

## Aileen Portrait of a Serial Killer



**Narrative in Practice**  
**Goldsmiths MA Screen Documentary Essay**  
*Adrienne Grierson 2009*



*“A raped woman got executed and was used for books and movies and shit, ladder climbs for elections and everything else”*

Aileen Wournos, Oct 8 1992 (one day before her execution)

A documentary in cinema verite style, with the filmmaker Nick Broomfield as soundman and protagonist whose face and voice are seen and heard in this reflexive participatory film about Aileen Wournos the hitchhiking prostitute who murdered seven men in Florida over a one-year period.

Nick Broomfield started filming her again when he was subpoenaed to appear in court to determine the validity Aileen's initial trial and the aptitude of her first lawyer - Steve Legal, whose ineptitude came to light in Nick Broomfield's first film, *Aileen, the Selling of a Serial Killer*. It was this film's footage that was being called into question in court.

Back and forth between the original film of Aileen's trial and conviction to the current courtroom hearings, we see there are now cross-purposes being played out. Whilst her current attorney tries to rescue her from the death penalty, Aileen is deliberately sabotaging his efforts, saying she 'wants to set the record straight' that she was a cold-blooded killer who murdered for money, that she lied all along and all the murders were premeditated with robbery as a motive.

The film sets out to display that Aileen Wournos was a severely abused child who was abandoned, neglected, and tortured by all those who were supposed to nurture and protect her; who was mentally ill and undeserving of the death sentence, showing how a tragic childhood impaired Aileen and rendered her damaged and unable to make a constructive life for herself. It is also a damning indictment of the US judicial system, where in 1991 the law stated it was, 'not unconstitutional to execute the mentally impaired'.

## **Sequence Breakdown**

54:21

### **Nick goes to visit Aileen in prison**

Nick walks into the prison in Florida housing Aileen. May 2002

Nick's voiceover states that it is actually pretty hard to help Aileen as she doesn't trust anyone and wants to fire her lawyer if he fights the execution.

She wants to set the record straight about her childhood.

He is interviewing her through glass partition and he asks what it's like, does she have friends, what is her day like.

Did Richard Mallory abuse you?

She does not want to talk about it; she still insists that the police wanted her to kill for books and movies. She defends her parents as being clean and decent.

What was it like living in cars in snow?

Living hell – she said she had to go to Florida to stop freezing.

If she came from a family that was supportive she says she would have been an outstanding citizen.

Says she has known no happiness.

Straight to camera "Get that fucking warrant signed"

Thinks camera is off. Camera is on Nick.

She admits that it was self-defence.

As Nick leaves, Aileen says "I love you so much man, take care of yourself".

1:05:58

### ***Jeb Bush on the news***

Nick tells us it is six months later.

We see the new bulletins that Jeb Bush has signed the warrant and are told by Nick that he is up for re-election on a 'law and order pro death penalty ticket'. Aileen's execution has been set for October 9<sup>th</sup> - one month before the elections.

1:06:45

**Nick goes to visit Diane Wournos in Michigan**

On Oct 6<sup>th</sup>, three days before her execution, Nick sets off to Michigan to see Aileen's mother, Dianne Wournos, who she has not seen for 25 years. Very rainy. He interviews her in her house.

She talks about how Aileen was a breach birth; denies knowing about Aileen sleeping in the woods.

She wants to know the exact date of the execution and says she will rest better and said she wants Aileen's forgiveness.

1:10:36

**Nick goes to visit Dawn in Florida**

October 7<sup>th</sup> - 2 days before execution. Her best and only friend from her childhood in Michigan, Dawn is helping make all the funeral arrangements. She is staying in a motel and interviewed in her room.

What does Aileen want to wear when she is buried?

1:11:50

***Jeb Bush on the news***

Aileen's lawyer tries to stop the execution and we see Jeb Bush on the news saying that there is a stay until three psychiatrists analyse her. Continuing with news footage and Nick's voiceover we are told that the stay is lifted, that she has been examined and that it will go ahead.

1:12:31

**Nick goes to visit Aileen in Florida State Prison for a final interview**

October 8<sup>th</sup> - one day before execution. Aileen has given up a mass press conference and asks for Nick to come and do a last interview. Ropes divide them, she is in shackles. Nick's voiceover says that the death penalty is no deterrent and that states without it have lower murder rates.

He asks how will it be, is she ready? She is insisting that the police knew she had killed Richard Mallory and let her keep killing, She talks about how they used sonic pressure on her head.

He asks if she is OK now. She is fine, God will be there, it will be like Star Trek and she might re-colonise to another planet.

She says she saved others from being raped and killed. Nick goes back to the question of whether it was self-defence.

She refuses to say. When he says he met with her mother, Aileen goes ballistic and calls her a whore. She will not forgive her.

Her only concerns are about cops “letting” her kill.

He still confronts her about the fact she killed seven people. But she is consumed with the fact that her life was sabotaged by the police and sold for movies and compared herself to Jesus.

She cuts the interview as she says they are killing a raped woman. She gives the finger.

Nick calls out “I am sorry”.

1:22:45

### **Nick meets Dawn Botkins in his car outside the prison**

Nick driving in the night rain. Dawn gets in the car outside the prison after sharing a last meal of Kentucky Fried Chicken with Dawn on a \$20 budget and explains that Aileen was not giving Nick the finger, that she is sorry if he thought that and she is worried that someone will stop her execution.

1:24:01

### **Nick goes to the prison compound along with the world’s media for the execution.**

Oct 9<sup>th</sup>: early morning in the dark, driving outside the prison in the mist. We see the lights of the prison and then the Media Compound comes into view with dozens of TV stations and their dishes on top of the vans.

1:24:36

***News Bulletin***

“Time is ticking away for the serial killer.” Her date with death is 90 minutes away. We see the chamber and a description of what will occur.

Sterling Ivey, Department of Corrections spokesperson, talking to the media, gives a rundown of Aileen’s morning.

Nick walks through the compound in morning light and says that Aileen did not confess all to a priest but remained angry and defiant until the very end.

He is interviewed by a plethora of media representatives all at once.

He says they are killing a person who has lost her mind, that a mad person is being executed.

Sterling Ivey gives the announcement that Aileen has been killed and reads her farewell. She is going on the Big Mothership.

*Fade to black as Carnival by Natalie Merchant begins.*

*Credits:*

*Aileen requested to be buried with her bible and this song played at her wake.*

*Cut to LS Dawns farm in Michigan as we see Dawn walking towards her house with her back to us.*

“Dawn scattered Aileen’s ashes here at her farm”

Credits and music.

## **Aileen, Portrait of a Serial Killer by Nick Broomfield**

I chose this, the last thirty minutes from *Aileen, Portrait of a Serial Killer* because it affords me the opportunity to explore what is arguably the most gripping and climactic section in the film that documents the final months of the life of 'serial killer' Aileen Wournos. Whilst Nick Broomfield has made many compelling films, recent films before *Aileen* have been called "... unimpressive and increasingly slight and self-centred," [page 215, *New Documentary*]. He takes emotional risks that he has not done before in his relationships with his subjects making *Aileen* arguably his most compassionate and heartfelt film to date. His "... keenness to voice his own opinions on the issues raised by the case and his diminished physical presence in front of Churchill's camera..." [page 215, *New Documentary*] take us on a journey that opens our hearts and minds to a deeper understanding of how Aileen came to be so destructive and the killer of seven men in just one year.

I have decided to explore characters and narration as the narrative techniques used to tell Aileen Wournos' story because of the complex emotional and intellectual issues with which each person is dealing in this dramatic and tragic story. With Nick Broomfield's view as storyteller, we have the opportunity to witness a murderous woman in a different light. His narration is worthy as a separate entity due to the different personas he adopts as filmmaker or narrator – we come to understand and appreciate different and complementary angles that give the film a rich and in depth point of view. His opinionated stance as the film's narrator is a first for him, no doubt fuelled by his experience with Aileen and his pursuit for truth and justice.

Through his portrayal of these characters, the barometers for sanity and security are challenged, including our right to life itself. How our past can dictate our present, how circumstances beyond our control can make or break us, and in the case of Aileen Wournos she is shown to be broken and wounded to the core.

We see her mother Diane who abandoned her, Nick the filmmaker, trying to uncover corruption on her behalf, childhood friend Dawn standing by her, and Jeb Bush, Governor of Florida, a stranger to her and custodian of the judicial system, who has the final say on whether she lives or dies.

As Aileen's life draws to a close, each character reveals a deeper aspect of themselves in light of her impending death. The choices and consequences shown to us are sometimes heartwarming, and alternately terrifying. I was in turn inspired, appalled, outraged and saddened.

It is Nick Broomfield's expert use of narrative about Aileen's last months on earth, how he manages to convey her story in such a tender and expository way while not underplaying the seriousness of her crime by concealing evidence or glossing over facts that I found moving and powerfully compelling.

The excerpt I am analyzing begins with Nick visiting Aileen in prison in Florida.

Aileen wants to set the record straight regarding her childhood as we have just learnt some horrible truths about abuses Aileen was subjected to during her childhood.

“Nick Broomfield has sought to put three things on record, that Wournos believed she killed in self defence, that the abuse she suffered as a child had a direct impact on her later actions and mental health, and as a consequence of her life and time in prison, she was not sane’ [p 216 New Documentary].

He does this by revolving all of his questions for Aileen around these three main points. Whilst Aileen tries to paint a picture-perfect family life, save for the death of her Mother (that was Aileen's fault according to her father) - by her own admission what we see is a broken and abused woman. Her “clean and decent” family was so clean that a bar of soap would be shoved in her mouth if she swore.

We feel pity for the young girl who had to give up her baby at thirteen and was thrown out of her house to live in the woods for two years. Her hands and feet are frostbitten due to the constant exposure to the cold. She holds up her hands for us to see the permanent redness.

The more she talks the more we are led to believe that her abusive past informed her life. Her flirting with Nick, brushing her hair, talking about her clothes, she is communicating sexually with him, the only way she really knows how to communicate with a man and this is all wrapped up with her history. Conversely, this also normalises Aileen. We get the feeling that as inappropriate as it may be in this context, she is human, female, alive - just like the rest of us.

When Aileen talks of her day-to-day life in prison, her reading, writing, and reflecting seem virtuous, peaceful, and painfully sad. When she talks of “getting the tears out”, Nick repeats this statement to emphasise her suffering. He does this again when she states that sleeping outside was “living hell”. These are all techniques Nick uses to have us empathise, sympathise, and support Aileen Wournos.

Her outburst when she shouts straight to the camera that the US Supreme Court needs to sign her death warrant illustrates how much she wants to die. When she thinks the camera is off, Nick asks her if killing Richard Mallory was self defence, he asks it three times as she cannot fully hear him, and this makes us feel that he wants us to know the real truth. She states it was. Mallory’s is the one murder Nick truly believes was self-defence. It is possible that all her other murders were results of ‘snapping’ after the torture inflicted on her by Mallory.

She only wants to die now because she is tired, not because she really believes she is guilty. Even though the other crimes may or may not have been self-defence, deep down she believes she is

innocent of all her crimes. Nick Broomfield shows us she is damaged and crazy and even though she ended up a killer, it was brutality and torture that drove her to murder.

The second scene in this excerpt begins with Aileen in the courtroom, as a news broadcast informs us she will be executed. She looks resigned to her fate. Jeb Bush has signed the death warrant, and we see him say, "... a great majority of Floridians want their governor to do this". Nick's narration tells us "*... he is running on a law and order pro death penalty ticket. Aileen's execution date for October 9 fits in perfectly, a month before these elections*".

Nick's final commentary for this scene plays over images of the execution chamber. "Brad Thomas, Jeb Bush's political advisor is reported as saying, *'We want to become more like Texas. Bring in the witnesses, put them on a gurney and let's rock and roll.'*

Jeb Bush is portrayed as mercenary and cold-hearted with an assistant equally so. We understand that Jeb is capable of colluding to have Aileen killed in order to further his career and by including him in the film as a visual character we have a human representation of the equal and opposing force that is out to destroy Aileen. This creates narrative tension and keeps the characters in balance. The subtext of Jeb's personal agenda in handling Aileen's case - to use it as a means of winning the election - is quite clear.

Next, Nick visits Diane Wournos, Aileen's mother. As he approaches the copper mining town of Calumet, Michigan we get the impression it is a poor and rather desolate place. The driving rain and sinister music add to the affect. Nick narrates, "*We're driving to meet Diane Wournos, Aileen's biological mother. They haven't laid eyes on each other for 25 years.*"

Nick's use of the words "laid eyes on each other" alludes to a sense of loathing that often accompanies that phrase. Had he used 'have not seen each other', it would have been less loaded as a statement.

Here the implication is clear: there is no love lost.

The camera stays fixed on Diane in CU as we watch her unflinching gaze. But first, when she walks in, Diane fixes her seat cushion and there is something unpleasant about knowing that Aileen has no "little cushion" to soften her seat in life, and no Mother.

Diane says she, "... might cry a little" and tells Nick that Aileen was a breach birth. This is transparent in its effort to divert blame away from her and blame Aileen's killing spree on the fact that she came out bottom first and may have been brain damaged. Diane says, "The doctor even called other people to watch it", conjuring up invisible witnesses to prop up her argument. When told that Aileen has alluded to the fact that it might be her childhood that contributed, Diane shows contrived surprise.

By the time Diane denies any knowledge of Aileen sleeping in the woods for two years, we feel this woman is not to be trusted. We are only given insights into Diane's uncaring, unfeeling and irresponsible nature. When Nick talks of Aileen's hitchhiking as a homeless prostitute, Diane says, "Which she liked."

The one time we are open to the possibility of her concern for Aileen is when she asks when Aileen will be executed but instead of it being an example that she cares about Aileen, she merely says it will make her rest better. She will rest better when Aileen is dead? Or she will rest better when she knows the date of Aileen's execution? Oddly, Nick doesn't clarify which.

Only in his narration does Nick say that she asked for Aileen's forgiveness. Whether Nick chose not to show it because she did not say it to camera, it certainly helps us feel her sincerity was in question.

Diane is portrayed as self-interested and in denial. We know she has never been to see Aileen in prison and contrary to what she said at the beginning, she does not cry, not even a little. She could have been a very sympathetic character, no doubt through the investigation of her childhood and marriage at fifteen to Aileen's father, a violent sex offender, but to suit the film and Nick's agenda she is in juxtaposition to Aileen.

In the next scene, Nick visits Dawn Botkins, Aileen's best friend. We encounter a very different representation with Dawn. In order to portray Dawn as truly caring we are only shown caring and supportive aspects in stark and purposeful contrast to Diane. She is on the phone as she talks to Nick, arranging Aileen's funeral down to the last detail and making sure that Aileen will be dressed in what she wants. We understand and can visualize Aileen in all the clothes Dawn has described, and this is very poignant. This helps to fill in the narrative gaps as we will not be able to see Aileen wear these clothes. Nick asks her "what other wishes did she make?" and we know that Dawn, like the good fairy, will do everything in her power to grant those wishes. She is the custodian for the safety and love that Aileen has needed all her life. Aileen's final resting place will be with Dawn where she will scatter her ashes at her home in Michigan. We feel safe with Dawn, and relieved that Aileen has someone who loves her for her.

Aileen has "earned her wings" says Dawn, and this statement secures us in the knowledge that Dawn is not only interested in the welfare of Aileen in life but also in death, and more to the point, she believes in her, in her right to ascend to God, to heaven, to be with the angels.

Nick then shows a news broadcast with Governor Jeb Bush. Nick's commentary is over a shot of Jeb Bush walking away from a camera, waving at someone as he walks in a room. Nick as narrator says, "*Aileen's ex lawyer made a last minute plea to stop the execution, but Jeb Bush was not going to be stopped.*" We are given the impression of Bush as too busy to truly consider Aileen Wournos.

Jeb Bush says three psychiatrists will be evaluating Aileen as it is his duty to make sure she is of sound mind but as Nick has already told us Bush was not going to be stopped he renders all that Jeb says ineffective in its entirety.

Nick narrates, "*Jeb ordered a stay of execution, but guess what? His psychiatrists examined Aileen for just 15 minutes and then gave the thumbs up to go ahead.*" This tells us it was a foregone conclusion, and that all these previous actions were a waste of time and a front for going through the motions. The term 'thumbs up' is something we say usually in positive reference to an experience and by using it in this instance, the awful reality of what is happening here and the implications of what kind of person would give a 'thumbs up' for someone's execution, characterizes the psychiatrists with a flippant tone. Jeb Bush is pursuing his own agenda, which is clearly spelt out by Nick.

We are shown the news bulletin saying the stay was lifted and that she will be executed next Wednesday. We could have seen this piece in two parts, from the time she was granted the stay, to later when the stay was lifted, giving weight to Jeb Bush's statements, seeing it in forty six seconds, we are led to believe in every way it was a done deal.

One day prior to her execution, Nick goes to visit Aileen again. Nick says Aileen gave up a press conference just to talk to Nick. In his narration he says "*Dumb rules, like I've got to stand behind this rope, there will be fifteen guards, including the warden in attendance, and Aileen, for no good reason,*

*will wear shackled throughout the interview.” And “It’s been proven that the death penalty is absolutely no deterrent. States without the death penalty in fact, have lower murder rates.”*

He wants us to make sure that up to the end, all the rules and regulations that accompany Aileen in the build-up to her death are illogical.

Aileen wants to talk about the crooked cops and that fact that in the prison ‘they’ have been using sonic pressure on her head via the mirror in her room, poisoning her food, and that the police let her kill, that helicopters were dropping people out of the sky. How dying will be like ‘Star Trek, beamed up, colonized to another planet, with God and all the angels and everything.’

She says she did not do anything wrong, she saved peoples butts from being hurt and raped and killed. Viewing this aspect of her continues to support Nick Broomfield’s opinion that Aileen Wournos is mentally unfit and should not receive the death penalty. She does not have a grip on reality.

When Nick says he went to see her mother, she flies into a rage. The camera is in an extreme close up as Aileen spits out that her mother was a whore who only turns up at funerals. Nick tells Aileen that she asked for forgiveness. Doing this in the last moments of the final interview reunites in our minds where this all began and who just might be partly responsible for Aileen’s current situation. Diane’s inclusion here is inflammatory and serves to build the narrative tension as Aileen comes to the end of her life.

We are led to feel incredibly sad for Aileen, even in her fury, as the knowledge that being borne of Diane and winding up on death row are somehow so inexorably linked to this woman. All Aileen has to do now is die, and her mother will most likely return to her by way of her funeral.

Finally, in a confrontation between Nick and Aileen, she says that the police let her kill to clean the streets. He asks her how she 'ran into trouble' so often to kill seven people in one year. In this moment, there is not one death that Aileen does not truly believe was self-defence. All the other murders regardless of whether they were provoked have become justification for the first alleged Richard Mallory attack on her and she rails against society and compares herself to Jesus. She talks about people who have wanted to get rich off her story – back to the crooked cops, her burning issue.

All these aspects of her character shown in the final interview create a dramatic tension that we have not been subject to before. Nick heightens everything by mentioning her mother and being so confrontational about the murders. In the end Aileen cannot cope and the results are that Aileen terminates the interview with Nick calling out, "I'm sorry" as she gives Nick the finger.

Dawn gets in the car with Nick outside the prison that evening.

*Narration: It was really pretty incredible that Aileen had just sailed through the psychiatric test the day before. It makes you wonder what you'd have to do to fail. Later that night Dawn met Aileen for her last meal. Kentucky Fried Chicken and french fries. She was limited to a \$20 budget.*

Regardless of the fact that we are not there, Dawn provides cues that push the narrative forward. We are almost there at the last meal. Through her we learn that Aileen is sorry for terminating the interview and she was not giving Nick the finger personally. Through her we learn that the reasons Aileen gave for not talking frankly in the last interview was because she was afraid they might stop her execution.

On the day of Aileen's execution, Nick is in the media compound. Nick gives an interview and says that he believes they are executing a mad person and what kind of message does that give? In support of his argument immediately after we see Sterling Ivey the prison spokesman giving Aileen's last statement: "... *that she will be sailing away with the rock, she'll be back with Jesus Christ, like on Independence Day, on June 6, just like the movie, on the big mother ship, I'll be back, I'll be back.*"

The film ends with the music she requested at her funeral, [**Carnival** by Natalie Merchant] and seeing Dawn on her farm, presumably after Aileen's ashes have returned to her. This is the happiest ending under the circumstances. Aileen is with someone who loves her and someone who cared. We feel a sense of relief for Aileen with this closure but there is still an open-ended issue regarding the law, its practices and how much Nick Broomfield was trying to change that with his opinions and this film.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

According to The American Psychological Association, 'The central question before the Court is whether a defendant must have a rational understanding of the reasons for his execution, beyond the mere fact that he will be executed, in order to be competent to be executed.'

Nick believes and wants us to believe that she is too crazy to be killed, but from a legal standpoint, Aileen may well have been 'sane enough for execution'. If we were told what the law was exactly, this would have given us the opportunity to really consider the wider implications. Without it we are merely guessing.

"This is yet another shambolic and, in conventional terms, unsatisfactory Broomfield interview, but what it conveys, extremely strongly, is that, on the day prior to her execution, Wournos was not of sound mind" [p 217 New Documentary].

The last time Nick and Aileen met had dualistic emotional repercussions for the viewer. He did not seem to comprehend that the mention of her mother may incite Aileen. He said “A number of people have chided me for being cruel. I really thought it was going to have the opposite effect” [p 231 Nick Broomfield documenting Icons].

On the one hand we have seen and felt the huge emotional impact of the mention of her Mother so close to her death, and it brings her birth, life and soon-to-be death into sharp focus, and yet on the other hand there was something very unsatisfying with Nick Broomfield’s bungling his last moment with Aileen. We want it to be a little gentler. When she terminates the interview I felt let down, as he had failed her. Whilst it may be argued that Nick's films are often enhanced by his collision with his subjects, when we see it here it feels out of place.

By the same token it turned a weakness into strength as it created such a powerful effect and one wonders whether Nick Broomfield is being entirely honest in his statement.

Through his commentary, Nick Broomfield uses “... techniques used to generate the *impression* of conclusiveness or proof... The mixture of hunks of real reasoning with veiled pieces of apparent, faulty or misleading reasoning characterises rhetorical address... a necessary consequence of taking up issues for which there is no final proof or single solution...” [p 50, Introduction to Documentary]

Does Nick achieve what he wants with his reasoning and do we concur with his views? Whilst many Nick Broomfield viewers may already be the converted, Aileen was released on DVD in tandem with Monster, the fictional adaptation of Aileen’s story. Would the general public at large - those who like Charlize Theron - agree with him? One suspects the families of the victims may never be convinced, yet I feel he created a very strong argument for the injustice of the system that executed her and I

believe he has succeeded in being credible, convincing and compelling, the three necessary traits in the absence of absolute proof. As narrator he represents white male authority and the voice of reason that in this instance work in his favour to convince us of his arguments. This makes him merely one step down from the “voice of god’ commentary with which we are so familiar.

## **Conclusion**

This film gives us documentary elements through character and narration that are well constructed and gripping. Nick Broomfield as director provides lucid emotional navigation in his choice and use of characters.

“Dimensions fascinate, contradictions in nature or behaviour rivet the audiences’ concentration.

Therefore the protagonist must be the most dimensional character in the cast to focus empathy on the star role” [p 378 [Story](#)].

Aileen is a strong character with strong issues and by charting her actions in the last months of her life, Broomfield clarifies her nature and shows us meaning. She may or may not be executed during the making of this film, creating a literal life and death scenario for us to follow, with our equal and opposing force represented by the US Judicial system and characterised by Jeb Bush.

He shows us her intelligence - with her astute observations of the system around her; her vulnerability - with her appalling childhood; what she cares about most - fighting the corruption, (and unconsciously her Mother); what she wants in the future – death; what she fears - spending her life in prison and her claims of police corruption going unheard. When describing her family life we have seen her mask and it is the clue to revealing a truth about what childhood was really like for her. What gives Aileen her

multi-dimensionality is her contradictions and showing her in this light ensures that we are empathising with her in the leading role.

In order to maintain the balance and our focus on Aileen, the other four characters are not shown as multi-dimensional but only in relationship to Aileen and with a dominant trait that makes them either sympathetic or unsympathetic. This can be summed up simply as Dawn and Nick care and Diane and Jeb do not. This forces us to decide whether we like them or dislike them quite rapidly even though we have the time to weigh up Aileen in a more rounded light.

Jeb, Diane, Dawn, and Nick, are like satellites around Aileen, running the spectrum of all that is good and righteous as well as appalling and callous. Archetypal core entities of masculine and feminine are represented with Nick, the life supporter pitted against Jeb Bush the destroyer and Dawn, the life-enhancing supportive friend versus Diane, the absent mother.

He has cast opposing voices - some whose characteristics add complexity, being that the mother appears to prefer her dead, Nick, a relative stranger, wants to support her, and the law wants to kill her. This generates our interest even further as we are normally predisposed to see a Mother as nurturer, the law as our protector and strangers as not really part of our business. It is the incongruity of how these pieces fit together and the attributes of each character, including Dawn, and how each plays their part in the last moments of a sorry life that breaks our hearts for all we hold dear.

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