

## Document Citation

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A touch of supernatural comedy also flavors an exuberant new Brazilian comedy, Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands. Based on a novel by Jorge Amado, the film is a sly, erotic variation on Noël Coward's *Blithe Spirit*, about a woman whose second marriage is disrupted by the ghost of her first husband.

The movie's main achievement is the characterization of Flor's first husband, Vadinho. We first meet him at an outdoor celebration, dressed in women's clothes but flapping an artificial penis made of a giant gourd. It's a suitably flamboyant introduction to a very unconventional character. We eventually learn that Vadinho is a compulsive gambler as well as a lecher, drunkard, liar and cheat. He's a pleasure seeker who feels no guilt, and the remarkable thing about the film is that the characterization is free of moralizing. Vadinho is so frank about what he is and so completely, unashamedly hedonistic that we can't help surrendering to his lusty energy.

Feminists may object to the heroine's continuing submission to Vadinho's mistreatment. Perhaps there is a trace of sexism in the film, but it really means to raise a larger, more subversive point about the irrepressibility of frankly anti-social sexual impulses. After Vadinho's death, Flor tries living a more subdued, respectable life with a devoted pharmacist. For a while she adjusts to bourgeois domesticity, but she's burning with dissatisfactions. Before long her carnal fantasies overwhelm her, and that's when the ghost of Vadinho materializes. At first she tries to resist, but finally she comes to terms with her perverse, uninhibited secret life.

Director Bruno Barreto gives the film a sensuous texture. Earthy details stay etched in memory; when Dona Flor cooks a luscious crab casserole, we can practically taste it. Barreto is only 23, so his command of the medium seems prodigious. There are dead spots in the narrative, but the movie is as seductive as a carnival in Rio.