

*White Rose and the Red* by H.D., writing as Delia Alton, edited by Alison Halsall. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2009. lviii, 384 pp. + 9 b/w illus. ISBN 978-0-8130-3370-9. \$69.95.

When the teenage Hilda Doolittle met young Ezra Pound in Philadelphia in 1901, he was full of notions of medieval troubadours derived from the verses of Rossetti, Swinburne, and especially William Morris. She recalled excursions when Pound would shout out stanzas from “The Defence of Guenevere” and “The Gilliflower of Gold,” and they would self-dramatize in the roles of Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal. Later, as leaders of the Modern movement, Pound and T.S.Eliot would vehemently reject Pre-Raphaelite poetics along with all Victorian “sloshiness” in terms similar to the PRB’s own earlier reaction to prevailing modes, but the original inspiration remained influential. Morris’s abrupt, allusive, dynamic manner was particularly potent. And for H.D., the persona of Siddal, aspiring artist at the heart of a radical group of male painters and poets, evidently exerted its own creative spell.

*White Rose and the Red* was composed during 1947-49, apparently prompted by the centenary exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, commemorating the emergence of the PRB, at the end of 1948, which for virtually the first time displayed Siddal’s medievalizing watercolours, together with several paintings for which she had modelled, including Millais’s famous drowning *Ophelia*. Indeed, Siddal was in some sense the show’s presiding spirit, since her 1854 profile by Rossetti, now in the Delaware Art Museum, was the cover image for the meagre catalogue, constrained still by wartime shortages. Two other publications furnished source material: Evelyn Waugh’s 1928 biography of Rossetti and Violet Hunt’s long-gestated biography of Siddal, published in 1932 and freely used by H.D. “I am deep in the Pre-Raffs,” she wrote in December 1947. “I see it in scenes and the costumes fascinate me.” She envisaged Laurence Olivier starring as Rossetti and Greta Garbo as Siddal. “I can see those people, and hear them talking.”

The resulting text is a fiction in seven parts of unequal length, mixing historical record with a novelist’s imagination in the manner of many tales today featuring “real life” characters. Submitted to Macmillan, New York, in December 1948, it was either rejected or returned for amending, and then abandoned, surviving in authorial typescript in H.D.’s papers in the Beinecke Library, Yale University. Long known to scholars, it is here published for the first time.

Loosely structured, it is mostly set around 1856-57, when Siddal was in London, Paris, Nice, and Derbyshire, and when Morris and Burne-Jones plunged Rossetti into an Arthurian period inspired by Malory’s *Knights of*