

Jesse Lee Kercheval

**I DUE SOGNI AD OCCHI APERTI:  
TWO DREAMS WITH EYES WIDE OPEN**

"Today almost completely forgotten, between the two World Wars, the writer-director Lucio D'Ambra's ... name was primarily linked with 'light and polite comedy.'"

*Le Giornate del Cinema Muto catalogue*

**I**

*The First Dream with Open Eyes*

Reginetta, poor girl, has lost  
everything in the Messina earthquake  
except her caged canary.  
She staggers off a train  
in Rome, so tired she falls asleep  
on the cold stone steps of the church,  
*San Gregorio al Celio*,  
her only sweater draped  
over the bird's fragile,  
fretwork cage.

The last night of the Carnival —  
Prince Massimo di Luni  
& his bored friends roam the streets  
in their tuxedos, singing,  
arm in arm, unhooking horses  
from cabs with sleeping drivers, pulling  
hats over the eyes of other drunken men,  
until they come upon Reginetta,  
*poor sleeping Reginetta*,  
& her sleeping, covered bird.

The Prince has an idea  
he finds clever — they will carry  
the girl, still sleeping, to his palace —  
& make her a princess for a single,

fleeting day. They do so, ordering the maid  
to dress still-sleeping Reginetta  
while they change into their own operatic finery.  
At first, when she wakes, the girl  
is frantic, then Reginetta sees her bird  
& decides all the misery of her life before  
was the nightmare — that the palace,  
with its kind maid & handsome prince  
has always been her home.

The Prince & Princepessa di Luni  
marry after a grand procession  
through the palace. Even the canary

gets a wife & a golden cage. Then  
at dinner, a little powder in her goblet,  
& Reginetta's fast asleep. They dress her  
in her ragged clothes, take the bird  
from his mate & stick him in his old cage.  
Then gently, so as not to wake her,  
they carry Reginetta to *San Gregorio*  
& arrange her on the steps.

## II

*A Small Interjection Addressed to Lucio D'Ambra, Writer & Director*

What part of this abduction,  
is "light" or "polite." Or  
(even slightly) "comic?"

## III

*Life in the World After So Much Dreaming*

Reginetta is saved from madness  
by the maid from the prince's palace  
who finds her on the church steps  
& tells her all that happened.  
Reginetta finally finds a job at a laundry,

ironing sheets, then one day,  
as she is singing in the steamy basement,  
a famous impresario hears her  
& invites her to sing in his new opera.

So she does. In silent movies, women  
either marry well or sing opera — honestly,  
there seem to be no other choices,  
not even in America where, surely,  
opera singers were far less common. Reginetta  
becomes an overnight sensation,  
& the Prince — who fails to recognize her —  
falls deeply in her spell.

#### IV

##### *The Second Dream with Open Eyes*

Reginetta, who despises the Prince  
for his treatment of her, plans revenge.  
The Prince sends her note after pleading note  
telling her how much he loves her,  
but she spurns him. Then, one night,  
she has his old friends — now hers instead —  
drug & carry him to her apartment.  
For a single day, she pretends  
she loves him, that they are newly married.  
Then, just before the consummation,  
Again, the powder in the wine &  
his friends carry the Prince, sleeping,  
home to his empty palace.

#### V

##### *After the Dreams Are Over*

My husband says the second dream  
was crueller. *Without love*, he says,  
*all the Prince's wealth means nothing.*  
Nonsense, I shoot back, the Prince left

Reginetta with less than nothing.  
She could have starved for all he cared.  
We argue & walk & argue then  
we kiss, hard, in the middle of the wet street  
as if we might never stop.

VI

*My Mother Said All Life's a Dream*

Maybe that is why, in spite of everything,  
this movie has a happy ending.  
Reginetta & the Prince are reconciled  
& confess to having loved each other  
from the moment they first met.  
But the canary, even in the last shot,  
sits alone in his tiny, battered cage.  
No wife, no aviary  
full of fledgling children.

But still, he sings.  
But still, he has his dreams.

