

Welcome to the Dollhouse

US : 1996 : dir. Todd Solondz : 87 min
 prod: Todd Solondz : scr: Todd Solondz : dir.ph.:
[Heather Matarazzo](#); [Brendan Sexton Jr](#); [Daria Kalnina](#)
 Matthew Faber; Angela Pietropinto; Eric Mabius; Victoria Davis; Christina Brucato;
 Christina Vidal; Siri Howard

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	KBytes	Ω □ € Z ♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Heather Matarazzo

Source: Radio Times

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
 2001 review:

"The pain of puberty has never been portrayed so unflinchingly; smart-but-ordinary Matarazzo has to deal with her incredibly un-nurturing suburban family (which dotes on her "adorable" younger sister), and worse, the pranks and sexual threats of virtually her entire junior high school. Amid this dire lack of support and warmth is a heroine of enormous pluck and cunning. While viewer may wince as numerous unpleasant situations play out, there is also terrific satire (and guffaws) as life in the Seventh-Grade-From-Hell is depicted with spot-on clarity. Strong performances; sharply scripted by the director. ***½ "

Radio Times reviews:

"Before he made his name with the controversial **"HAPPINESS"** (1998), Todd Solondz also raised a few eyebrows with this truthful look at the nightmares of growing up. Eleven-year old New Jersey misfit Dawn Wiener (a superb performance from young Heather Matarazzo) has all the problems of an average schoolgirl, and more. Thanks to Solondz's original ideas, no-holds-barred script and determination never to stray into sentimentality, this is a fascinating and ironic look at teenage life. Contains violence and swearing. **** "

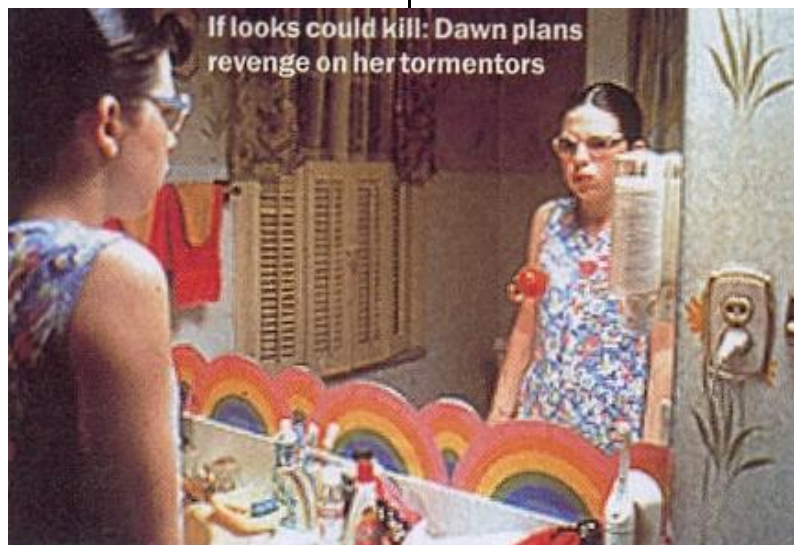
"Eleven-year old misfit Dawn is ignored by her family and routinely humiliated by her classmates. A crush on her brother's friend Steve and friendship with delinquent Brandon provide some solace, but a crisis looms when Dawn's spoilt younger sister Missy disappears. **** "

"One of the most interesting and widely discussed films of the past two years has been Todd Solondz's **"HAPPINESS"**, in which he tracked the interlocking lives of some manifestly unhappy New Jersey characters. The template can be found virtually fully formed in **"WELCOME TO THE DOLL-HOUSE"**, which he also wrote and produced. It's as if the main family in **"HAPPINESS"** are seen here in embryonic form, unsparingly portrayed as selfish and cruel..

Struggling between a nerdish older brother and a preferred younger sister, Dawn Wiener (Heather Matarazzo) is uncomfortable in

herself, her family and her school, where she's

Source: *Radio Times*



tormented by her peers. She forms an unlikely

alliance with one of her persecutors (Brendan Sexton Jr) but is infatuated by Steve, the singer in her brother's spectacularly bad band, the Quadratics.

My favourite scene is the celebration for Dawn's parents' 20th wedding anniversary. Serenaded inanely by the Quadratics, the gruesome parents ignore Dawn and she wanders off to have her romantic dreams with Steve crushed. Then for good measure, and this is a very telling touch, the family sit down to watch it all again on camcorder. Like Solondz himself, the scene is one part cruelty to two parts jet black comedy.

Solondz is a director who seems happy to be here for the nasty things in life. In contrast to the standard depiction of the US family – ideally wholesome or whimsically offbeat – Solondz picks off its wings and shows it as dysfunctional and dreadful. His style amplifies this by lingering on painful scenes with an unflinching detachment. **"WELCOME TO THE DOLLHOUSE"** also boasts an outstanding performance by Matarazzo as Dawn. The film is not to everyone's taste perhaps, but it's a taste that's well worth acquiring.

Pub fact: after his debut feature **"FEAR, ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION"** flopped miserably, Solondz gave up film-making and taught English to Russian immigrants."

- Jonathan Ross

No further information currently available. Interesting, and certainly worth a look. We're bombarded with so much saccharine fodder from the States to reinforce the "family values" political lobby that a strong corrective is needed. The family, quite naturally, is the breeding ground of society's ills just as much as its strengths, and American consumer culture has made its own poisonous input to the social codes of adolescence, and to family politics in general. But one does wonder, in commercial terms, where the market would be for such a Cassandra-like indictment of these core myths and values. If we want to see the dysfunctional family in full cry, after all, we merely have to step outdoors or tune into the nearest soap or *wash-your-dirty-linen-on-air* chatshow.

See subject index under **BOY MEETS GIRL, BULLYING** and **CRUELTY / NEGLECT / MALTREATMENT**.