

November 6, 1964

Mr. Robert Benjamin  
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New York 19, New York

Dear Bob:

I am genuinely stunned and distressed by the Legion's attitude toward KISS ME, STUPID. This seems to me a much milder comedy than IRMA LA DOUCE or SOME LIKE IT HOT or THE APARTMENT -- and there were no repercussions from censorship groups or audiences around the world. It is only the fact that in thirty years in Hollywood I have never had a picture condemned that makes me even consider the Legion's objections.

I am at a loss to understand how anyone can read something improper into a line like "Who ever heard of a groom playing the organ at his own wedding?" -- when we are discussing the wedding day of a church organist. And by what tortured interpretation such a literal line as "You mean now she's going to drink out of his shoe?" can be deemed offensive leaves me completely stumped. These subtleties obviously escaped the preview audience, too -- because they certainly didn't react as if they were hearing double entendres.

But even if I agreed with these objections, it would be technically impossible to make most of the changes the Legion suggests. First, however, let us consider the changes that it would be feasible to make:

Most important, of course, is the revision we have discussed in the trailer scene between Zelda and Dino (Page 152, Scene 96). The ending of the scene would be rewritten and re-shot to show an exhausted Dino falling asleep. This is really the crucial revision in the picture -- the elimination of Zelda's infidelity.

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Page 56, Scene 38: The off-scene sound of the bedsprings can be eliminated.

Page 76, Scene 53: The best we can do with the line "But last Palm Sunday there was an incident in the organ loft" is to re-dub the words "Palm Sunday," substituting "Thanksgiving" -- if this is considered less objectionable. etc

Page 82, Scene 55: The line "Give it both knees" can be eliminated. (Although the phrase has long ago passed into the language and become divorced from whatever implications it originally had.)

Page 123, Scene 79: We can eliminate the line "Not me. I'm an indoor girl." But we need the preceding line "Maybe she'll take me out in the garden and show me her parsley" to give Orville time to cross to the bookcase and get the music. Not that this line was ever intended as anything but a reference to the previously established fact that the wife grows her own parsley.

Page 140, Scene 91: We can eliminate the line "Don't get your ball in an uproar."

As for the other lines the Legion feels strongly about, these cannot be eliminated by simple cuts, because it's impossible to match the action that precedes and follows with the film that now exists. What we would have to do is re-shoot the scenes in question, and that involves insurmountable obstacles -- the sets have been torn down, and the actors are scattered or otherwise committed. All but two of these scenes require Kim Novak -- who is shooting a picture in England. And all the scenes involve major sets -- like the house or the cafe -- and the cost of rebuilding them would be prohibitive. Specifically:

Page 61, Scene 44: "Who ever heard of a groom playing the organ, etc." House would have to be rebuilt. (I have already commented on this line above.)



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Page 68, Scene 46: Polly's exchange with the two men at the table. Cafe would have to be rebuilt. Miss Novak unavailable.

Page 82, Scene 55: "It's not very big, but it's clean, etc." House would have to be rebuilt. Miss Novak unavailable.

Page 84, Scene 55: "The family that prays together..." Same as above.

Visuals (Page 104, Scene 65; Page 115, Scene 69; Page 116, Scene 71) Same as above.

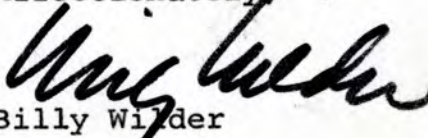
Page 120, Scene 78: "You mean now she's going to drink out of his shoe?" House would have to be rebuilt. (I have commented on this line earlier.)

Page 169, Scene 111: Polly's finger gesture plus "Bang. Bang." Street would have to be rebuilt. Miss Novak unavailable. (What makes this commonplace children's pantomime of shooting a gun objectionable is beyond me!)

To be practical about it, the one scene that can be re-shot is the trailer scene, because it involves a small set and both actors are available. And the new scene, proving that Zelda and Dino do not go to bed together should, I would think, be the essential one from the Legion's point of view. However, Dean Martin will only be available to us until the 19th of November -- so we have to rewrite, reconstruct the set, and re-shoot the scene before then. We therefore have to get an answer from the Legion as soon as possible.

If we have their assurance that this change, plus the other changes I said we could make, will satisfy them, then I will go ahead and redo the trailer scene. Otherwise it would be pointless to invest time, money and effort in re-shooting, re-cutting, re-scoring and re-dubbing, and we might as well leave the film as it is.

Affectionately,

  
Billy Wilder