

“TELLING THE TALE OF THE YEAR’S HERITAGE”:
ROSAMUND MARRIOTT WATSON
AND THE DOMESTIC ARTS

David Latham

Musings from the Editor’s Desk

Best-known for the handful of subversive ballads and lyrics in each of her *Bird-Bride*, *A Summer Night*, and *Vespertilia* volumes, Rosamund Marriott Watson should be just as well known for another book of another genre – *The Heart of a Garden* – her last book¹ and one that stands among her best. It is a prose poem intended to complete her agenda for elevating our respect for the domestic sphere of the arts of the home and the garden. By creating a framework that references the epic – including epic catalogue-like lists, twelve epic book-like chapters, an epic journey-like turn of the year – Watson invites us to read her garden prose within the context of the elite genre of poetry. Garden books were more often prescriptive guides for promoting one fashion over another. The prevailing style for the garden estate had long been the classical garden described in Francis Bacon’s essay “Of Gardens” (1625), which reads like a set of blueprints for geometric divisions into a set number of walls, fountains, alleys, and arched hedges that indicate everywhere the cut of the blade. Against this prescriptive model, Joseph Addison, a century later (1712), encouraged an imaginative diversity for a new “Gothick” style of garden, a “confusion of Kitchen and Parterre, Orchard and Flower Garden, which lie so mixt and interwoven with one another, that ... a foreigner ... would look upon it as a natural wilderness, and one of the uncultivated parts of our country” (1). The debate continued in the next century with architects like Sir Reginald Blomfield defending the still reigning classical design for a formal garden and landscape gardeners like William Robinson defending the wild style of the Gothic garden.

Watson took no part in these debates. Though her descriptions reveal a taste for the Gothic style, her book manifests the nostalgia of pastoral idylls, like Alfred Austin’s *The Garden That I Love* (1894), recommending the cultivation of a garden as a personal refuge from the urban environment. A sentence from Austin’s book has been popularized over the years in garden