

“QUILLS” SPINS HISTORY

Fox Searchlight, a division of 20th Century Fox, has released a movie for the holiday season that is anything but joyous. “Quills” is a fictional account of the Marquis de Sade, a French maniac who lived at the time of the Revolution and died in a lunatic asylum in 1814. His life was so sick that they even coined a name after him: sadism. The movie is of interest to the Catholic League primarily because of the priest character, Abbe Coulmier, who is played by Joaquin Phoenix.

“Quills” is billed as a creative period piece about the perverted author, Marquis de Sade. In real life, Sade’s writings offered a clear picture of his twisted life. His fascination with feces, sex with the dead and man-boy sodomy are clinically known as coprophilia, necrophilia and pederasty. Oh, yes, he liked mutilation as well.

Not surprisingly, Sade hated Catholicism. One of his best-known books was *Juliette*. In it his “most monstrous heroine performs a black mass with the Pope, disemboweling a pregnant waif on the Vatican’s altar.” This is the stuff that excites Hollywood these days.

In actual fact, there was a priest named Abbe Coulmier who attended to Sade in the asylum. From what we know of Coulmier, he was an unattractive, four-foot tall hunchback who remained celibate. But in the movie, he is transformed into a “sexy and fluid” clergyman who comes across as “a liberal-minded, good-looking young priest” with “progressive notions.” And for good measure, he has a relationship with Sade and has sex with a dead laundress.

So what was the purpose of turning this deformed dwarf of a priest into a cross between James Bond and our “Nothing Sacred” friend, Father Ray? Money. After all, no one wants to look at an ugly midget having sex with a beauty. So Hollywood

did some doctoring.

Times have certainly changed. Sade, who in his lifetime spent more than 27 years in prison, has now been rescued from the bowels of history by filmmaker Philip Kaufman. Kaufman brags that "Quills" makes a case for free speech at its most extreme. "There's a reason why we have a First Amendment," he says. "[It's] not the eighth amendment. It's the very first one."

What Kaufman doesn't know is that the First Amendment was originally set by the framers to be the Third Amendment. However, when the first two amendments failed in the First Congress, number three jumped to number one. He is similarly ignorant of the fact that the First Amendment begins by citing freedom of religion, not freedom of speech.

Even if Kaufman were educated, what difference would it make? Anyone so bent on polishing the image of a pervert and delivering it at Christmastime deserves to wind up where his hero spent so much of his life.

But we live in strange times. We've made a celebrity out of a chief executive whom history will record as a man who regularly received fellatio from a young intern in his chambers while conducting the nation's business on the telephone. Given that reality, the smart money says Philip Kaufman will get an Oscar next March. And who knows?—maybe the guy who soiled the Oval Office will give him the award!