



How to Create the Perfect Wife: Britain's Most Ineligible Bachelor and his Enlightened Quest to Train the Ideal Mate

By Wendy Moore

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Thomas Day, an 18th-century British writer and radical, knew exactly the sort of woman he wanted to marry. Pure and virginal like an English country maid yet tough and hardy like a Spartan heroine, she would live with him in an isolated cottage, completely subservient to his whims. But after being rejected by a number of spirited young women, Day concluded that the perfect partner he envisioned simply did not exist in frivolous, fashion-obsessed Georgian society. Rather than conceding defeat and giving up his search for the woman of his dreams, however, Day set out to create her.

So begins the extraordinary true story at the heart of "How to Create the Perfect Wife," prize-winning historian Wendy Moore's captivating tale of one man's mission to groom his ideal mate. A few days after he turned twenty-one and inherited a large fortune, Day adopted two young orphans from the Foundling Hospital and, guided by the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the principles of the Enlightenment, attempted to teach them to be model wives. After six months he discarded one girl, calling her invincibly stupid, and focused his efforts on his remaining charge. He subjected her to a number of cruel trials including dropping hot wax on her arms and firing pistols at her skirts to test her resolve but the young woman, perhaps unsurprisingly, eventually rebelled against her domestic slavery. Day had hoped eventually to marry her, but his peculiar experiment inevitably backfired though not before he had taken his theories about marriage, education, and femininity to shocking extremes. Stranger than fiction, blending tragedy and farce, "How to Create the Perfect Wife" is an engrossing tale of the radicalism and deep contradictions at the heart of the Enlightenment.

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Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

Who hasn't dreamed of a perfect better half? But one eighteenth-century British philosopher attempted to make that dream come true. Moore (Wedlock, 2009) lays out the incredible true story of Thomas Day. Unable to find a spouse suited for the bare life of virtue he envisioned, Day set out to create her by taking two orphan girls and subjecting them, without their knowledge, to his wife-molding program. Moore wittily skewers Day's pie-in-the-sky ideals as they clash disastrously with reality. This engaging account will appeal to a diverse audience, including Enlightenment philosophy students and Jane Austen fans. Day is ludicrous, insufferable, arrogant—and utterly engrossing. His quixotic quest fired the plots of numerous fictional works, including *Pygmalion*, that examined the quest for perfection. The narrative pulses forward briskly, moving between Day's story and those of the orphan girls. Drawing on detailed personal accounts, Moore creates suspense and surprise in a manner rarely achieved in biographies. An unusual and unusually fascinating story. --Bridget Thoreson

Review

Amanda Foreman, author of "Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire" and "A World on Fire"

"Only Wendy Moore has the genius to find and bring to glorious life the hidden histories, the personal follies, and very human desires of our 18th-century ancestors. "How to Create the Perfect Wife" is a perfect read."

"Origins: Currents Events in Historical Perspective"

"Impressively researched--and by turns hilarious and heartbreaking--Moore's book offers a wild ride through Enlightenment society by asking one simple question: what made Day's unusual path to matrimony a viable option for a perennial bachelor in eighteenth-century Britain?... [An] impressive, engaging, and thoroughly entertaining work.... Moore's able storytelling combined with Day's bizarre quest to create his ideal woman make "How to Create the Perfect Wife," apart from all its other virtues, a page-turner of the first order."

Caroline Weber, author of "Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution"

"In this riveting tale of Enlightenment theory gone haywire, Wendy Moore offers an unforgettable portrait of Rousseau's most deranged 18th-century acolyte (Robespierre included!). With exemplary research and tremendous wit, she offers an invaluable, if utterly disturbing, cautionary tale about the uses and abuses of the "philosophes'" putatively progressive thought."

"New York Times Book Review"

"Moore's extraordinary subject is the compellingly repellent historical figure Thomas Day.... The story of Day's attempt to create his perfect wife...is both chilling and uncomfortably absorbing.... [A] skillfully narrated story."

Jonathan Yardley, "Washington Post"

"However thick the mists into which Day and his book disappeared many ages ago, he was a certifiable piece of work, and Moore has performed a service of sorts by bringing him to our attention. Moore, a British freelance journalist with an interest in the oddities of her country's history (of which there are

"New York Review of Books"

"[Moore's] book reads at times like a historical novel. Yet it is underpinned by meticulous research, and raises a host of questions about eighteenth-century attitudes toward women, love, and power, both personal and political.... Her account is particularly valuable and touching in the light it sheds on the background of the girls before they entered Day's orbit, and on Sabrina's life after she left it. For the first time, thanks to diligent research in the archives of the Foundling Hospital in London, the two girls are identified."

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"Wall Street Journal"

One of Ms. Moore's greatest strengths is her ability to flip our sympathies. Day appears at different times as

comical, odious or naive. Day worshiped Virtue but, Ms. Moore reveals in a bit of nifty detective work, he lied and flouted the law to gain possession of the two girls. Sabrina lived to a ripe old age more than twice as long as Day but she never wanted to talk about my checker d & adventurous history. Wendy Moore has done a brilliant job of unearthing it.

"The New Yorker"

This fascinating account of the life of Thomas Day, better known as a poet and anti-slavery campaigner, chronicles his misguided attempts to find the ideal woman.

"Slate"

The Pygmalion-gone-wrong story of a man who adopted two orphans in hopes of making one his wife is bizarre, true, and thoroughly compelling, touching on the folly of uncritically embracing extreme parenting methods, the futility of trying to force someone to be who you want, and the danger of philosophy when wielded by young men who don't understand it.

"The New Republic"

"[An] excellent new book... Its tone is dry and amused, and the author's approach to her subject is ironic. Even her subtitle...has a certain sting. And the story she tells is simply astonishing.... Her understated comic style is actually perfect for the material.... The picture of Day is so expertly drawn and so withering without being heavy-handed, that it manages to count as a form of moral condemnation."

Cord Jefferson, NPR

"How to Create the Perfect Wife" is adroitly written, making the book at times feel less like a history tome and more like a novel. Moore's deeply thorough research yields new surprises at every turn.

"Salon"

[A] transfixing new book. How to Create the Perfect Wife, as delectable as any good novel, is also the best remedy for wrongs done long ago. It takes a girl who was plucked from obscurity to become an experiment, a paragon, a symbol and a legend, and it has made her a person once more.

"Boston Globe"

[An] extraordinarily strange and entertaining book. Moore's acerbic dissection of Day's hypocrisy and the surprising unfolding of the story make this a lively, compelling read.

"Minneapolis Star Tribune"

Moore's narrative brilliantly delineates the political and intellectual forces that shaped and nurtured Day, a heady and deeply contradictory blend of Romanticism, empiricism and radicalism. Day himself emerges as a rounded and not entirely unsympathetic character; his friends and detractors are depicted with equal liveliness. Fascinating.

"The Daily Beast"

How could Day himself remain blind to his hypocrisy? And why did none of his friends stop him? That's a difficult question, and in the places where historical documentation falls short, Moore turns the gaps into opportunities to revel in the lurid injustice of Sabrina's fate.... Moore's research suggests the real-life Sabrina got by not on love but on reserves of inner strength and dignity. If Day's experiments shaped her, it was certainly not in the way he intended.

"Columbus Dispatch"

Moore's witty and well researched "How To Create the Perfect Wife" tells the absorbing story of Day, his unknowing subjects, and his circle of friends, all with their own sets of peccadilloes.

"Publishers Weekly," Starred Review

Enlightenment ideals become weapons in the battle of the sexes in this riotous saga of ill-starred romance. Moore's funny, psychologically rich narrative feels as if Jane Austen had reworked Shaw's Pygmalion into a Gothic-inflected comedy of manners, and illuminates the era's confusions about nature and nurture, sentiment and rationalism, love and power. The result is both a scintillating read and compelling social history.

"Kirkus Reviews," Starred Review

A darkly enlightening tale thoroughly researched, gracefully written about Enlightenment thought, male

arrogance and the magic of successful matrimony.

Henrietta Thornton-Verma, "Library Journal," Top 10 Books of 2013

Perhaps the oddest title on our list, this true story won me over completely, despite my misgivings..... No spoilers here, but the tale of how [Thomas Day s] plan unfolds reveals heartbreaking details of child rearing and treatment of the poor in a Britain that is thankfully bygone.

"Library Journal," Starred Review

This is a seductive book. Readers will be captivated as the tale unfolds, marveling at the many layers of meaning and historical significance that London journalist Moore has woven together through painstaking archival research.

Andrea Wulf, "The Guardian"

As in her previous book Moore has again found an excruciatingly gruesome and fascinating story. But instead of turning these portraits into misery biographies, she weaves them into the broader context of the time. In "How to Create the Perfect Wife," she investigates education, liberty and the role of women. It is pleasing to see a writer bringing together painstaking research with gripping storytelling. I can't wait for her next book.

"The Economist"

A darkly amusing tale about the struggle to create the perfect wife. This story is told with gusto.

"Wall Street Journal"

"With the entire affair now safely in the distant past, readers can make judgments on Day's story for themselves. Ms. Moore has done an especially fine job of tracking Sabrina in archives and across England, even locating her previously unrecognized grave. "How to Create the Perfect Wife" is to be relished by those who enjoy slices of 18th-century life. It should, however, be read as a cautionary tale by anyone thinking of embarking on, say, a radical program of home schooling."

"Financial Times"

"Compelling and meticulously researched.... [Moore] evokes a period of contradictions, in which an abolitionist (as Day was) could '[purchase] two girls ... as he might buy shoe buckles.'"

"Booklist"

This engaging account will appeal to a diverse audience, including Enlightenment philosophy students and Jane Austen fans. Day is ludicrous, insufferable, arrogant and utterly engrossing. The narrative pulses forward briskly, moving between Day s story and those of the orphan girls. Drawing on detailed personal accounts, Moore creates suspense and surprise in a manner rarely achieved in biographies. An unusual and unusually fascinating story.

"Sunday Times" (London)

What is so intriguing about this rollicking and well-researched book is just how confoundingly, detestably hypocritical [Moore s] central character is. This is a sordid tale, splendidly told. [An] enthralling history.

"Mail on Sunday"

In this enthralling, brilliantly researched book, Wendy Moore has uncovered a story so weird that you have to keep reminding yourself that it actually happened. Moore has found an extraordinary story and tells it very well indeed. Far from writing a horrible history shocker, she does a good job of explaining why Day truly thought he was undertaking an experiment for the good of humanity.

"Sunday Herald" (Glasgow)

[A] mesmerizing account. Moore has a captivating story to tell, which she conveys with the pace and ingenuity of a novelist. What in less skilled hands could have been another misery biography is a paean to the obstinacy of the human spirit.

"Scotland on Sunday"

Moore s history is beautifully told and researched all credit to her for discovering the real origins of Sabrina and Lucretia, when so many declared there were no such records of these girls, and for telling as much of their incredible story as she has.

"The Times" (London)

With gusto and glee Wendy Moore takes on the paradoxes of the Age of Reason and the tyranny of public probity and private morality.

"The Scotsman"

Wendy Moore has very successfully secured a self-made niche in writing popular, witty and yet incisive books on the more recherche aspects of 18th century culture, often demonstrating how the most peculiar and almost unbelievable stories inform not just the everyday culture of the period, but our own as well. Moore manages to balance the narrative precisely, neither bridling with condemnation nor glossing over the more barbaric and melancholy results. The overall result is a book which is both comical and horrific.... This is the best kind of non-fiction, the kind that reads like a novel and yet couldn't be made up.

"Daily Express"

"Moore is under no illusions about the desirability of her hero and tells his story with a wry wit that makes him engaging even as his audacity, arrogance and egotism send your jaw hurtling to the floor."

"Telegraph"

Well-researched. Moore uncovers for the first time the full story of Sabrina, and it is to the original Eliza Doolittle that this book belongs.

"Sunday Telegraph"

Wendy Moore likes odd subjects...The subject of her latest is equally bizarre, a sort of double biography; of an 18th century sociopath, Thomas Day, and of the orphans he illegally acquired, to groom one for his future wife. But aside from its dark content, the plotline is a comedy of manners gone right off the rails, lit by flashes of sardonic authorial wit.

"Scotland on Sunday"

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"Daily Telegraph"

Well-researched. Moore uncovers for the first time the full story of Sabrina, and it is to the original Eliza Doolittle that this book belongs.

"The Spectator"

Moore tells a good story.... As a champion of the lost she finds her own most authentic and compelling voice.

"The Observer"

[Moore] has done an exceptional job of tracking Sabrina through the records and produced a cheerful, lively version of her tale.

"Mail on Sunday, YOU Magazine"

A true Pygmalion-style story set in Georgian England.

"Bookpage"

Author and historian Wendy Moore writes with a novelist's flair and fluidity. She is tough but fair to Day; though his ideas about women were clearly dangerous, he was a fine writer, a loyal if blustery friend and an early supporter of the abolition of slavery. "

About the Author

Wendy Moore is a veteran journalist and author of "The Knife Man," which won the Medical Journalists Association Consumer Book Award, and the best-selling "Wedlock." Moore lives in London.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Esta Banks:

Inside other case, little people like to read book How to Create the Perfect Wife: Britain's Most Ineligible

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David Lucero:

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Anna Brooks:

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Beatrice Kennemer:

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