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Delinquent

Written and directed
by Peter Hall

The protagonist of *Delinquent* is not your standard streetwise, swaggering, sexy teen reprobate. Rather, he's a small-town, mixed-up, abused introvert whose potential for violent crime exists primarily within his own mind. The title's suggestion of a lurid teen-exploitation flick seems intentionally ironic. Indeed, everything about *Delinquent* challenges preconceptions, not just about genre, but also about adolescent behavior and psychology.

Set in an upstate New York hamlet called Cold Mills, *Delinquent* tells the story of Tim (the spot-on Desmond Devenish), a 15-year-old boy whose soul is up for grabs. Tim's life has been upside down since his mother killed herself a year ago, leaving Tim to discover the corpse. His father, Ben (a cartoonish Jeff Paul), lost his job and house and moved himself and Tim into a trailer in a strange new town, where he now works as a cop.

Seeking refuge from his father's alcohol-fueled temper, Tim sneaks into an unoccupied house. His imagination stirs as he explores the personal effects of Tracy (Shawn Batten), a boarding-school girl his age whose family keeps the place as a summer home. Differences in sex and class aside, Tracy appears to be going through a similar process of painful self-discovery, as evidenced by a videotape implying an affair with one of her teachers.

It's the feminine sphere—the artifacts that Tracy has left behind and the concern of a former English teacher who once saw promise in Tim—that offers him some small hope of redemption. While juvenile-delinquent movies from *Rebel Without a Cause* to *Boyz n the Hood* blame teenage sociopathy on absent or insufficiently masculine fathers, *Delinquent* indicts hypermasculinity. Away from his mother or the English teacher, Tim's only role models are his jock friend Eddie and his authoritarian, abusive dad who, when he sees Tim reading Tracy's copy of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, rips it to shreds.

Tim, Tracy, and Ben eventually do cross paths, but the way their climactic confrontation plays out defies expectations yet seems devastatingly apt. Writer-director-producer Peter Hall, who apparently fashioned the film from incidents in his own troubled childhood upstate, presents a debut feature that, while self-assured and sure-handed, is as raw, restless, contemplative, and haunting as its antihero.

—GARY SUSMAN

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