

Mad Miss Mimic - Quill and Quire

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In her debut novel, Ryerson University English professor Sarah Henstra delivers a plot filled with intrigue, romance, and danger set against the backdrop of Victorian London. Her heroine is Leonora Somerville, a 17-year-old heiress who perfectly mimics those around her, but stutters when speaking in her own voice. The mimicry would be helpful, except that Leo has no control over when the phenomenon occurs or whom she impersonates.



No one is more critical of Leo's lack of ability to control her vocal tics than her older sister, Christabel, who forbids her to speak at social functions and would like nothing more than to marry her off as soon as possible. When Francis Thornfax, the remarkably good-looking business partner of Christa's husband, Dr. Dewhurst, begins to court Leo despite her speech impediment, everything appears to be going to plan.

But that would make for a dreadfully boring book, and *Mad Miss Mimic* is not that. Henstra mixes everything from political manoeuvring to drug smuggling to journalistic integrity to class disparity and more into her complex tale. Leo is a woman of her time: despite the fact she stands to inherit her aunt's great fortune, it is only through marriage to the right man that she will, ironically, find some measure of independence. Still, her uniqueness emboldens her, and when she suspects her brother-in-law and Thornfax are somehow mixed up with the bombings that have been occurring around the city in protest of the proposed bill banning the importation of opium, she sets out to find the facts. Along the way, she falls in love with Dewhurst's assistant, a poor young thief named Tom Rampling, who accepts her as she is.

Mad Miss Mimic is being marketed with crossover appeal in mind, but while Henstra artfully portrays Leo's sexual awakening at the hands of Rampling (and, to a lesser extent, Thornfax), and weaves a complex plot that reads like a combination of Austen and Conan

Doyle, the tone may be too tame and the pace too slow for most adult readers. Teens who can handle a bit of corset-straining lust mixed in with their mystery should be duly impressed, however.