

The Annual Retrieval, Part One: five appeals to Mars Nodens using the flotation-rejectamenta-to-completion technique

PRESET

As audience members arrive, occasional security and information announcements are read out on a loop over the tannoy.

Voting chips are on sale for 10p each. Explanation is not offered regarding what is being voted for or how the voting system works. Anyone asking questions is told that they will find out soon.

TANNOY

Please remember to keep your belongings and special effects with you at all times.

Voting chips are available for ten pence each. Please buy voting chips from our authorised vendors.

Do not buy voting chips from unauthorised vendors, as this encourages goat larceny.

Teas, coffees, salty and sugary snacks and drinks are available from the kiosk at the shallow end of the pool. Please use correct wording when ordering.

Do not urinate, sweat or weep into the pool. Facilities are provided for these purposes.

ROSIE stands at the poolside.

SCENE 1

ROSIE waits for the crowd to settle, climbs the lifeguard's high chair and oppresses them into silence with her gravitas.

ROSIE

People. We are gathered here today to offer our songs and praise to the givers and the takers of the world.

We have come together to express our appreciation for alternative economies, for all the gifting, volunteering and charitable work that must, by necessity, take up the slack.

And we have come together, more specifically, here, in a place that was itself a gift, and which is run by dedicated volunteers, who think nothing of asking nothing in return other than our pleasure in and respect for this great gift.

And we have come together in a place that is also overlooked by the god Mars Nodens, on yonder hill, who will, on appeal, let loose his dogs and order them to lick the afflicted into wellness.

But this is no more a miracle than the small marvels performed every day by ordinary, decent, hard-working people.

In a world of cutthroat careerism, mind-binding capitalism and hamstringing disparity, there is still a corner of our souls that responds to the needs of others who we have not even met.

You are about to witness a pageant of gratitude, a parade of offerings to Mars Nodens, who will hopefully respond by letting loose his dogs on our wounded society.

At the end of the pageant you will be asked to cast a vote, to determine the future of the objects you are about to encounter, and the sentiments and ideas that they stand for.

Once your vote is cast, the object that receives the most support will maintain its status as offering. It will be presented to Mars Nodens at his temple on the hill. The other objects will be dismantled and sent back to the charity shops that they came from. There will be five offerings. One for each of the five charity shops in this small but very charitable town.

Please, look and listen carefully. The stakes are not negligible, although they could be higher. We must learn to look and listen rigorously. To decide well.

Let the offerings be brought in for appraisal.

SCENE 2

ROSIE blows a whistle, then climbs down from the chair and stands to the side of the deep end. She recedes from the audience's view as they watch SALLY struggle up the length of the pool with a cumbersome object on a raft.

ROSIE helps deliver the object to its poolside display position, making sure that the audience get a good look at the object.

SALLY takes the megaphone from the poolside.

ROSIE

I present to thee offering number one: *All the Hair in Age Concern*.

Let us raise up our eyes, towards our hair,

SALLY

(from the water, with megaphone)

Or to our eyebrows if they be the fuller,

ROSIE

And let us rejoice in the productivity of follicles.

SALLY

(from the water, with megaphone)

May they never rest.

ROSIE

As we are hirsute,

SALLY

(from the water, with megaphone)

So are we strong.

ROSIE

As we are balding,

SALLY

(from the water, with megaphone)

So are we virile.

SALLY returns the megaphone to the poolside.

ROSIE climbs up to the high chair.

ROSIE

Let us rejoice in the contradictions of your many wisdoms.

Let us give praise for the eternal cycle of growth and cut,

Of paraben elasticisers and Tony & Guy.

Let us throw back our heads and sing for the 40,000 hair and
beauty outlets in the UK,

And the industry turnover of seven billion per annum.

As hair grows,

ROSIE & SALLY

So does the economy.

ROSIE

As hair is cut,

ROSIE & SALLY

So grows the economy.

SALLY starts swimming back to the shallow end.

ROSIE

It is for this consistency that we appeal to you who has, through the lickings of your dogs, taught all of us – young and old, rich and poor, healthy and ill, fair and plain, fat and thin, insiders and incomers, alcoholics and teetotallers, criminals and victims, the dead and the undead, the talented and the mediocre, the bright and the dim, left and right, larks and owls, hawks and doves, tits and legs men, mothers and whores, nymphets and studs, bears and Ursulas, workers and shirkers, shakers and movers, players and losers...

Yes, Mars Nodens has taught us all that growth is grace, a state of grace that grows in the breast and bones of young and old, rich and poor, healthy and ill, fair and plain, fat and thin, insiders and incomers, alcoholics and teetotallers, criminals and victims, the dead and the undead, the talented and the mediocre, the bright and the dim, left and right, larks and owls, hawks and doves, tits and legs men, mothers and whores, nymphets and studs, bears and Ursulas, workers and shirkers, shakers and movers, players and losers...

Grace begins in the throne-room and finds us in the salon, in the pool, in the café, in the infinite symbolic spaces of the computer screen and in the nested suitcases that lie behind that screen; it finds us in the shower, on the bus, on the rampage, in dire straits, at the end, under the bed, behind our eyes.

There but for the grace of growth grow I, and all I grow grows with me, and as I go and grow, my eyes grow and I go and grow growth above and below. And as I grace your growth with growing grace, so do I bestow the growing gracious growth both above and below my bestowing eye, which falls on they who are above and below, who are grown and ungrown, who are rich and poor, healthy and ill, fair and plain, fat and thin, insiders and incomers, alcoholics and teetotallers, criminals and victims, the dead and the undead, the

talented and the mediocre, the bright and the dim, left and right,
larks and owls, hawks and doves, tits and legs men, mothers and
whores, nymphets and studs, bears and Ursulas, workers and
shirkers, shakers and movers, players and losers, lasers and tazers,
whistles and hums, bums and tums, tizer and lilt, cheese and onion,
salt and vinegar, nice and spicy, nice and tidy, hide and seek and
find and lose and win and try and if and but and off and on and off
and on and off and on and on and on and on and on and on and on...

*(fading out, as if embarrassed to have found herself at this point –
again.)*

ROSIE sits quietly in the high chair, as if lost in contemplation.

SCENE 3

The audience watch and listen as SALLY swims to the deep end, delivering a float populated with noise-making objects to the poolside. The sounds get louder as she approaches. She places the float on the side of the pool, and picks up the megaphone. ROSIE descends from the high chair and brings the float and objects to a poolside table.

ROSIE

I present to thee offering number two: *All the Sounds in the Dean
Forest Hospice Shop.*

Let us rejoice in the sounds of the forest.

ROSIE activates an inappropriate sound.

SALLY

(using the megaphone, from in the water)

Let us rejoice in the sounds of the forest.

ROSIE

Let us be sensitive to noise.

ROSIE activates an inappropriate sound.

SALLY

Let us be sensitive to noise.

ROSIE

Let us laugh at beeps,

ROSIE activates a beep sound.

SALLY

And weep at the ringing of bells.

ROSIE activates another beep.

SALLY places the megaphone back on the poolside and heads back to the shallow end.

An ASSISTANT places a music stand and paper score poolside for ROSIE to play from (the score comprises a list of pairs of objects to be activated in order).

ROSIE

Let us give praise that as the blood of life seeps through the
bandage of time,

So does silence absorb the surrounding noise.

Let us roar, therefore, in the presence of alarm clocks,

And sing with joy at the existence of maracas.

(Switching to the sort of voice the introduces

classical concerts on Radio 3)

The piece I'm going to play for you now is from Miller's
symphony *The Trials of Dean*. It's a movement that describes the
commoners uprising in protest at the royal enclosure of large parts
of the forest by Charles I. Listen out for the sounds of nonchalant
animals among the music of corruption and outrage.

ROSIE performs an avant-garde concert while SALLY is in the changing room putting on all the T-shirts.

ROSIE ends the concert and takes a bow. The audience clap.

SCENE 4

ROSIE

I present to thee offering number three: *All the White Collars in the Dial-A-Ride Community Transport shop.*

ROSIE opens a changing room door to show the audience the white collar object. It is not there.

ROSIE

I present to thee offering number three: *All the White Collars in the Dial-A-Ride Community Transport shop.*

ROSIE opens another changing room door. It is not there either.

ROSIE

I present to thee offering number three: *All the White Collars in the Dial-A-Ride Community Transport shop.*

ROSIE opens a third changing room door. The white collar object is there. She takes it to its display position.

ROSIE

Let us come together against white-collar crime.
Lead us not into grimy temptation,
But towards the high ground of correct conduct in clerical and managerial positions.

Let us raise our voices against the justifications of the manipulating
classes,
And have no truck with white-collar excuses.
White-Collar Excuses.

ROSIE climbs back up to the high chair.

ROSIE

White-Collar Excuses.
You hear them say 'It's what is done
In our business, it's how it's run.
So when the chance presents itself
Who wouldn't? I tell you – there are none.'

You hear them say their hand was forced
By pressures they had not endorsed.
Their actions hardly were their own,
Since from their will they were divorced.

You hear them say in retroaction
'I couldn't get no job satisfaction'.
They'd bent the rules and grabbed a fistful
Of what they'd hoped was sliced-up action.

You hear them say 'a few measly pence
Are hardly of great consequence,
When corporations, banks and nation states
Make industrial-scale malevolence.'

You hear them say they're not a crim,
That it's the state of business that is grim,
That failure snapping at the ankles,
Would try the virtue of cherubim.

You hear them say all this and more.
Their petty pleas are such a bore.
Mars Nodens, use your better judgement
And slam their faces in your door.

SCENE 5

SALLY emerges from the changing room wearing *All the Chest Messages in Age UK* and stands on a table.

ROSIE

I present to thee offering number four: *All the Chest Messages in Age UK*.

ROSIE walks to the shallow end to put on the leopard print bikini and wings over her wetsuit. The TWO ASSISTANTS go with her.

SALLY

Let us rejoice in our individualism,
And give praise that we have the means to share our idiosyncratic
inner life with strangers in the street.

SALLY takes off the T-shirts slowly, one by one, repeating their slogans as she strips down to the last one.

SCENE 6

ROSIE sets off from the shallow end, swimming up the centre of the pool.
TWO HELPERS carry the wings aloft using the poles attached to the wing tips
and walk up the sides of the pool, keeping apace with ROSIE as she swims.

By now, SALLY has finished taking off all the T-shirts; she climbs down from the table and readies the tape recorder from the *Sounds of the Dean Forest*.
ROSIE clambers out of the deep end of the pool.

ROSIE

I present to thee offering number five: *All the Leopard Print in the Cats Protection shop*.

Let us lift our eyes and hearts and rejoice in natural camouflage,

SALLY

And pray that it gets us noticed.

ROSIE

Let us give thanks that we can dress to kill,

SALLY

And that we can request prolongation of life through medical intervention.

ROSIE

As hemlines rise,

SALLY

So knees nobble.

ROSIE

As fabrics stretch,

SALLY

So flesh swells.

ROSIE

As seasons turn,

SALLY

So pulse the mysterious algorithms of the high street.

SALLY presses play on the tape recorder. Music plays for ROSIE to catwalk to. ROSIE walks around the audience, modelling her wings. The TWO ASSISTANTS do their best to keep the wings aloft while avoiding the pool and the audience.

ROSIE

You will see that this season is all about nature, and we are seeing a lot of patterned fabrics, like this gorgeous leopard print which is a stunning way to really draw the eye.

I just love how it channels the power of the big cat – look out, this lady’s got teeth and claws – and yet it also hints at a sort of old-world majesty. Think Nefertiti meets Queen Mathilde of Belgium presenting prizes to the finest Belgian minds.

I think that, as an alternative to some of the bolder graphics out there at the moment, this soft silhouette is really romantic. And of course, an organic pattern is always practical. Drips, drool and those little whoops-a-daisy moments can be passed off as part of the design.

Because this is what awaits us all – those of us lucky enough to avoid illness and accident, that is.

We can look forward to the loss of control of our finer involuntary motor movements.

We can look forward to the dimming of our sight and the muffling of sound.

Our taste will wane.

We will add too much salt and floral print.

Disgusted, the leopard will slope off into the dusk,

Which the young will take to be a signal.

They will start buying up our bright past

And converting it into coffee bars.

Whatever’s left we will bequeath to charity shops,

For use in future offerings to Mars Nodens,

To be made by people we've never met.

SALLY gets into the pool and floats as if an object. ROSIE gets into the pool and swims back to the shallow end, tidying up the hairy basket and the floating Sally as she goes. At the shallow end they leave the water and disappear into changing rooms. The music on the tape recorder finishes.

ENDS

OUTRO

As the audience disband. The TWO ASSISTANTS help people in their voting, reminding them what they're voting for and guiding them to the right place with their tokens. The audience never finds out the result.