



Ross Barnett

Film Services

Short Film

The Trial of Nicholas Urfe



Screenplay by Ross Barnett

based on an excerpt from the novel *The Magus*

by John Fowles

DURATION:

© 1965 John Fowles

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Australian Writers' Guild Reg No: PENDING

Suggested music: God is Alive (Magic is Afoot) by Buffie Saint Marie ©1969

FADE IN

*Two nude bodies, subtly lit with soft gold hues, embrace in various obviously sexual fusion against the black background. The camera follows the curves of the bodies - the couple will be later identifiable as **Nicholas Urfe** and **Lily**, the latter a very lovely girl with striking blonde hair.*

Opening credits are superimposed, rolling horizontally.

FADE TO BLACK
FADE IN

1. INT. LARGE CONCRETE HALL

*We see a large steel door pulled open, and through the door three large, muscled men in black T-shirts drag **Nicholas Urfe** into a stark concrete hall. He is bound, gagged and blindfolded, wearing a loose white smock. He resists, and attempts to shout although muffled by the gag. He is taken to a raised plinth and sat in a heavy chair, his arms tied to the arms of the chair with leather shackles. His blindfold is removed, and from **Nicholas's** POV we see a panorama of bleak concrete walls. The hall is lit solely by fire brands held in brackets on the walls.*

A panel of inquisitors wearing bizarre costumes sits facing Nicholas (Appendix A). To his right, against the wall, we see a group of about twenty casually dressed young people seated in two rows. A heavy "St Andrew's Cross" or whipping post stands towards the back of the room (behind the line of masked inquisitors), leather accoutrements signifying its purpose.

*Against a soft murmur of conversation from the students and discordant music, the camera pans slowly along the eleven grotesque masks. After some time, the central figure, the **Goat/Wizard**, stands and raises his arms, all eyes turn towards him. He extends fingers of both hands "devil horned" and suddenly the entire scene is transformed.*

*One of the muscled attendants pulls a large electrical switch and the room is brightly lit, showing stained concrete walls. The attendants walk down the room, collecting and extinguishing the fire brands, whilst the people sitting at the table remove their masks and bizarre accessories in a very matter-of-fact manner - just another day at the office. They are wearing conventional clothes. After adjusting papers and folders on the table, the **Goat/Wizard** strikes a small bell and the room becomes silent.*

Goat/Wizard

(Standing, referring to notes in his hand)

Mr. Urfe, you must have formed the conclusion that you have fallen into the hands of madmen. Worse than that, of sadistic madmen. And I think my first task is to introduce you to these 'sadistic madmen'.

(He indicates his colleagues, some of whom smile)

I shall first introduce myself. I am Professor Friedrich Kretschmer, formerly of Stuttgart, now Director of the Institute of Experimental Psychology at the University of Idaho in the United States.

On my right, you have Doctor Maurice Conchis of the Sorbonne University in Paris, whom you know.

*The **Magus/Conchis** half rises and bows briefly, modestly smiling.*

On his right, you have Doctor Mary Marcus, now of Edinburgh University and formerly of the William Alanson White Foundation in New York.

*The **Bird Woman**, remaining seated, nods briefly.*

On her right, Professor Mario Ciardi of Milan.

*The **Succubus** stands and bows formally.*

On the right of Professor Ciardi, you will see Mr Yannia Kottopoulos, who has been our stage manager for the many varied scenarios you have experienced over the past six months.

*The **Crocodile** man stands and bows quickly.*

and on my far right

*The **Stag** man stands and looks defiant, challenging.*

the person who has dramatised and directed our amateur theatricals over the past months is Mr Arne Halberstedt of the Queen's Theatre, Stockholm. I know my colleagues will agree with me when I say that we owe a huge debt to Mr Halberstedt for the successful outcome and aesthetic beauty of our er enterprise.

*The **Goat/Wizard** starts to clap and others join in. The **Stag** man turns left and bows, acknowledging the applause.*

Goat/Wizard

(Standing, referring to notes in his hand)

And now, to my left, you see Doctor Joseph Harrison of my department at Idaho. You know Joe well, of course, in his *alter egos*.

Anubis the Jackal - *a handsome, athletic black man - leans back in his chair and waves his hand.*

and Doctor Heinrich Mayer you may recognise as the gardener. Heinrich is, in fact, a respected research psychologist currently working in Vienna.

*The **Skeleton** stands and bows elaborately.*

Next you will see not Maria the maid, but Madame Maurice Conchis. Madame Conchis is better known as the gifted investigator of the effects of wartime trauma on children. I speak of course of Doctor Annette Kazanian of the Chicago Institute.

*The **Corn Doll** remains seated and smiles in a friendly way.*

Beyond Madame Conchis you see Doctor Thorvald Jorgensen of Aalborg University in Denmark, who played the evil SS colonel.

*The **Aztec** stands and bows his head formally.*

And finally, let me introduce Doctor Vanessa Maxwell, the young lady known to you as "Lily".

Lily *looks up briefly, expressionless, then returns her attention to the notes in front of her.*

The success of the clinical side of our enterprise this summer is due very largely to the efforts of Doctor Maxwell. Doctor Conchis had told me what to expect of his most gifted pupil, but I should like to say that never have my expectations been so completely fulfilled. The success of the venture is due entirely to Dr Maxwell's efforts.

*The **Goat/Wizard** claps enthusiastically and others join in with prolonged applause.*

Lily / Dr Vanessa Maxwell
(Very quietly)

Thankyou Professor . . . thankyou very much.

Goat/Wizard

The students whom you see to your left are Austrian and Danish research students from Doctor Mayer's faculty and from Aarlborg.

You will have guessed our secret by now, Mr Urfe. We are an international group of psychologists which I have the honour to lead. For various reasons, the path of research in which we are all especially interested requires us to have subjects who are not volunteers, subjects who are not even aware that they are participating in an experiment.

The information you have unknowingly provided for us has proved most valuable, most valuable indeed . . . before proceeding further we wish to show our appreciation for the normality you have shown in all the peculiar mazes through which we have made you run. We owe you our gratitude.

Everyone, including the students, stands and applauds looking towards
Nicholas.

***Nicholas** struggles violently in the chair, trying to shout through the gag. He turns his wrists in their shackles and manages to raise two fingers of both hands in an abusive gesture.*

Goat/Wizard
(Waiting for applause to fade)

A perfectly understandable reaction, Mr Urfe, and one which brings me to our purpose in holding this little charade. We are naturally aware that you are filled with deep feelings of anger and hatred towards some of us. That is why you are temporarily silenced.

We are gathered here today, however, to allow you to judge us in your turn, and this is why we have placed you in the judge's seat. You may regard the students present, if you like, as the jury.

I now call on Doctor Marcus to open the case for the defence.

The Bird / Dr Mary Marcus
(Standing and referring to her notes)

The subject of our 2011 experiment belongs to a familiar category of semi-intellectual introversion. Although excellent for our purposes his personality pattern is without subsidiary interest.

The subject's personality results from an Oedipal complex only partly resolved

DISSOLVE TO

. . . . towards women, in which they are seen both as objects of sexual desire and also as objects which have betrayed him, and consequently . . .

DISSOLVE TO

. . . . auto-erotic approach to problems and life in general. The subject has preyed sexually and emotionally on a number of young women. His method, according to Doctor Maxwell, is to stress and exhibit loneliness and unhappiness - in short, to play the little boy in search of his lost mother. He thereby arouses repressed maternal instincts

DISSOLVE TO

. . . . requires him to caste himself as the rebel or the outsider. And in summary I shall quote from Doctor Maxwell's report, as she has had closest personal contact with the subject:

Doctor Maxwell states: The subject's selfishness and social inadequacy have been determined by his past. If anything, our attitude towards the subject should be one of pity towards a personality that has to cover its deficiencies under so many conscious and unconscious lies.

Silence . . . after an awkward pause, she sits down.

Goat/Wizard

(as if suddenly waking from a dream)

Thankyou . . . yes, thankyou Doctor Marcus.

(referring to his notes)

I think, Doctor Maxwell, that it would be fair to the subject if you repeated what you said to me last night in connection with him.

Lily / Dr Vanessa Maxwell

(standing, very coldly)

During my interactions with the subject I experienced a certain degree of counter-transference. I have analysed this with the help of Doctor Marcus and we think that this emotional transference should be broken into two components. One originated in a physical attraction for him, artificially exaggerated by the role I had to play.

The second component was empathetic in nature, where the subject's self-pity is projected so strongly that one becomes contaminated by it. In terms of personal relationships, the conclusion that must be drawn from the experiment is that the subject has very little to offer except as a sexual partner.

Goat/Wizard

Yes . . . well. Thankyou Doctor. Doctor Conchis, perhaps you might like to summarise your thoughts?

The Magus/Conchis

Thankyou, Professor. Let me start by saying that the subject has proved admirable for our our purposes as a representative sample of the young male.

Now that the experiment is concluded, I feel some closure should be attempted especially concerning the subject's attachment to Doctor Maxwell. There are also latent feelings of guilt to be considered concerning the young Australian girl. It may take some time for the subject to resolve these feelings.

Goat/Wizard

Quite thankyou Doctor. Does anyone else wish to say anything at this point? . . . No? Then we have come to the end of our experiment.

*A general murmur arises amongst the students. Papers are shuffled and chairs scrape on the concrete floor. The the **Goat/Wizard** motions for his colleagues to stand up, which they do. The students remain seated.*

Goat / Wizard

I said at the outset, Mr Urfe, that this trial provides an opportunity for *you* to judge *us*. We have, first of all, selected a *pharmakos*, a scapegoat.

All eyes turn towards Lily / Dr Vanessa Maxwell. She takes off her glasses, walks around the table and stops in front of Nicholas, looking directly at him. The white woollen dress she wears is high to the neck but quite short, with a very long zipper at the back. Her hair is in a pony tail.

Goat/Wizard

She is your prisoner, Mr Urfe. Traditionally we specify a precise type of punishment for the crime of destroying all power of forgiveness in in the subject of our experiments.

The three muscular men drag the heavy flogging frame to the centre of the room - it becomes the focus of attention. Lily turns her back on Nicholas and walks to the frame, where one of the attendants slides the zipper down the back of her dress and pulls the dress forward and down over her arms so that she is naked above the waist - she faces the frame, back to the camera, the dress low on her hips. She kicks off her shoes and raises her arms, which two attendants secure to leather shackles high on the frame. Her pony tail is flicked forward over her shoulder, so that her back is totally exposed.

Goat/Wizard

We are now going to untie you from your bonds, Mr Urfe. Should you choose to do so, you may flog Doctor Maxwell to a maximum of ten strokes. Should you choose not to inflict any punishment, then you may walk from this room and be free of us for evermore. Now, I ask one last thing of you - that you think carefully, very carefully, before you choose.

*The gag is removed from **Nicholas's** mouth and the shackles unbuckled from his arms. He stands up and rubs his arms, then his mouth and jaw. The room is in silence but we hear distant wind-chimes tinkling. One of the attendants offers a cat-o-ninetails to **Nicholas** who accepts it and studies it. The cat-o-ninetails has the appearance of a genuine antique from the Royal Navy, heavy - **Nicholas** runs the thongs through is fingers.*

*The tables have been pulled apart in front of **Nicholas** and he steps down from the raised dias and walks towards the table. Suddenly he brings the cat-o-ninetails down heavily on one of the tables, with a resounding "thwack" that makes the watchers jump.*

*Hesitantly **Nicholas** walks towards **Lily / Dr Vanessa Maxwell** expecting to be intercepted. He walks within striking range. He stops and brings the cat-o-ninetails back as if to strike, then relaxes and looks around at the watchers. All are still. **Nicholas** walks closer to **Lily** and lifts a finger to her back. She jumps at his touch - we see that her back is scarred by a number of diagonal scars, a previous flogging. **Nicholas** gently traces the outline of the scars with his finger.*

***Nicholas** turns abruptly and walks towards **The Magus / Conchis**. The attendants start forward as if to restrain **Nicholas** but **The Magus / Conchis** raises his hand to stop them. **Nicholas** hands the cat-o-ninetails to him.*

Nicholas

Fuck you.

FADE TO BLACK
FADE IN

2. EXT. PARK, LONDON

Preferably, although not necessarily, Autumnal colours, striking reds and yellows.

Nicholas sits on a park bench. He holds an open newspaper in his hands but spends the time looking around. People pass, a couple walking a dog, children playing. Suddenly he tenses and stands up. We see a figure walking towards him - **Alison** - a girl wearing a tweed suit, matching hat, a scarf around her neck. She has her hands in her pockets. **Alison** speaks with an Australian accent.

Nicholas

I was afraid you wouldn't come.

*They both sit down on the park bench, slightly apart. **Alison** takes off her hat and shakes her hair free. Then she takes a cigarette from a packet and lights it, looking into the distance.*

Nicholas

Alison?

Alison

(With pauses, drawing on the cigarette)

Don't start talking about the past I've decided to sell the flat

I'm going back to Australia I didn't want to come here.

Nicholas

Then why are you here?

*No response from **Alison** - she draws on the cigarette.*

Nicholas

Is there someone else?

Alison

Good God, there's always someone else . . . if you're looking for it.

Nicholas

Have you been looking for it?

Alison

There's no-one.

Nicholas

And no-one includes me?

Alison

(she looks directly at him)

Of course. What else would you expect?

Nicholas

There was a time, not so long ago, when we truly loved each other.
It wasn't just sex. I know you know that . . . you can't have forgotten.

Alison

Why should I not have forgotten? Why should I not try to forget?

Nicholas

You know the answer to that.

Alison

Do I?

Nicholas

(moving closer along the bench)

Alison

Alison

Don't come closer, please don't come closer

(she stands up and starts to walk away)

. . . this was a bad idea. I shouldn't have come. I just wanted
to say goodbye.

Nicholas

Alison, please . . .

Alison

(Turning, angry)

You should have whipped her!

Nicholas

(amazed, as if struck by a thunderbolt)

What the *fuck* are you talking about?

Alison

You should have punished her . . . they *wanted* you to punish her.
You're weak.

Nicholas

Oh my god, you *knew*! You knew all the time!

The camera pans slowly across the fallen leaves to a small statue of Pan, a Pan's flute in his mouth. The statue is old with patches of moss growing on it. We return to the theme music Magic is Afoot as the credits roll.

FADE TO BLACK