

Document Citation

Title	Dead in bed
Author(s)	Harlow Robinson Harlow Robinson
Source	<i>Daily Californian (Berkeley, Calif.)</i>
Date	1978 Aug 11
Type	review
Language	English English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Dona Flor e seus dois maridos (Dona Flor and her two husbands), Barreto, Bruno, 1976

THURSDAY JOURNAL

Dead in bed

Doily Cal, 8/11/78

DONA FLOR and Her Two Husbands (now at the Bridge in SF) is a sunny, sexy film that refuses to take even death seriously. Only in the opening moments, when Vadinho, Dona Flor's first husband, drops dead of a heart attack in the street during Carnival, does it look like what we are about to see is a tragedy. At the colorful funeral feast that follows, where the over-dressed women and dissolute gamblers of Bahia come to mourn the passing of their irrepressible Don Juan, the mood shifts decisively to ribald, irreverent humor, and stays there to the film's end.

As it turns out, Vadinho (Jose Wilker) didn't really die — at least not for his lovely wife Dona Flor (Sonia Braga). After an appropriate period of mourning, Dona Flor remarries, this time a respectable, timid pharmacist, Teodoro (Mauro Mendonca) — the exact opposite of the unfaithful, hard-loving Vadinho. She be-



Sonia Braga and Jose Wilker in "Dona Flor": subconscious desires or black magic?

comes content, but bored. She realizes just how bored when Vadinho's spirit, none the worse for wear and as horny as ever, turns

up in her bed, ready for action. It is only Dona Flor who can see him, which leaves the origin of his reappearance ambiguous — is it her subconscious desires, or black magic?

There is no "deeper significance" in *Dona Flor*, which is both its strength and weakness. Though the film pokes fun at religious and social hypocrisy, the political angle is not strongly developed, perhaps surprising in a movie from the Third World. In general the pace is lively, though the long flashback sequence that follows Vadinho's funeral, filling us in on the background of the first marriage, becomes a bit too predictable. Best are the final 20 minutes or so, after the reappearance of Vadinho, which show us Dona Flor's struggle between her moral Catholic feelings of devotion to Teodoro, and her equally compelling lust for Vadinho.

23-year-old director Bruno Barreto, the new hope of the resur-

gent Brazilian cinema, is enamored of bright, sensual colors, and sequences packed with simple town faces. His favorite film is Bertolucci's 1900, and it shows in the overripe, luscious quality of the color (though the lighting is frequently too bright) and the close-ups of cooking food or brilliant fabrics. The scenes of sex, which are many, are extremely well-done, both graphic and romantic — a real turn-on. (One scene showing Dona Flor and Vadinho engaging in sodomy was cut by the Brazilian censors.)

Braga is gorgeous as Dona Flor, capable both of small-town respectability and the throes of orgasmic passion. Wilker is also fine as Vadinho, though his peroxide

blonde hair and beer belly seem to indicate Brazilian standards of beauty are different from our own. The secondary roles, especially the town's women, Dona Flor's confidantes, are completely authentic and immediate, oozing a kind of slightly obese, tropical sensuality.

Dona Flor is reminiscent of Truffaut, or of Tacchella's *Cousin, Cousine* in its light touch and detached, bemused view of adultery and sex, but Barreto adds a refreshing earthiness and crudity that make these French films seem like so much fluff. If this is what the Brazilian cinema is up to these days, I hope we'll see more of it.