

Entertainment Today
Friday, September 12, 1997

Delinquent

by Eric Lipton

Talk about teen angst. In this potent, affecting film debut by writer-director-producer Peter Hall, an exploration is launched into the troubled psyche of 15-year-old Tim (newcomer Desmond Devenish), a motherless, trailer-relegated youth with a relentlessly abusive father. Though we've seen various young adolescent issues addressed in recent years with movies like *Kids*, *Welcome to the Dollhouse*, and *Ripe*, *Delinquent* addresses the harsh reality of *Kids*, the longing for opposite-sex acceptance of *Dollhouse* and the Greek-scale tragedy of *Ripe* in one tense, 84-minute package. *Clashes* this ain't.

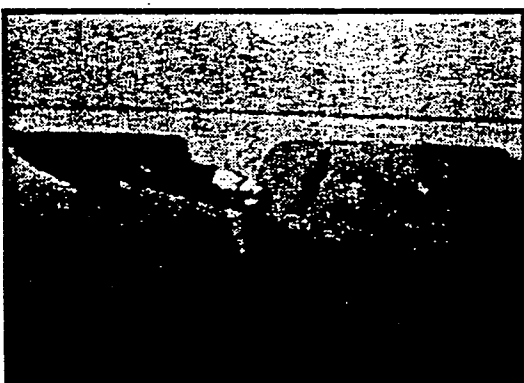
Set in rural upstate New York—a thoroughly depressing environment to begin with—this tale tracks the hostile environment of our protagonist Tim, an intelligent kid gone bad due to extreme life changes. Stressed out over the suicide of his mother just months before, and struck living in a run-down trailer with his alcoholic cop father Ben (an thoroughly evil Jeff Paul), Tim, now flunking school, spends his spare time masturbating to *Playboy* lingerie issues and ducking the smacks of dear ol' dad. When an especially ugly confronta-

tion with Ben impels him to flee through the woods one afternoon, Tim stumbles upon the summer home of the wealthy Delors family, which he breaks into out of boredom. Besides a handgun, he finds the room of Tracy, a comely teenage girl with plenty of the underwear Tim fetishizes in her drawer, as well as a copy of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. In his new refuge, Tim finally has an escape to a preferable, though vicarious home situation. The intrigue increases as he comes across a fascinating videotape of Tracy at boarding school, talking to a friend about some anticipated sexual exploits with one of her professors. Progressively becoming more obsessed with the idea of Tracy and him together, and anxious to rid his father from his life once and for all, Tim's amoric quickly develops into a displaced Oedipus complex, as he projects feelings for his dead mother onto this very real, though absent teenage girl. And despite the efforts of his former English teacher Mrs. Richman to help Tim with his studies and fill Tim's primary female relationship void somewhat, he's irrevocably bent on a future without his father and with Tracy. Mix in the firearm, Tracy's faithful return to the house and a shaky plan by Tim to entice his old man into some lethal circumstances, and you have one hell of a volatile situa-

tion.

Perhaps what will strike you most about *Delinquent* is its raw, uncompromising performances—Devenish, for one, is a natural, effectively conveying every drop of pathos in his facial expressions as well as his subdued line delivery. Paul, as Ben, reminds one of a thinner, younger Ray Liotta, and exudes a menacing intensity befitting that actor here. Also memorable is Batten, portraying our emotionally crumbling teen heroine. *Delinquent*, for all its tragedy and drama, ultimately communicates a palpable (and needed) sense of hope. And with all due respect to those groundbreaking films, that's more than *Kids* or *Welcome to the Dollhouse* could offer.

(Rice Arts, not rated, starts Friday, limited)



Look out, *Delinquent* with guns!