



★ **The Extinction of Irena Rey**

Jennifer Croft

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A loyal group of translators find their allegiances tested when their author disappears in translator Jennifer Croft's winking satirical novel *The Extinction of Irena Rey*.

The novel adopts a twisting conceit. It is the translated novelization of eight translators' experiences with their final group assignment: reclusive Polish author Irena Rey's magnum opus, *Grey Eminence*. To work, they converge on the edge of the Białowieża forest, where their hostess lives and writes. After an intoxicating meal and cryptic remarks, though, Irena disappears. Her manuscript is in their inboxes, sans clear instructions for proceeding.

The eight are tight knit, save the fresh, polarizing addition of an alluring Swedish translator. Still, they are not immune to internal spats: the Spanish-translator narrator, Emi, considers her English-language colleague, Alexis, her nemesis. She vies to best Alexis throughout. And Alexis, who does not return Emi's enmity, translates Emi's tale, contributing footnotes at regular intervals to correct Emi's unreliable account. Her interlocutions reflect her differing perspective—that translators are interpreters with the license to delete. Emi, conversely, prefers to treat Irena's work as sacrosanct—a position that wavers when the team learns that their author is less a saint than an opportunist, maybe even a liar and a thief.

In time with the steady unveiling of Irena's skeletons, the novel muses through questions related to aestheticism, Anthropocene ethics, method writing, awards-committee politics, and personal rivalries. *Grey Eminence* is unpacked, including its dystopian perspective that "art is the uniquely human impulse to relentlessly transform whatever we come into contact with, to undo in order to do or redo." Exciting developments temper the story's headiness leading up to its final, disillusioning confrontation.

The Extinction of Irena Rey is an incisive literary novel that troubles the divide between art, its interpretation, and real life.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (March / April 2024)

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