

Terror in a Turnus Town: Vergil's Wild West, and Ours

Joseph H. Lewis' *Terror in a Texas Town* (1958) is an unpretentious B-Western about a farmer's efforts to avenge the deaths of his father and friends at the hands of a ruthless oil baron and his minions, while at the same time trying to defend his land from the depredations of this group. The climax of this film features a unique showdown between the hero and the main hired gun- a duel which seems, perhaps more deliberately than accidentally, to have been inspired in part by the end of the *Aeneid*.

However, the parallels between *Terror in a Texas Town* and the *Aeneid* go well beyond this final encounter. I will show how the main characters in this film correspond to major figures in the *Aeneid*, and how the theme of manifest destiny- both explicit and unspoken- runs through both- in short, how *Terror in a Texas Town* limns the long and controversial struggle of these newcomers in the American West to overcome and dominate a hostile land, just as Vergil devotes the second half of his epic poem to the travails of the long-suffering Trojans to successfully establish a new home for themselves in Italy.