



MARTIN MAYO

The Perversity of Everyday Life

Inés Arredondo's collection of short fiction, **UNDERGROUND RIVER AND OTHER STORIES** (University of Nebraska, cloth, \$30; paper, \$12), is nothing short of spell-binding. Mostly set in a small town in northwestern Mexico at the beginning of this century, it provides a stunning expression of the erotic perversity found in seemingly ordinary lives: in each story, hovering just below the placid surface of daily existence, lurks a tragicomic opera of battling desires. Arredondo (1928-89) uses sharp prose to create a paradoxically dreamlike reality; the details in her work are so vividly rendered that they make scandal, madness and horror seem fascinating. In "The Shunamite," a young woman reluctantly agrees to her uncle's deathbed wish that they marry, only to find that her transgression is his cure. In "Mariana," a young couple's erotic

obsession leads one to insanity, the other to death, while their neighbors avidly track their downfall. The narrator of "The Nocturnal Butterflies," who works as a butler, describes how his relationship with his employer is forever altered when he procures for him the sexual services of an unusual adolescent girl. And the narrator of "Shadow in the Shadows" tells of her passion for a handsome young man, a passion so strong that she is willing to share her lover with her aging husband. Arredondo, although she published only three small volumes of stories during her lifetime, is one of modern Mexico's most highly regarded writers. Cynthia Steele's able translation, the first appearance of Arredondo's work in English, should secure a new audience for her powerful and distinctive voice.

JENNY MCPHEE