a.n.g.e.r.o.u.s A.n.i.m.a.l.s, when the marching of the bass fails to connect with the rest of the ensemble.

Missing the spark that made Arctic Monkeys such a sensation in the first place. *Humbug* is liable to confuse many of their original fans who'd prefer the group to remain as the talented teenage quartet from Sheffield.

MUSE

The Resistance

Previously unfamiliar with Muse music this reviewer was taken aback by titles such as *Symphony Part 1/2/3*. *Pomp Rock?* *Reissue?*

No. But it might just as well be. Is this band progressive rock's version of Spinal Tap? No it can't be limited to one band. One minute you think you're listening to Queen, then there's a sample from the Dr Who theme. Wait! Now were in U2 country.

They cannot be serious. Other reviewers have insisted that Muse has not quite reached what could be defined as self-parody but I beg to differ.

The lyrics to such songs as the title track *The Resistance* – "They will not force us/They will stop degrading us/They will not control us/We will be victorious" – might offer some insight into the wincingly 1980s alienated weirdos out to save the world territory we are in.

Feeling perhaps that the wailing synthesiser doesn't quite get the earth-shattering import of the lyrics across, the band takes the pomp up a level with the introduction of the full-on orchestra for the three – part *Exogenesis* (creation of the world) *Symphony*.

In the third and final part of the symphony Matt Bellamy pleads: "Why can't we start it over again?" Indeed.

