

Hypocrisy Imbues Tale of 'Aileen Wuornos'

John Petrakis

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"If you lie down with dogs, you come up with fleas," the old saying goes, and never has this maxim held more truth, or warning, than in the sordid case of "Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer," the new documentary by British filmmaker Nick Broomfield.

Wuornos was a rough-and-tumble Florida prostitute who in 1989-1990 turned a few fancy tricks, and as a result, seven of her "clients" turned up dead. (The police figured it was a woman, because the men were all shot in the chest. It seems that male serial killers tend to shoot their victims in the head.)

The authorities had plenty of clues, and even a few witnesses, and they eventually were able to track Wuornos down and arrest her. She was quickly sentenced to six life sentences, but it was what happened to her behind bars that piqued Broomfield's cinematic interest.

First, there is the shady saga of Tyria Moore, Wuornos's lesbian lover. Had she been in on the murders? If so, why wasn't she also arrested? Could it be that she had struck a deal with local police to share profits in the selling of the bloody tale? Then there's Arlene Pralle, the meek and mild horse farmer and bible-beater, who decided to "adopt" Wuornos (who is only six years her junior) because she sensed a "kinship" with the killer by looking in her eyes (on TV, of course).

Finally, there is Steven Glazer, the bearded, pot-smoking, ex-musician attorney, whom Wuornos hired after seeing his commercial on television. Together with Pralle, he convinced Wuornos to plead guilty to all the murders so she could "right herself with God." As a result, they were in essence dusting off the hot seat-or "Old Sparky," as one of the victim's relatives calls it-for Wuornos, not to mention setting themselves up for a big payday down the line.

Director Broomfield, who has done much more accomplished work in the past ("Soldier Girls," "Monster in a Box") seems to be suggesting, in this slightly disjointed documentary, that Wuornos is some sort of victim of the American judicial system. After all, lesbians tend to get harsher prison sentences, and prostitutes are always vulnerable to rape on the job. (Wuornos' original defense was "self-defense," each and every time.) And Broomfield is not alone in this concern. Organizations such as the "Aileen Wuornos Defense Committee" and the "Coalition to Free Aileen Wuornos" have sprung up around the country.

But what really bugs Broomfield is the constant ringing of cash registers in and around this case. He seems genuinely offended by the rampant commercialism that surrounds big-time crime in the U.S. At one point, he stamps his foot in anger and, abandoning his role as objective observer, accuses Arlene Pralle of being "mercenary." (It seems Nick didn't get his money's worth after paying Pralle and Glazer \$10,000 for what they knew about Wuornos.)

By the end of this unpleasant Southern sojourn, we don't care about any of them. Not the killer, the partner, the mother, the cops, the lawyer, or even the faceless victims. They all seem equally slimy, and that includes Broomfield himself. It appears he had hoped to slip into town, grab a lurid story, pass judgment . . . and hop a plane back to England. Instead, he found out that the smell of mass murder may be strong, but the stench of hypocrisy can be even stronger.

"AILEEN WUORNOS: THE SELLING OF A SERIAL KILLER"

A Strand release of a film by Nick Broomfield; opens Friday at the Music Box Theatre. Running time: 1:27. Not rated by the MPAA. Strong language, violent themes.

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