

The Great Romance, by The Inhabitant

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Introduction

Volumes I and II of [The Great Romance](#), two novelettes 55 pages and 39 pages in length respectively, were published separately under the pseudonym of The Inhabitant in 1881 in Ashburton (or possibly Dunedin),¹ New Zealand, and are worthy of attention for their position in the history of utopias and science-fiction (SF). Volume I is interesting as it appears to be the principal source for the frame story of [Edward Bellamy's](#) (1850-1898) influential American novel [Looking Backward](#) 2000-1887 (1888), as well as for his short story "[To Whom This May Come](#)" (1898).² Yet both volumes I and II are also of interest for: (i) providing an instance of how widespread the writing and publishing of SF was in the 19th century, particularly the existence in rural New Zealand of a distinct Antipodean SF/utopian tradition evidenced elsewhere by the likes of [Samuel Butler](#), [John Macnie](#), [Anthony Trollope](#) and [Jules Verne](#); (ii) demonstrating a cutting-edge position in the writing of late 19th century SF, with a focus on the future, interplanetary travel, a sympathetic treatment of non-humanoid aliens, technological developments in space travel and non-oxygen environments; and (iii) as a further expression of a late 19th century British Zeitgeist with an emphasis on progress, morality and race.

[The Great Romance](#) and [Edward Bellamy](#)

[Looking Backward](#) recounted the tale of a wealthy Bostonian named Julian West, who having fallen asleep in the year 1887, awakened in the year 2000 to see a wonderfully advanced society which had resolved all the problems plaguing the industrialising 19th century world. The divisions of the old Boston, namely poverty, unemployment, labour-capital conflict, corruption, class barriers, and inequality of wealth, had all been resolved in the new society as a consequence of the nationalisation of the economy by the state, which in turn had allowed for the complete social and political equality of all citizens regardless of sex. As a result of the novel's readable prose (a practical problem facing many late 19th century utopianist/SF works), as well as [Bellamy's](#) sincere and logical vision of a potential socialist utopian future, [Looking Backward](#) quickly became an international best-seller and went on to establish [Bellamy](#) 'as one of the United States' most widely read and ideologically influential writers' (Bowman xix-xx). [Everett F. Bleiler](#) in his history of early Science-Fiction says

that [Looking Backward](#) may well be ‘the most international American book since the work of [Edgar Allan Poe](#) and [James Fenimore Cooper](#)’ (xxi).

[Bellamy](#)’s ideas went on to affect in varying degrees the Fabians of Britain, Russian Revolutionaries in 1917, Zionist leaders in Europe and Palestine, labour leaders throughout the British settlement colonies, and Theosophists the world over. His ideas also influenced such writers and thinkers as [Charles Beard](#), [John Dewey](#), [Anton Chekhov](#), [Eugene V. Debs](#), [Anatole France](#), [Maxim Gorky](#), [George Bernard Shaw](#), [Leo Tolstoy](#), [Thorstein Veblen](#), [Edward Weeks](#), and [H.G. Wells](#). The vogue for SF and utopianism which resulted from [Bellamy](#)’s novel was even ‘such that [Gilbert](#) and [Sullivan](#)... thought it worth a whole operetta, [Utopia Ltd.](#) (first performed in 1893)’ (Amis 38). Nor was New Zealand itself immune to the popularity of [Bellamy](#)’s message. [William Pember Reeves](#), later Liberal Minister of Labour from 1892-1896, celebrated the novel in 1889 on account of the fact that [Bellamy](#) had ‘mastered, and digested the creed of Socialism... without being dull...’ (Roth 231). Although there is no evidence to show the number of people who read [Bellamy](#) in New Zealand, one year after [Reeves](#)’ comment local newspapers in Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin were announcing that they were quickly selling out of copies of the popular book. According to one correspondent from the [New Zealand Tablet](#): ‘For some weeks past the first query on the lips of every second person whom one met in the street or elsewhere was “Have you read [Looking Backward](#)?”’ (Roth 232). Even as late as the 1960s the former New Zealand Prime Minister [Walter Nash](#) said that he regarded [Bellamy](#) as ‘probably one of the greatest, if not the greatest, prophets of the development of world conditions’ (Bowman xx).

The relationship between [Bellamy](#) and New Zealand, however, may not necessarily be only one way. It now appears highly likely that the New Zealand novelette [The Great Romance](#) is the principle source for the frame story of [Looking Backward](#). This conclusion appears all the more certain when [The Great Romance](#) is compared to [Bellamy](#)’s 1898 short story “[To Whom This May Come](#)”, on which its influence is pervasive. In both [The Great Romance](#) (GR) and [Looking Backward](#) (LB) the narrator (John Brenton Hope³ and Julian West respectively), awakes after a long sleep - 193 years for Hope, 113 years for West.⁴ When Hope awakens he sees a strange man staring at him who appears to be a ‘mesmerist’. West in LB was put to sleep by a mesmerist. Both protagonists after waking in their respective futures also fall in love with women named Edith. In GR she is the sister, in LB the daughter, of the man present at their awakening. Furthermore each Edith is a descendant of a friend of the narrator from his previous time: Edith Leete is the great grand-daughter of West’s 19th century fiancée Edith Bartlett, while Edith Weir is descended from

John Malcolm Weir, Hope's closest friend. And in both works these women function not only as romantic love interests to help enhance the plot, but also serve a more practical role by acting as guides for the protagonist (and reader) in these future worlds.

Where the two works differ is in intent. The author of GR appears primarily concerned with producing an entertaining and romantic story, and even quite possibly a promotional piece aimed at attracting settlers to New Zealand. The flight into the unknown reads like a fevered dream or prophetic vision, the author indicating a passionate thirst for knowledge and new experiences, an *innatus cognitionis amor*, like Dante's Ulysses: 'we wandered and searched, like children on a holiday, ever eager to see, to know, and to discover...' Parts of Volumes I and II can even be likened to a Boy's Own or an American dime novel with an emphasis on technological wizardry, Hope's adventures on Venus, and his companions' dangerous return journey amongst the stars. By contrast [Bellamy's](#) prime concern is to stress the need for a type of socialist transformation that would end 'the old laissez faire capitalist order' (Lipow 23). LB is therefore more concerned with a concrete and practical reality. Its utopia is firmly grounded upon the earth and appears achievable; it is not simply an adventurous dream as in GR, the focus of which soon leaves the planet altogether.

This divergence in intent raises another difference between the two works, namely the means by which these utopias come about. Whereas the Inhabitant attributes the rise of utopia to the advent of telepathy, [Bellamy](#) envisions it as the result of nationalism wherein the old predatory capitalist monopolies have been peacefully and gradually absorbed into one central governmental monopoly which operates in the interests of all. Telepathy, therefore, plays no part in LB's cooperative Boston of AD 2000. [Bellamy](#) did, nevertheless, credit the rise of a utopian society to telepathy in "[To Whom This May Come](#)", published in 1898. In this short story the shipwrecked narrator is rescued by the telepathic inhabitants of a group of South Sea islands cut off from the rest of the world by savage currents. Here, as in GR, the fact that one's every thought is public, so that wicked intentions cannot be concealed, has resulted in all having only honourable thoughts, or (in GR) in the isolation of those who have socially undesirable motives. And here again the narrator finds both a friendly guide to educate him in the ways of this telepathic society as well as the love of a beautiful woman.

In the history of SF [The Great Romance](#) appears to form an important bridge between [Bellamy's](#) "[To Whom this May Come](#)" and another noteworthy and influential SF work of the late nineteenth century, namely [The Coming Race](#),

which was written in 1871 by the British novelist, dramatist, politician and statesman [Edward Bulwer-Lytton](#). That the writing of GR was influenced by [Bulwer-Lytton](#) is suggested by the following: (i) the inhabitants of [Bulwer-Lytton](#)'s utopia (which is located in the centre of the earth) are winged people (despite their otherwise human appearance), as are the non-humanoid alien 'Venuses' which Hope meets in volume II; and (ii) the scene in which Moxton uses 'magnetism' to control the movements of a stick is reminiscent of the rod used in [The Coming Race](#) to control the power of vril (an energy which permits the transfer of thought and mind-control). [Susan Stone-Blackburn](#), who discusses the treatment of psi powers in [The Coming Race](#), calls [Bellamy](#)'s short story

... a trailblazer in its exploration of effects telepathy might have on society, and in its suggestion that under special conditions evolution might distil ancient and genuine but sporadic and unreliable human psi abilities into universal and reliable ones. (247)⁵

It should now be evident that the trail was blazed not by [Bellamy](#) in 1888 but by The Inhabitant in 1881. It was not long after this that psi powers developed into a staple of modern SF: 'The notion that new mental powers would be developed in the course of man's future evolution became commonplace in the early 20th century' (Pringle 35).

[Bellamy](#) scholars (including his biographer [Arthur E. Morgan](#)), have suggested that Bellamy may have borrowed some of his ideas for LB from [John Macnie](#), a Scottish-born American educator and Professor of French and German who in 1883, after GR and before LB, published a dystopian novel entitled [The Diothas](#). According to Morgan in both [The Diothas](#) and LB:

...the device of hypnotism was used... [and] the hero had a sweetheart named Edith. On awaking from the long sleep in each case the hero fell in love with a distant descendant of 'Edith'. In each case too, the father or guardian of the heroine, a man of exceptional intelligence and culture, became interpreter of the new world to the hero who had emerged from the nineteenth century. Each of the works forecasts radio, television, automobiles, and other technical developments... (241).

[Bleiler](#), in discussing the merits of such a possible connection, does point out that both [Macnie](#) and Bellamy were in correspondence with one another before their works were published (735). The possibility that [Macnie](#) himself was

influenced by GR cannot be excluded at this point. Certainly he was familiar with New Zealand for he devoted a great deal of space to the material progress which the Antipodes were supposed to have made over the course of centuries and refers to New Zealand (which he terms 'Maoria') many times. In fact the protagonist of [The Diothas](#) from the future - Ismar Thiussen - is identified by [Macnie](#) as originating in the North Island of the country (58). The question now arises how Bellamy (if he did not borrow the plot of GR via [The Diothas](#)) came across [The Inhabitant's](#) novelette, for he never visited New Zealand. It is possible that someone visiting New Zealand brought back a copy to the United States, a copy that eventually made its way into Bellamy's hands. It is even possible that the publisher sent copies of the book to American publishers for possible reprinting or distribution.

The Great Romance and Contemporary SF

In addition to its probable influence (either directly or indirectly by way of [Macnie](#)) on Bellamy, GR is unusual among SF works of the time in being primarily science-fictional, in other words taking the real world and technological innovation (as opposed to fantasy) at its starting point, rather in the mode of an earlier and more famous SF author, [Jules Verne](#). [Bleiler](#) designates such a position as being quasi-scientific as opposed to pseudo-scientific 'which suggests falsity' (xi). GR is also of interest for ostensibly introducing a number of innovative technologically-related firsts for SF which have now become quite common to the genre.

The [Inhabitant's](#) attempts at verisimilitude are evident early on in Volume I which begins not in the time of the author and reader, in 1881, but in a scientifically-advanced 1950. The chemical potion that puts Hope into a state of suspended animation, which he enters in order to experience for himself the future, has been concocted by '[John Malcolm](#) Weir, the greatest chemist of the day.' In addition, the Hope of 1950 is himself a renowned scientist whose concepts have been, at least in part, responsible for the technological developments that have led to the world of 2143: 'You first started the mechanical world on this new track. You found out the power which so swiftly drives us through the air and over the earth...'

[The Great Romance](#) is also interesting for its depiction of space travel. While a number of space-travel stories were published earlier, there was perhaps only one, [Percy Greg's](#) [Across the Zodiac](#) (1880), which provided so detailed and extensive an account of the difficulties involved. Otherwise many of these earlier works 'tended to turn a blind eye to the problems involved in moving outside the Earth's atmosphere' (Pringle 50). By contrast the [Inhabitant's](#) vision

of the shape of things to come, both on his journey to Venus and during his friends' return, includes: accounts of the absence of gravity on a spaceship and the need for exercise to prevent muscle fatigue; the problem of meteor damage to a ship (avoided by the spaceship *Star Climber* having a defensive cannon powerful enough to destroy a moon à la *Deathstar*); possible regions in space, passage through which would disable a spaceship; the need for a cooling device on board to prevent damage from the extreme heat generated by a planet's atmosphere during take-off and re-entry; the apparent use of a planet's or comet's rotation and/or atmosphere to increase (in a sling-shot like effect) or decrease a space vessel's speed; initial landings in a planet's ocean (reminiscent of American manned capsules returning to the Pacific or Atlantic); the problems of fresh air and monotony on a long space voyage; the reasons why Venus is chosen over the moon as a destination for the voyage (there is no atmosphere on the moon and apparently one on Venus); the description of Venus from space 'like a moon at three-quarter's full', which is strikingly reminiscent of today's television images of the view of Earth as seen from space; the fact that before a launch can occur a suitable window of opportunity is required: 'Early morning was the time appointed for their leave-taking; then the planet would bring us round to the appointed place...'; and the depiction of walking in a low-gravity environment that so clearly resembles the frustrations, dangers and humour of the first moon walks: 'Don't fool about Weir. I believe a good jump would send one clear altogether'.

As far as the primary propulsion system of the *Star Climber* is concerned, it is not driven by anti-gravity or any such similar power common to late-nineteenth-century space flight (for example 'apergy' in Greg's [Across the Zodiac](#)), but while in the atmosphere of a planet it uses metallic wings that, like those of a hummingbird, flap so rapidly that they cannot be seen at full speed. This picturesque but improbable image aside, the *Star Climber* can also achieve alternative velocity in space or during take-off by a variant of the more conventional means of rocket-propulsion:

Moxton determined to poise the *Star Climber* in the air, keeping her steady and motionless with her lesser vibratory motion, till, like a rifle or telescope, she was accurately sighted, then discharge, as we had done in the *Magellan* could, our rearward artillery - this would give her a swift and true start. (Volume II)

Such a method of take-off as described from the planet Venus, looking 'like a falling tower across the firmament' and leaving a 'fearful deafening roar', is very

much akin to late twentieth century images and after-effects of modern American, Soviet or European rocket launches.

Another technological innovation of interest found in volume II includes the use of a spacesuit which is worn by Hope's companions to explore a passing comet: 'they prepared their air-pipe supplies - something like a bagpipe in appearance; they could breathe in the air through a mouthpiece... With these on they could walk in a vacuum for an hour or more.' Part of this spacesuit includes glasses tightly fastened over the face 'so that the atmosphere could touch no part of his body.' [John J. Pierce](#) in [Foundations of Science Fiction](#) states that the French novelists [Georges LeFaure](#) and [Henri de Graffigny](#) who worked collaboratively in the late 1880s and early 1890s were 'apparently the first to think of... space suits' (40). It now seems clear that this particular necessity of space exploration first makes its appearance in GR and as early as 1881.

Other apparent technical firsts for GR include the equivalent of a kind of shuttle-craft or lunar rover in volume II which is used by Hope to explore the planet Venus; he calls it 'the Midge' and it is described simply as a kind of fantastic 'boat' that can 'run, or fly, or swim'. The author of GR also appears acutely aware of the need to maintain an air-tight environment during space travel, and consequently volume II includes, quite possibly for the first time in the history of SF, the use of an airlock as we know it today. Such a device first makes its appearance with Hope's friends during their reconnoitre of a passing comet: 'The sliding doors were shot back and closed again behind them, then Weir opened the outer one and stepped out.' [The Great Romance](#) may also be the first story in which a person travels into the future via induced suspended animation rather than simply by sleep; none earlier is mentioned by [Bleiler](#) in his history of the early years of SF.⁶ It would later be left to [H.G. Wells](#) to develop what is today probably the most well known means of intentional travel into the future (or even the past for that matter), the time machine.

Other aspects of GR worth mentioning, which if not unique to nineteenth century SF/utopianism are interesting in their own right, include the future relationship between the sexes and the physical description of the new cities. The society described in GR is a free-love society. Whereas sexuality in any physical sense never influences the behaviour of West and Edith Leete in LB, it does play a part in the relationship between Hope and Edith Weir: 'It was with us, then, like Danty's [sic] lovers, when they ceased to read of the loves of Launcelot and the Queen.' When Hope is about to embark for Venus he wonders whether Edith will follow him, an issue which constantly dominates Hope's thoughts during his Robinson Crusoe-like period of isolation in volume II. A further likeness between GR and LB—although one common to utopian

tales of the future beginning as early as Thomas Moore, and probably reflecting contemporary preoccupations over fin de siècle urban reform rather than further similarities between GR and LB—is that for both *The Inhabitant* and *Bellamy* the future assumes millennium-like dimensions of a Golden Age. The cities of the future are depicted in both works as the apotheosis of an urban planner's dream. When Hope is shown the urban landscape of the 22nd century for the first time, he sees 'an immense city. The streets were as thickly peopled as the old London streets, but they were four times their width, and planted with trees along either side.' West's description of Boston in the year 2000 is similar: 'At my feet lay a great city. Miles of broad streets shaded by trees and lined with fine buildings... stretched in every direction.'

Possibly one of the more interesting developments in GR relating to the genre of SF as a whole, aside from the technological innovations already mentioned and the novel's potential influence upon [Macnie](#) and/or *Bellamy*, is its treatment of the alien 'Venuses'. Unlike many later SF works of the post-[War of the Worlds](#) kind, the two Venuses which Hope encounters (one male and a smaller female) are not menacing bug-eyed monsters (BEMs). Instead they are given some basic character development and attempts are made at apparently realistic xenobiological characterisation. When the two races first meet there are some introductory problems of communication as the aliens do not speak English and hand gestures are required to initiate a greeting. First contact description between the races also appears particularly credible. The smaller female shrinks back with fear as Hope first approaches; there is a rather moving description of Hope and the male alien initiating physical touch; and there later occurs an exchange of gifts and hospitality between the two species after some confidence is established between them. The alien couple also appear to have a belief system, evidenced by the fact that while later agreeing to act as Hope's guides, before doing so they enact a kind of 'solemn covenant' which Hope presumes to be an oath of secrecy: 'wherever your native home may be I will always hold it as a sacred thing.' A believable exploration procedure is also evidenced by the fact that Hope's companions, before they begin their return journey home, 'collected fruits, flowers, and the smaller animals, to be taken back.' Such an accumulation strategy resembles [James Cook](#)'s exploration in the South Pacific or even more modern inter-planetary expeditions to the moon or Mars.

GR is not by any means the first work to develop the concept of life originating away from Earth. As early as the 2nd century AD., the Greek author Lucian of Samosata was peopling the moon and other heavenly bodies with strange races. Most of his creatures, however, fitted 'more into supernatural

fiction than ancestral science-fiction' ([Bleiler](#) 455) and were intended for satiric purposes like [Swift's](#) creations in [Gulliver's Travels](#). By comparison, those later SF authors who did develop a concept of intelligent alien beings such as the 'Martials' in [Across the Zodiac](#), tended instead to restrict their descriptions to a type of humanoid: 'Until [The War of the Worlds](#), interplanetary fiction had typically peopled other worlds with beings little different from ourselves' (Pierce, [Foundations](#)). The Martials in Greg's story, for example, are essentially just shorter and weaker human beings. According to Pierce, it was for plot reasons having to do either with a need to develop a human-alien romantic interest ([Edgar Rice Burroughs](#)) or a malevolent BEM threat ([H.G. Wells](#)), that 'for the most part, the story of aliens in science fiction before 1934 is one of missed opportunities' (Pierce, [Great Themes 2](#)). The Venuses in volume II of GR, however, are a visibly physically and psychologically distinct species from homo sapiens:

...there before me in the uncertain distance, some thing with two colourless insect-like wings stood up... Strange beings! how shall I describe them? with no likeness to humanity except that they stood on two legs; with arms, yet not arms; faces human, yet how unlike...with soft eyes... their fine bodies covered with a down - neither of bird nor animal - soft and dark, and their heavy, lithe limbs, such as might have developed from that earliest of prehistoric elephant...

Although at times GR may read like a safari adventure with its descriptions of various 'huge lion-like animals', 'tigers', and strange landscapes, the planet Venus and its creatures appears to represent a more believable alien-world creation. What is more the author at times seems sympathetic to the aliens (who often become parabolically displaced by SF authors in time and space with native peoples). As early as volume I, and before contact has been made, Hope concludes that if alien life does exist on the planet then Earth colonists will just have to find another world to develop: '...we must seek another planet - for over earth's over-crowded happiness..' Similarly the Venuses are described as having a degree of mental ability: 'There was intelligence, knowledge, in every line of their features...' Such an apparently more enlightened late-nineteenth-century point of view in GR contrasts remarkably with the actual history of European colonization of the Americas and Australasia, many of whose indigenous peoples were either displaced or eradicated during the settlement process. In discussing contact experiences in SF, [John Pierce](#) states that

[Florence Carpenter Dieudonné](#) in her SF work [Rondah, or Thirty-Three Years in a Star](#) (1887), is 'ahead of her time...in defending the rights of aliens' ([Foundations](#) 59). Similarly [Kingsley Amis](#) states that sympathetic attitudes to native peoples [read alien species] can only be found to have developed in American SF from the middle of the 20th century onwards (95). The empathy for a non-human species in GR appears to put the work ahead of its time in the genre of SF as a whole. Such an attitude in 1881 New Zealand SF may well reflect a kind of noble savage mentality that was re-affirming itself in the wake of late-nineteenth-century social and environmental concerns, as well as a European/New Zealand sense of guilt or shame over the realisation that colonisation in many cases had disastrous effects on those colonized.

Conclusion

Initial sympathy for the aliens aside, there are also paternalistic elements towards the Venuses that mirror late-nineteenth-century cultural attitudes of racial superiority towards native peoples. Although in volume I Hope stated that colonization would not proceed should there be life on Venus, that idea is quickly forgotten by volume II; for even after Hope has befriended the Venuses he has grand plans for the alien world: 'They had come to find a future home for the growing millions of their native earth, and here all around the tropical zone was a region fitted with everything necessary.' The imperialistic/militaristic is also visible by the fact that Hope has his own version of a frontier fort to which he can retreat if attacked, his 'little castle' with its 'formidable...powers of defence'; he additionally carries around with his person a revolver whenever he travels beyond the confines of his private sanctuary.

There are a number of other acts which Hope undertakes which could be interpreted as examples of Victorian cultural superiority. Soon after contact with the Venuses, for instance, he names them. What is more he chooses the classical/mythological appellations of Philomenia and Hyperion, and in using such classical designations appropriates automatically the legacy of the Greco-Roman heritage and all its intonations of civilised authority. This was a favourite tactic of late-nineteenth-century empire propagandists: 'in the Protestant countries... classicism as the uniform of civilization' (Pieterse 19). Such a naming process is in fact very similar to the way in which Robinson Crusoe names Man Friday, although Hope does recognise that 'he would learn their own names as soon as he could master their most strange speech.' In addition Hope tends to view the Venuses, despite their intelligence, as 'children' whose minds 'had little that was superior to humanity.' Furthermore, the Venuses' level of sophistication as reflected by their material culture is also implied to be

inferior, as evidenced by the description of their little boat as 'rude'. Their apparent sexual behaviour towards one another from a mid- to late-Victorian perspective could also indicate a relatively uncivilised culture, although at the same time it may represent to the author a kind of innocent nobility of which he is envious: 'they seemingly grew quite unconscious of any onlooker, in their soft and lover-like play together.'

It does not take too long, then, for Hope to try to begin civilising the two Venuses whom he encounters. He shows them the benefits of fire while simultaneously teaching them to cook the local 'fish'; in the process he comments that they will soon be 'as completely civilised in these respects as the inhabitants of the earth.' The Venuses, therefore, are presented as a kind of simplistic and primitive noble savage, and the planet Venus itself as a kind of *Terra Nullius*/Garden of Eden. The implication appears to be that there is much which humanity could teach these people and that the planet is well-suited to human settlement. The theme of colonization is itself raised by the apparent promotional and/or reformist nature of GR. The novelette, apart from its SF/utopian theme, also appears to be an example of a sub-genre of literature designed to either attract emigrants to the supposedly Arcadian lands to be found in the Antipodes or to advance the benefits of political or social legislation. The reader has simply to substitute the advanced but overcrowded utopia of Earth in the 22nd century with that of Europe in the late 1870s or early 1880s, and then replace the descriptions of the vast and supposedly nearly uninhabited lands of a Venus rich in wildlife and natural resources with either New Zealand or Australia, for the booster intent of the publication to become readily apparent. The author, in fact, has included kangaroos as one of the exotic animal species on Venus in volume I. Even the choice of *The Inhabitant* as nomenclature is important, as the pseudonym was one common at the time to guidebooks in Great Britain and the United States.

[The Great Romance](#), therefore, in addition to its possible influence on Bellamy and its cutting-edge position in the writing of SF, particularly with regard to the use of telepathy, technological realism, and alien xenobiology, is also of interest as a kind of cultural barometer. Like much other SF it can be used as an alternative means to analyse popular perceptions from a specific historical period, in the same way that more modern SF sources such as films like [Invasion of the Body Snatchers](#) or the old television series [Star Trek](#) can be used to examine the Cold War paranoia of the 1950s or a change in American opinion towards the Vietnam War in the late 1960s. GR is also of interest from a literary point of view. Although there are obvious holes in the plot (telepathy is relatively important in volume I but appears to be forgotten in volume II), and

although at times Hope's lamentations for Edith in volume II can appear repetitive at best, the work does read quite well as a work of fiction and is not quite as dull as a good deal of similar SF/ utopian material produced during this period. The episode regarding Hope's companions on the comet, particularly Weir's fall off the face of the comet, is particularly gripping and is literally a cliff-hanging conclusion to the second volume. All that remains to be done is to perhaps find volume III (if it exists at all?) and to continue the search for the identity of the author.

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Endnotes

- ¹ For a discussion of the possible publisher see: [Dominic Alessio](#), "[The Great Romance: a science fiction/utopian novelette](#)", [Kotare: New Zealand Notes & Queries](#) 1, 1 (October 1998), 59.
- ² A commentary on volume I was first published in [Alessio, Dominic](#), ed. "[The Great Romance, by The Inhabitant.](#)" [Science-Fiction Studies](#) 20, 61 (November 1993), 305-340.
- ³ Later in the text Brenton reads Bredford.
- ⁴ The stories differ in that West's sleep was private and unintentional whereas Hope's was public and purposeful.
- ⁵ Telepathy also makes a small appearance amongst a secret society on Mars in another and slightly earlier SF work than GR, namely [Percy Greg's Across the Zodiac](#) (1880).
- ⁶ Louis-Sebastian Mercier's *Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred* (1772) is the first known work which displaces its protagonist into the future, however it is only a dream sequence and the protagonist does not deliberately attempt to transport himself to the distant future.