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## **DONA FLOR AND HER TWO HUSBANDS**

p. C64

Directed by Bruno Barreto

New Yorker, April 23 through 29, Film Forum

By the 1970s, after a series of right-wing coups, the political climate in Brazil had eased a bit and restrictions on sexuality in the movies had relaxed.

The result: frothy erotic comedies like Bruno Barreto's *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands* (1977). In the picturesque port city of Bahia, Flor, a lovely young woman (Sonia Braga), marries the wastrel Vadinho (José Wilker), a compulsive wench who beats her. His one redeeming quality is that he's a tiger in the sack. After Vadinho drops dead, Flor accepts the proposal of a pharmacist, who's kind but dull in and out of bed. Her yearning for her randy first husband causes his ghost to materialize.

Ectoplasmic Vadinho makes it clear that there is sex after death, and since he's visible only to her, conditions are right for a bizarre ménage à trois. A variation on Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*, *Dona Flor* was a huge hit at home and abroad. In its best moments, it has the qualities of a ribald folk tale. But it's a slight work, slackly directed, that gets a needed boost from Braga's endearing performance and Chico Buarque's intoxicating score. **ELLIOTT STEIN**