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FILM

Creating a killer

Monster blurs the lines
between victim and executioner

BY LISA BRADSHAW



Christina Ricci (left) and an unrecognizable Charlize Theron are superb in telling the story of serial killer Aileen Wuornos in *Monster*

When Charlize Theron was a teen-ager, her alcoholic father tried to rape her, and her mother shot him dead in the act. The lithe, blond actress won't talk about the incident to the media, but surely this background must have affected her extraordinary connection with the lead character in *Monster*, which opens Jan. 9 at Fox Tower Cinemas.

Based on actual events, *Monster* casts the unlikely Theron in the role of serial killer Aileen "Lee" Wuornos, a queer Florida prostitute who murdered six of her johns in 1989 and 1990. Former model and ballet dancer Theron, who also co-produced, gained 35 pounds and went through extensive makeup and dental fittings for the role, which transform her into the road-hardened Wuornos so completely, you can't believe it's her.

The movie opens with the homeless Wuornos about to shoot herself. But upon finding \$5 in her pocket, she decides to spend it first. (One becomes rather pragmatic in her situation.)

She goes to a bar and orders cheap beer. Guess what? It's a lesbian bar, and the formerly straight drifter leaves with the younger, cute Selby Wall, played by the always-compelling Christina Ricci (*Pecker*, *The Opposite of Sex*).

Wall's parents sent her out of town to get her

away from a teen-age lover and to learn decent, moral values under the watchful eyes of her racist, homophobic aunt and uncle. Turns out she finds the worldly Wuornos more intriguing.

Wuornos decides to go straight (so to speak) and find a better job to support her newly created family—unfortunately not before tragedy strikes, starting her on a killing spree she seems helpless to stop.

After Theron went through her first makeup test to become Wuornos, she reports looking in the mirror and saying, "How did this happen?" First-time feature writer/director Patty Jenkins makes marvelous work of combining all the elements needed to explain exactly how Aileen Wuornos happened.

In *Monster*, Jenkins is expert at laying bare the grim reality when abused, disenfranchised women with no training or education try to find honest work and of the sad naiveté of her subjects. Wuornos—a prostitute from an early age, having been molested by relatives, beaten by her father and thrown out of the house for becoming pregnant at 14—tells Wall she'd like to be a "veterinarian" or a "businessperson."

The film also invokes the myth of the

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