

INADMISSIBLE EVIDENCE

"I can't begin again. I can't begin again. I can't begin again"

Bill Maitland (Nicol Williamson)

The volcanic, quicksilver brilliance of Scottish actor Nicol Williamson first came to international attention when John Osborne's play *Inadmissible Evidence* hit Broadway in November 1965. Williamson had created the role in London the previous year, and the Stateside transfer would yield him a Tony nomination for Best Actor—he lost to Hal Holbrook for the latter's famed one-man Mark Twain show. ("When is a play not a play? When it's an aria, and in the case of *Inadmissible Evidence* a two-and-a-half-hour mad scene," noted *Variety*.)

The film of the aria/play, directed by Tony Page—who had handled similar duties on both sides of the Atlantic—exists primarily as a permanent record of Williamson's harrowingly pathetic performance as 39-year-old solicitor Bill Maitland, hopelessly entangled in the soul-sapping tendrils of mid-life crisis. Tracing one particularly eventful and emblematic day in the midst of his turmoil, the film tracks Maitland from his home in blandly affluent suburbia to his office in central London, only a few tantalising yards from Carnaby Street and the Swinging London from which he feels utterly excluded. In between stints at work trading barbs with his colleagues— Peter Sallis delivers a pitch-perfect masterclass in underplaying as his weary underling Hudson—he trudges the thoroughfares like an ashen-faced zombie, stewing in his disgruntlement. A spiritual half-cousin of Alfred Hitchcock's homicidal man-about-town Bob Rusk from *Frenzy* (1972), Maitland hovers on the edge of doing real harm to others—and/or himself.

But despite his increasingly pasty-faced, glassy-eyed demeanour and instinctive readiness with verbal lacerations—a lawyer trained in rhetoric and oratory, he exceeds even Osborne's previous anti-hero Jimmy Porter in the sharpness of his tongue—Maitland truly is catnip for the ladies. The attentions of attractive females do little to assuage his inner tumult, however, his adulterous adventures exacerbating feelings of guilt that manifest themselves in Kafkaesque dreams and hallucinations.

A miasmically seedy of a life in seemingly terminal disarray, *Inadmissible Evidence* refuses to let its protagonist off the hook—or, indeed, its audience. Osborne depicts and eviscerates middle-class pretensions and bourgeois conventions with hawk-eared accuracy—in a crucial, extended late sequence, he captures pseudo-bohemian dinner-party chatter with the skill of a supreme satirist (the guests at this gathering include future British soap eminences June Brown and John Savident.) Also eye-catching in the supporting cast: Richardson's Free Cinema colleague Lindsay Anderson—fresh from directing Woodfall's *The White Bus*—who makes a striking impression as a sardonic barrister in what would regrettably be his last big-screen acting gig before the Oscar-crowned *Chariots of Fire* (1981).