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# Terror in a Texas Town

USA 1958. Dir: Joseph H. Lewis. Prod: Frank Seltzer. Script: Ben L. Perry. Photo: Ray Rennahan. Ed: Frank Sullivan, Stefan Arsten. Music: Gerald Fried. Cast: Sterling Hayden, Sebastian Cabot, Ned Young, Victor Millan, Carol Kelly. 80 mins.

Lewis' last feature film appropriately returns to the genre with which his career more or less began. But if much of his earliest work was in a minor sub-species of the Western, *Terror in a Texas Town* has just about freed itself of any of the conventional forms and disciplines. In a way, it is a denial of the genre, stretching and distending the latter's most familiar features in pursuit of its own peculiar tropes.

The basic familiarity is the story. Land baron Sebastian Cabot (a monument to epicurean excess) discovers oil in a fertile pocket of the West, and brings in a black-clad gunfighter to make 'compulsory' purchases from the valley's small farmers. Sterling Hayden turns up as a Scandinavian emigrant, an ex-seaman come to join his father in "God's own free country", only to find his father dead and a harpoon rather than a farm his only heritage.

From there, Lewis proceeds to play a kind of ping-pong between what we expect and what we see. The elaborate rococo quality of the camerawork plays against the spareness of plot and production values, and similarly baroque emotional/sexual tensions. — Richard Combs.

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