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Suzanne W Jones

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in *The Buccaneers*: Vernon
Lee's Influence on Edith
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Suzanne W. Jones

The ‘*Beyondness of Things*’ in *The Buccaneers*: Vernon Lee’s Influence on Edith Wharton’s Sense of Places

The emotion which has been stirred in me by localities may be transmitted, though the images cannot; and those whose feelings have been heightened by the transmission of mine will find in what they *do* see, and make in what they *do not* see, places and things to delight their hearts.

Vernon Lee, *The Sentimental Traveller*

Since its publication in 1938, readers have been at odds in their assessment of *The Buccaneers*, Edith Wharton’s only novel set in England. While her literary executor, Gaillard Lapsley, and many early reviewers on both sides of the Atlantic saw great promise in the unfinished novel, a few critics like Edmund Wilson wrote the work off as ‘an old-fashioned story for girls’ and judged Wharton’s skills ‘dulled’ in this her last book. In the 1980s, however, feminist critics found much to value in the novel: from protagonist Annabel St. George’s self-actualization to the comradeship of the American girls and the close relationship between Annabel and her European governess. Since Marion Mainwaring’s 1993 completion of *The Buccaneers* and the 1995 BBC production of the screenplay by Maggie Wadey, the novel has once again incurred harsh criticism, perhaps in part because of these completions. In a very critical *New Yorker* article on these ‘reworkings,’ John Updike pronounced the novel itself a ‘pretty mess,’ full of ‘internal contradictions and proliferating loose ends.’ In a recent scholarly examination of the intellectual history of Wharton’s work, Claire Preston dismissed *The Buccaneers* as ‘too nostalgic,’ the plot as ‘too sentimental and romantic to stand up as satire,’ and the characters