Celeste returned to Paris in 1858 and published a novel, *The Gold Robbers*, to generally favourable reviews. Her friend, Alexandre Dumas fils, also appears to have read it with interest. Ill health, however, dogged her in Paris. Lionel joined her on leave but himself took ill and died on return to Melbourne. Celeste never remarried.

This book is a must for those interested in colonial Australia. Celeste’s memoirs, while not fully trustworthy, as her editors demonstrate, are exceptional for being a colonial record to emerge from a Continental source. She provides a detailed narrative of life in Melbourne told from the peculiar vantage point of a highly colourful, intelligent Frenchwoman. As a result, nothing is taken for granted. Melbourne life is depicted in vivid detail and with the sense of astonishment only a stranger can give. Many stories, doubtless, must be taken with a grain of salt. Her eye for detail was wide but uneven and there is scarcely a single place-name she gets right. Patricia Clancy and Jeanne Allen fully put the reader in the picture with copious notes and explanatory material.

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D’Arcy Wentworth was born in 1762 in Portadown, Ulster, a ‘middling member of the middle orders’ whose life and prospects showed little likelihood of differing greatly from any of his Protestant Wentworth forebears. Until, that is, he arrived in New South Wales as a free—but only just—passenger with the infamous Second Fleet in 1790, having escaped the hangman on at least three occasions resulting from his descent into the *demi-monde* of Georgian London. Acquitted each time he presented at the dock, he was sufficiently aware of his good luck that within four days of the last acquittal, when *The Times* described him and the only other acquitted person on the day as ‘Lucky Dogs!’ (p. 22), he was in Portsmouth and boarding the *Neptune*, a transport with the Second Fleet. Although his shady past as a reputed highwayman hounded him for the rest of his life, his decision to make for the new colony was a crucial turning point. Things could only get better, and through a combination of hard work, canny politics and frank ambition he created his own position as one of the most important members in the early history of New South Wales.

John Ritchie’s biography of Wentworth (and although the book is titled *The Wentworths*, it deals with Wentworth senior—D’Arcy—to a much greater extent than his children, including the arguably more significant William) is a very well researched work. From the early discussion of Wentworth’s exploits — alleged, of course, never proven in court—in London, to the intimate details of his multi-family life with the women who bore his twelve children (as well as the many others who simply shared his beds), Ritchie’s book shows the command of
archival sources that I would expect of the editor of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. As he tells the story of the rise and rise of the house of Wentworth in the colony, Ritchie’s attention to detail shows itself in the many interesting digressions he allows himself—looking at Norfolk Island (where Wentworth received his second chance, under the patronage of Philip Gidley King), for example, or the developments which led to the visit and subsequent reports by Commissioner Bigge, whom Ritchie shows as having had an ambivalent attitude towards Wentworth, lenient in his public reports but scathing in his private correspondence, raising Wentworth’s disreputable past and scandalous personal life.

The Wentworth portrayed by Ritchie is not a character with whom it is easy to sympathise. That he was in fact a highwayman in his youth is not seriously questioned; indeed, Ritchie attributes his acquittals to his being ‘a beneficiary of Britain’s bloody criminal code’ which led ‘prosecutors, witnesses, counsels, juries, judges and advisers of the Crown to thwart the very laws they were meant to uphold’ (pp. 16–17). Throughout the book, Ritchie paints a picture of an acquisitive and grasping man, ready to align himself with whichever faction in the colony was able to deliver to him the most in financial or other material rewards. One of Wentworth’s associates was Joseph Foveaux, described by his head gaoler, Robert Jones, as ‘one of them hard and determined men who believe in the lash more than the Bible’. Ritchie depicts the relationship between him and Wentworth as one of ‘mutual respect ... which blossomed into friendship’ (p. 97). Others included the merchant and grog seller Simeon Lord (with whom Wentworth carried on a lucrative liquor importing business) and John Macarthur, who shared with Wentworth the description of ‘troublesome’ in the handing-over instructions of Governor King to Bligh in 1807 (a characterisation which Bligh would come to regard as a serious underestimate). In fact, ‘troublesome’ is a description that could be used for many if not most of the others in Ritchie’s book: the early settlers, exclusive or emancipist, appear as a generally unsavoury bunch, among whom Wentworth stands out less because of his character but for the strength and persistence of his ambition.

This assessment is for me, the abiding message from Ritchie’s book. The first Europeans to settle in Australia were a pretty miserable group of people, regardless of which side of the bonded/free divide they occupied. On reading this book, I was initially a bit disconcerted that Ritchie did not appear to be saying anything much that would help to inform the unenlightened detractors of what has been called ‘black armband’ history. After all, this is fundamentally a book about ‘dead white males’, and the number of times Aboriginal people, women, or even convicts are mentioned as anything other than bit players in the narrative can be counted on one, or at most two, hands. But this is not much of a cause for criticism; after all, the Wentworth created by Ritchie would not have considered anyone other than the European men with whom and against whom he connived and strove as significant in his life.

On further consideration, however, I now think that *The Wentworths* is a book which does have something to say about the contemporary debate in Australian historiography. It demonstrates that, far from going about the business of establishing the colony in any positive and creative way, the men, like Wentworth, who contributed most to it were motivated by petty jealousies, hatred and
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individual greed. Ritchie's depiction of D'Arcy Wentworth leads me to question how much there is to celebrate about Australian history, even when it is focussed on what would ostensibly be regarded as one of the early colony's 'success stories'. In leading to this conclusion, John Ritchie's considerable research skills and ability to inform have been effectively demonstrated.

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This book has been reissued thirteen years after it was published to wide acclaim for its engaging prose and its unabashed revisionist ambitions to 'describe the Kurnai tribes of Gippsland and the culture and experiences of those who routed them' (p. xix). The latter occupy Watson's attention for much of the book; in particular Angus McMillan, who, 'half steering his way, half being blown' (p. xix), arrived at NSW in 1838 and established European settlement in Gippsland. If not for Strzelecki's sharper eye for social kudos, the region would perhaps have been given McMillan's preferred name of Caledonia Australis, rather than that of the presiding Governor.

Watson devotes the first half of the book to the cultural influences that made the man who was closely involved in the genocidal program against the Kurnai. The Highland life of McMillan's nostalgia was itself fractured, its mix of clansmanship and feudal relations systematically destroyed by the British from the mid-eighteenth century. The Clan system was replaced by southern landlordism, Highland settlement with sheep and their English managers. In the English view, the impoverished Highlanders displayed a 'soddened and inveterate indolence and a listless imperviousness to improvement' (p. 64). In the terms of the Presbyterian ascendancy, their material plight expressed God's unknowable will.

Watson argues that while material ambition was a central dynamic of migration, the behaviour of migrants had other dimensions; cultural, ideological and religious. The idea of the transplanted kingdom of the Celt, who might also 'raise the altar of God', became its defining theme. It was providential to migrate and NSW—'a marsh that was unfit for habitation until drained' in the opinion of the Edinburgh Review (p. 55)—became a focus for highland migration in the 1830s with John Dunmore Lang, the first Presbyterian minister in NSW, its strongest exponent. In this vituperative code, highlanders were uniquely impervious to the corrupting influences of convicts and Catholics, and 'the best antidote to the moral plague that transportation spread'. Their language alone would place them 'beyond the reach of contamination' (p. 80). McMillan migrated with a letter of introduction and a copy of Lang's History of NSW. From a close analysis of McMillan's shipboard diary emerges a man—