

Chapter 1 : The cinema of John Sayles : lone star (Book,) [blog.quintoapp.com]

Character and dialogue are the driving forces in writer-director John Sayles' movies. In Passion Fish, Sayles delivers a quality screenplay, and Mary McDonnell and Alfre Woodard do his script justice with some of the most accomplished work of their careers.

The War on Coal: The film details the events leading up to Battle of Matewan alternatively known as the Matewan Massacre in West Virginia, which pitted striking coal miners against invading gun-thugs hired by the Stone Mountain Coal Company. When Sayles, one of the leading voices in the American independent cinema movement, came onto the scene with *The Return of the Secaucus 7*, he did so with a fully developed vision, one that relied on large ensemble casts manned by a repertory company of regular players and centered on stories with a socio-political bent. The story focuses on the efforts of Joe Kenehan a remarkably assured Chris Cooper, making his film debut, a pacifist and communist organizer sent by the United Mine Workers of America to help the residents of the mining town of Matewan to unionize. In order to do so, he must not only convince them not to resort to violence, even as the Company targets them with ratcheting economic and physical harassment, but also to team up with black and Italian miners who have been brought in as scabs. Through his upstanding moral example, Kenehan is almost able to achieve his goals; but in the end, the clarion call of retribution proves too strong, and the long struggle for justice culminates in bloodshed and tragedy. While Sayles takes a clear-eyed position on the futility of violence, he does not try to draw any moral equivalence between the striking miners and those that do the bidding of the Coal Company. The lines here are clear: The miners, despite their initial racial and ethnic prejudices which they do eventually overcome in the name of worker solidarity, are fighting for what is right, while the Coal Company and its muscle are fighting for bottomless greed. In making such a clear delineation without spilling into agitprop, Sayles is helped by his cast. Mary McDonnell, who would go on to become a Sayles regular before eventually landing her most iconic role as the leader of Earth in the remake of *Battlestar Galactica*, also makes one of her earliest appearances as the widowed, hardscrabble mother of Danny and nascent love interest for Kenehan. The cast is rounded out by great supporting players including Bob Gunton as a weaselly Company spy and saboteur, Ken Jenkins as the de-facto leader of the white strikers, Josh Mostel as a deceptively brave town Mayor, and James Earl Jones as Few Clothes, the leader of the black miners. As good as everyone is under the tight direction of Sayles and the ashen, period- evocative cinematography of the legendary Haskell Wexler, there are three cast members who stand out and, in so doing, help to give the film a sense of epic scale: In Hickey and Briggs, Matewan distinguishes itself from other historical dramas by introducing two of the slimiest, most intensely hateful villains imaginable. Tigh as Hickey is especially captivating, his satanic bearing making every scene he appears in electric with the sense of danger. When we first meet him paying an ominous midnight visit to the newly arrived Kenehan, we quickly peg him as a threat, before he surprises us by revealing himself to be fully committed to the cause of his fellow townfolk, even in the face of great personal peril. In this regard, Sayles reveals his greatest strength as a storyteller. This alone would make *Matewan* worthy of proper rediscovery I can think of few modern films as deserving of the Criterion Collection treatment, but it is not the sole reason. Thirty years removed from its release date and almost from the events it depicts, *Matewan* plays as an elegy not only for the people and place that it portrays, but the very notion of their struggle on behalf of a collective good. Kenehan, crestfallen, says that he only came to Matewan to help. First people come here to help us with some money. Next we know, we got no land. Now you come here to help us bring in the new day. We had about as much help as we can stand.

The Cinema of John Sayles: Lone Star, by Mark Bould A long overdue study of a rare example of a radical film director who is also unashamedly populist. Appreciating the Anarchists' Convention.

It might not be New York City, but we do all right. You can even get your legs waxed. Often described as the father of American independent filmmaking, the director has a feeling for American regional realities that is rare in American cinema. The son of schoolteachers, Sayles was educated at Williams College, Massachusetts, majoring in psychology and graduating in 1971. Whilst it would be simplistic to call his work educational, the veracity and seriousness of his films invariably leaves the spectator with a wider, more comprehensive outlook. Before filmmaking, he worked in a range of environments as meat packer, construction worker, nursing home orderly, factory worker and stage actor at the Eastern Slope Playhouse in New Hampshire until 1975. Commentator Andrew Light wrote: Before turning to fiction, then later screenwriting and filmmaking, Sayles worked in factories and hospitals in the rust belt. He was not a film school graduate, and he was steeped neither in the techniques of the trade nor in the theoretical commentary on it. Aside from writing, directing and editing his films, Sayles can be spotted in minor roles in his own *Lianna*, *Matewan* and *City of Hope*. What some critics have described as a novelistic quality in his films has worked for and against Sayles. Whilst his extended portraits of regional communities are densely woven, there is talk of subplots remaining undeveloped, potentials lying dormant. Sayles likes to say that he was catapulted from total obscurity to relative obscurity, a quip borne out by a trajectory that has taken him from the genre grindhouse to niche arthouse respectability. These included the late night favourite *Piranha* and *Battle Beyond the Stars*, of which Sayles reported: Screenwriting fees enabled him to set up his first feature. The aesthetic pragmatism and broad human canvas became a trademark of the method. Sayles never allows the camera to become a character. As Sayles has observed: As the director himself has said: It has the intimacy and closure of a turn on the dance floor with an attractive, unlikely stranger. The tension between the American Dream and the unlikely particulars of actual American lives is a recurring theme. Whilst *Sheik*, like many Italian boys, aspires to be Sinatra but finds himself miming for the blue rinse set, Jill is on the way to finding herself as herself, a mission thrust upon Sayles women from *Lianna* to Marly in *Sunshine State*. Not entirely successful in its attempt to meld the solutions of exploitation cinema with a political statement, nevertheless *The Brother from Another Planet* remains a strange and haunting curio. On the surface a barroom anecdote about a black extra-terrestrial landing in Harlem, making good in a video arcade and smashing a drug ring, Sayles uses this allegorical premise to make astute observations about the African-American condition in the urban northeast. This propensity for mining the reality of non-Anglo lives through the collisions of everyday difference is unique among white American directors. In friction between miners and company strike breakers resulted in bloodshed in the West Virginia town of *Matewan*. Relating a fireside tale from the annals of vintage labour history, *Matewan* nevertheless introduces complexities that seem more contemporary. Notice how the strike camp is depicted at one point in the mingling of Appalachian, African-American and Italian recreational music. At first argumentative, an Italian and an Anglo mother in neighbouring tents eventually bond over the welfare of their children. In the World Series, the biggest event in pro-baseball, was thrown by the machinations of big business and the syndicate. As Sayles told *Rolling Stone* at the time: People began realizing that everybody "including our blue-eyed boys playing pure, white games" was out for a buck and that it was time to get more realistic. Traditionally, American films trade in dynamic individual ambition and socially sanctioned acclaim. *Passion Fish* trades in the everyday despair that people with sharply delimited expectations face each moment of their lives. Shifting focus to the Texas-Mexico border country, *Lone Star* also has a feeling for the points at which societies and their histories interface and mingle. Because miscegenation is so ubiquitous, it is difficult to police. As his human patchwork evolves, Sayles throws an uncompromising spotlight on a region which, more than any other in American history, has thrived on a deceptively singular legend. But the shift south of the border was an interesting development. The preoccupation with the regional and personal consequences of the transnational flow of money and labour is a

favourite theme of Sayles. As he has said: But when you go to America, its sights, sounds and smells make you realise that it is a foreign country, after all. Pitting Americans themselves up against unexpected environments, Sayles manages to recreate something approaching an exotic quality in his own country. Set in Alaska, the haunting *Limbo* made for a dark turn to the usual canvassing of regional flavours. As he did in *City of Hope*, Sayles shoots one conversation before smoothly pulling back to eavesdrop on another. But there is a less inviting *Great Outdoors*. The emotional consequences of contemporary dislocation have been nicely analogised in the opening credits in which fish swim to avoid each other. Daughter Noelle is later seen assiduously avoiding contact in a school corridor. As John Wrathall commented in his *Sight and Sound* review, the newer film is just as unresolved yet its structure rebels against the teachings of industry screenwriting manuals that counsel rigorous trajectories and definitive closure. As Bush fils announces the aim of conquering fresh frontiers in space, the commercialisation of the Florida coastline becomes all the more resonant. Unable to surmount their longing and their impatience with the bureaucracy and economic contingency south of the border, the tension between American individualism and overarching socioeconomic conditions is vividly explored. At the time, Sayles told the *Rocky Mountain News*: But it is easy to see how the variegated work of John Sayles can inspire such an allusion.

Chapter 3 : John Sayles on the 12 films that most influenced his career / The Dissolve

John Sayles is an inspiration to independent filmmakers in America and beyond, both for his engaged political filmmaking and as living proof that directors can survive and thrive without the need for mainstream financing.

John Sayles, age 63, is one of the founding fathers of modern American independent cinema. His latest film, *Go For Sisters*, is a typically gracious, sympathetic, incisive character piece about two former high-school friends who meet again in adulthood as parole officer and parolee. The film opened in New York on November 8, with a national release to follow. How aware of any of this were you when you were 5? Basically, I liked Westerns and cartoons when I was 5. *Magoo* or *Heckle And Jeckle* cartoon before it was really dark enough, and it was hard to see. I would fall asleep. *The Treasure Of The Sierra Madre* is not quite a Western, although there are horses and mules and prospectors and things in it. I liked dark stuff—I liked the look of film noir, and the cinematography, without analyzing it at all. They put you into the movie, rather than being more like a TV show, or having a kind of proscenium. *The Treasure Of The Sierra Madre*, one of the things that impressed me at 5 was just the fact that they really had to work so hard for the gold. How much of that did you follow as a child? Which is the plot of a lot of bank-robbery movies: The heist goes very well, and then the guys start to distrust each other, right up to *Goodfellas*. *The Third Man* Sayles: That whole movie is really like a great rock song where there is not a note out of place. A couple things impress me: And he turns out to be Orson Welles, who brought that swagger, that humor and size to it. No way she would do that. I think the look, that black-and-white post-war film noir look, is really important in the movies I make. *Ace In The Hole* Sayles: I really reacted to the tawdriness of it, which you rarely really saw done well at the time. And his father was the same way. *Kirk Douglas* could play a hero, but very often, he played a charismatic heel. Film noir is a claustrophobic genre. You mentioned early on being drawn to darkness in film, and your list for this piece is all pretty conceptually dark. Did your relationship to this kind of cynicism change around this point, when you were hitting your teenage years? As I said, I was mostly interested in Westerns and cartoons as a kid. I loved the color, and my favorite shot in all of movies is horses crossing water, and many of those movies start with horses crossing water. There were a few dark Westerns that I liked. But I think when I was younger, if I was going to watch a black-and-white movie, generally it had to have that kind of dramatic style. Now, the movies I make are generally about people in untenable positions. This is a brilliant film. It starts with a story told by a guy in this traveling carnival—I used a technique like this in *The Secret Of Roan Inish*. And then that ends, and the characters who were in that little metaphorical sequence become very minor characters you only really see in the background for the rest of the movie. And some of it is the naked acting in it—American movies had this tendency to use a big score, with violins, to tell you what you were going to feel. Bergman uses music, but never for that reason. So you would get these very, very strong emotional scenes with the camera very close to the actors. At what point do you think you transitioned from watching movies for entertainment to this kind of analysis, and mining techniques for your own career? When I was a senior in high school, I started paying attention to who directed the movie. Even if the movie sucked, I liked looking at her. Or a *Sophia Loren* movie, I had a big crush on her, too. Choices were made here. I started paying attention to that in high school. *Touch Of Evil* Sayles: That was a movie that again really impressed me with tone. You said drive-ins were important to you as a kid, and films in class in college. How did you first encounter *Touch Of Evil*? I saw it on *The Late Show*. So you might start watching a movie at midnight, and it might not end until 2: And then the stations might cut different scenes, or it might be in a different format. There were movies, like *King Kong*, that I really liked, and might have seen five times over a year period. I grew up in Schenectady, New York, and there was an art theater that was too far away. I remember having this experience—my brother worked for a program called ABC in his freshman year of college. A bunch of them came up to where my father lived one night, and it was like, seven black kids and one poor white kid from West Virginia. The movie on TV that night was *Two Women*, and at the end of it, all these tough kids were crying. *The Magnificent Seven* Sayles: And it had all of these guys who eventually became iconic: What could have done this? That then leads up to the confrontation with the army, where the bazooka shells bounce off the

thing. Gunfight Westerns have a very, very classic chronological structure of increasing confrontations that all lead to the final shootout. Each of the main characters have their own agenda. Did filmmaking change film-watching for you? Yeah, I think it did. Eventuallyâ€”and this happens to movie critic, tooâ€”the more movies you see, the harder you are to impress or surprise. Whereas a good movie will still just grab me. Once again, a beautiful structure, and a beautiful use of space. He really thinks about the size of the screen. But the psychology of the characters is very Japanese. Something about the characters really grabbed me. A lot of good thrillers are really just machines. You have a visceral experience, but not an emotional one. All my movies are like thatâ€”Two Women is also like that. The Organizer Sayles: I grew up in a union town, so I was always aware of working people trying to get their rights. This film is very Italian, and very human. The labor organizer Marcello Mastroianni plays is kind of a loser: I really responded to that. If you first saw it earlier in life, was there a particular reason it came back for you at age 45? They may instruct you, but they may also just tell you who you are. They have their own problems. Unions are a fragile thing. I was blown away by what he did visually with the movie. He does some great stuff with parallels between animals and people. He really thought through the technology of the time. The style of fighting tells you something about the people who are doing it. What did this movie particularly mean to you at age 50? There are interesting questions: How do directors stamp their work? Certainly Polanski was into some weird, kinky shit, and that shows up in the movie. Eventually, if people get to make a bunch of movies you kind of get their worldview. That movie really grabs the strange world kids can live in, their own imaginative world. And she just looks at it: The stakes are totally different. Very few movies rarely capture that moment in childhood when kids learn all the basic stuff: If people are acting this way, what could possibly be going through their heads? Is it before Freud? Is it before Capitalism? These things changed everything about how people thought about themselves.

Chapter 4 : The Cinema of John Sayles : Mark Bould :

Through discussion of films such as 'Return of the Secaucus 7', 'The Brother from Another Planet' 'Matewan' and 'Sunshine State', this study uncovers themes of racial and sexual otherness, capitalist excess and the erosion of community in the work of John Sayles.

Chapter 5 : John Sayles - IMDb

In a scene in Matewan, John Sayles's brilliant film about the struggle for unionisation in a West Virginia mining town in the s, an argument erupts that is still relevant today.

Chapter 6 : The War on Coal: John Sayles' Matewan at 30 - CrookedMarquee

John Sayles, Thinking in Pictures: The Making of the Movie Matewan, Da Capo, Gavin Smith, (ed.), Sayles on Sayles, Faber and Faber, In addition, there are valuable interviews and articles to be found in issues of Cineaste, CineAction!

Chapter 7 : Movies Directed by John Sayles: Best to Worst

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Chapter 8 : John Sayles - Wikipedia

John Thomas Sayles (born September 28,) is an American independent film director, screenwriter, editor, actor and novelist. He has twice been nominated for the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay, for Passion Fish () and Lone Star ().

Chapter 9 : John Sayles - Rotten Tomatoes

*Character and dialogue are the driving forces in writer-director John Sayles' movies. In *Passion Fish*, Sayles delivers a quality screenplay, and *Mary McDonnell Cinema of the World* A comprehensive library of blog.quintoapp.com, Classic, Experimental and rare movies from all over the world.*