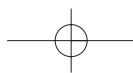


The Missing Wives of *Leviathan*

With the supreme confidence of divine authority, King James I, in a speech to Parliament in 1604, the second year of his reign, relied on a powerful political metaphor to establish a permanent relationship between himself and his subjects: 'I am the Husband, and all the whole Isle is my lawfull Wife'.¹ In declaring himself to be intimately linked with the destiny of England, the monarch resorted to a figurative strategy familiar to his audience. In the political rhetoric of the seventeenth century, the domestic household served as the microcosmic model for the ruling state. The family/state analogy also was reinforced through religious instruction from the pulpit and the prayer book, which emphasized obedience to parents as the paradigm for honouring the sovereign.²

However, the analogy could prove vulnerable to patterns of political and social flux. As political theorists, including John Milton, began questioning the prerogatives of royal authority, traditional family relations and gender roles also became subject to scrutiny. If one side of the analogy lost its stability, the other also would be placed in a precarious position. The analogy became particularly problematic during the Civil War and the Interregnum, when political theorists from both the royalist and parliamentary camps tried to exploit the metaphor of the marriage contract to support their respective visions of political authority. Royalists seized on its potential to help them justify keeping Charles I on the throne because 'it provided an example of a contract which established a relationship of irrevocable hierarchical authority between the parties', as Mary Lyndon Shanley notes.³ Just as the marriage bond was believed to permanently authorize the husband's dominion over the household, the fictional 'social contract' between the sovereign and his subjects set up a unilateral agreement that could not be broken once the subjects consented to subordinate themselves to the ruler, according to a royalist interpretation. Political theorists in support of the parliamentary cause, however, argued that the contract could be broken if the ruler did not fulfill his obligations and that the monarch's power could be withdrawn by the people, who originally had granted it to him. Using the marriage contract analogically would force



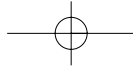
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the parliamentarians into a more liberal view of marriage and divorce than many were prepared to expound. It would have required them to grant women authority to break their marriage vows and would have diminished the presumed dominance of the husband in the domestic household.

Given the vexed and volatile status of the marriage analogy during the Civil War, it might come as no surprise that Thomas Hobbes, whose *Leviathan* was written during that turbulent era, avoids deployment of this familiar prop of political rhetoric. Although Hobbes frequently uses the family/state analogy in articulating his theory of political obligation, he curiously elides mention of the relationship between husband and wife as a model for the bond between sovereign and subject. This omission sets him apart from other seventeenth-century political theorists who exploited the metaphor of marriage as part of their debates about monarchy. Passing references are made to wives in *Leviathan*, but women's most prominent role in the text is as mothers. Wives are conspicuously absent from Hobbes's theoretical family.

Hobbes's portrayal of women in *Leviathan* is contradictory and inconsistent. He shows women in a position of power as mothers, who have original dominion over children, but fails to account for their subjugation as wives. This paper will argue that these ambiguous depictions of women reflect the paradoxes and contradictions in Hobbes's description of the subject. Although he submits to sovereign power, the Hobbesian subject is the authorizing agent of all the ruler's actions. In addition, under certain conditions, the subject can disobey the monarch. If, for example, the sovereign commands a man to kill or maim himself, or to refrain from defending himself against an assault, 'yet hath that man the Liberty to disobey'.⁴ The application of Hobbes's notions of the liberty and authority of subjects to the seventeenth-century household would present a radical challenge to traditional assumptions about relations between husbands and wives; it would have yielded a definite space for female resistance. Placing wives in an analogous role to the Hobbesian subject would have given them far more autonomy than was granted in seventeenth-century patriarchal ideology.

Furthermore, to insert wives into his fictional family would disrupt the basis for his political system because it leaves him with another form of subjugation that is not based on consent. If women are equal and potential partners with men in the state of nature, why must they become subordinate as wives in civil society? Hobbes is unable to account for this disparity, thus the child-bearing woman who 'becomes both a mother and a lord' in *De Cive*⁵ retreats to a marginalized position in *Leviathan* instead of being positioned as a wife in Hobbes's imaginary family. In addition, Hobbes's inconsistent use of the family/state analogy illustrates the dismantling of this rhetorical strategy during the latter half of the seventeenth century, when theorists were troubled 'either because of its limits or because of its absolutist implications', as Susan Dwyer Amussen asserts. She locates Hobbes among those theorists who encountered the vulnerability of the analogy in the midst of social, political,

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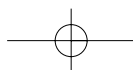
and religious upheaval, noting that ‘while he recognized and pointed out some of the problems arising from the use of familial language, in the end he failed to resolve them’.⁶

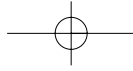
In addition to exposing the ideological tensions within his argument, the contradictions within Hobbes’s theoretical family reveal the instability of seventeenth-century political theory in the face of challenges to sexual and political hierarchies. Although conduct books, marriage treatises, and pamphlets of the period reinforced the Aristotelian male and female dichotomies, some women transgressed the boundaries of culturally prescribed feminine behaviour by writing responses to misogynistic tracts and violating the dictates of rigidly gendered fashion. In what is now known as the transvestite controversy of the 1620s, women donned masculine attire, such as broad-brimmed hats and pointed doublets. During the 1640s, scores of women petitioned Parliament, demanding equal participation in the political process, and female members of radical Protestant sects preached God’s word from the pulpit.⁷ The ambiguities and contradictions of *Leviathan*, along with inconsistencies between the text and his earlier treatise, *De Cive*, exemplify conflicting positions in the debates over gender and state that characterized seventeenth-century social and political discourse. We cannot interpret the inconsistencies in Hobbes’s theoretical model without situating him in the context of the controversy over gender as well as arguments about political authority.

The Artificial Family

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes describes an artificial family that is analogous to a monarchy, with a man ruling over his children and servants. He claims that ‘a great Family if it be not part of some Common-wealth, is of itself, as to the Rights of Sovereignty, a little Monarchy; whether that Family consist of a man and his children; or of a man and his servants; or of a man, and his children, and servants together: wherein the Father or Master is the Sovereign’ (p. 142). In *De Cive*, his 1642 tract delineating the political principles that form the basis of *Leviathan*, Hobbes offers a similarly peculiar definition of the family as consisting of ‘a father, with his sons and servants, grown into a civil person by virtue of his paternal jurisdiction’ (p. 110). What is distinctive about *Leviathan*’s artificial family is its structure. Hobbes extends the nuclear core to include servants but leaves out the wives, without which the family cannot fulfill the functions of property consolidation and propagation. Of the three family structures he describes, two of them include children, who could not exist if there were no wives.

Perplexed by the disappearance of wives from Hobbes’s family, Carole Pateman believes that they are simply included under the general designation of servants. She speculates that, in the Hobbesian universe, ‘if a man is able



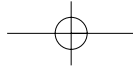


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to defeat a woman in the state of nature and form a little body politic or a “family”, and if that “family” is able to defend itself and grow, the conquered woman is subsumed under the status of “servant”.⁸ I disagree with Pateman’s assertion. Elsewhere in *Leviathan*, Hobbes asserts that it should not be considered a breach of the law for a man to imagine ‘being possessed of another mans [sic] goods, servants, or wife’ without any intention to transform such fantasies into action (p. 201). If Hobbes had subsumed wives under the category of servants, then he would not list servants as well as wives in the cited sentence. In another passage, when explaining common causes of discord, Hobbes describes men who use violence ‘to make themselves Masters of other mens [sic] persons, wives, children, and cattell’ (p. 88). Here, wives are inscribed as part of a hierarchical chain, but, as in the previous example, their status is confined to that of property. The servants slip out of this succession of possessions to be conquered. Women are not part of the sampling when it is defined as a ‘little Monarchy’, but they are among a man’s possessions. Still, none of these examples prove that Hobbes conflates wives with servants, as Pateman argues.⁹

Contrary to Pateman’s explanation, I argue that the exclusion of wives from Hobbes’s artificial family is consistent with his contradictory portrayals of women. On the one hand, as mothers, they have initial dominion over children; on the other, they are described as possessions to be seized and bodies to be conquered. Among the crimes Hobbes lists in *Leviathan* is rape, or, as he terms it, ‘the violation of chastity by Force’, which is a worse crime if the victim is a married woman rather than an unmarried woman (p. 213). On the one hand, women are more susceptible to weeping, not by mere fact of their sex but because they, along with children, ‘rely principally on helps externall’ (p. 43). On the other hand, women are potentially as prudent and powerful as men in the state of nature because their authority over children cannot be determined ‘without War’ (p. 139). It is precisely because Hobbes grants women so much agency as mothers that he could not simply relegate them to the position of meek subordinates demanded of early modern women in conduct books and domestic manuals. There is a gap in the text between the contract that women make with men to determine parental authority and the contract of marriage that requires women to ‘honour and obey’ their husbands for life.

In addition, Hobbes’s assertion of the ‘natural’ equality of men and women counters presumptions of male superiority that dominate misogynistic tracts and household manuals. In his 1622 book, *Of Domesticall Duties*, William Gouge, a Puritan minister, wrote: ‘A wife must submit her selfe to an husband, because he is her head. . . . As an head is more eminent and excellent than the body, and placed above it, so is an husband to his wife’.¹⁰ Gouge’s discourse, relying on biblical verses and the Genesis account of Eve as the emblem of female inferiority, is typical of the view that women were naturally subject to their husbands.¹¹ As Margaret R. Sommerville observes,

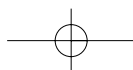
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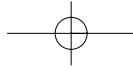
‘Virtually no Renaissance theorist thought that a wife granted her husband the power he possessed over her. God gave power to the husband by making marriage an institution in which husbands ruled’.¹²

Hobbes, however, does not assume such a divinely instituted hierarchy of male over female. In addition to the fact that men and women in his state of nature are rivals for the domination of their children, he also grants the possibility of female authority over males in the following statement from *De Cive*: ‘universally, if the society of the male and female be such an union, as the one have subjected himself to the other, the children belong to him or her that commands’ (pp. 107–8). This assertion represents a departure from traditional views of male supremacy in the household. Hobbes did not go so far as to grant women automatic authority in the domestic realm; however, he posits the possibility of an equal partnership between men and women: ‘in the state of nature, if a man and woman contract so, as neither is subject to the command of the other, the children are the mother’s’ (*De Cive*, p. 108). This implies that women can share power in the household. In the next paragraph, Hobbes describes a marriage contract, which, in civil society, legitimates male dominance in commonwealths ruled by men. How does the contract between men and women for equal command differ from the marriage contract? Hobbes makes no mention of an equal partnership between men and women in *Leviathan*, instead emphasizing the need for one parent alone to establish mastery over the children.¹³ The notion of an equal partnership of men and women in the state of nature that Hobbes introduces in *De Cive* disappears in *Leviathan*. Perhaps the idea is discarded because it would be considered too iconoclastic for his contemporaries and draw attention away from his emphasis on the relationship between subject and sovereign in the latter text. The omission is symptomatic of Hobbes’s inability to negotiate a place for wives in *Leviathan*. The idea of an equal partnership between men and women contradicts his assertion of a perpetual power struggle in the state of nature.

Disappearing Wives, Dominating Mothers

The role of wives is also conspicuously diminished in Sir Robert Filmer’s *Patriarcha*, considered the primary treatise of patriarchalist political theory. His Adam never acknowledges an Eve. Fathers and daughters are mentioned, but mothers remain invisible in the margins of the text. The primacy of male sovereigns leaves no room for a female monarch such as Queen Elizabeth. The basic claim of *Patriarcha* is that God granted fathers, beginning with Adam, exclusive authority over their wives and children; kings derive their absolute authority over their subjects from Adam’s divinely ordained position as original patriarch. Regardless of whether they gain the crown by succession, conquest, or election, kings govern, not by the consent of the people, but by





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‘the only right and natural authority of a supreme father’ (p. 11). Filmer echoes James’s figurative link between the role of a king and the responsibilities of a father. James writes that ‘as the Father of his fatherly duty is bound to care for the nourishing, education, and vertuous government of his children; even so is the king bound to care for all his subjects’.¹⁴ In the following passage, Filmer makes a similar comparison:

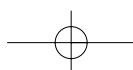
If we compare the natural duties of a father with those of a king, we find them to be all one, without any difference at all but only in the latitude or extent of them. As the father over one family, so the king, as father over many families, extends his care to preserve, feed, clothe, instruct and defend the whole common-wealth. His wars, his peace, his courts of justice and all his acts of sovereignty tend only to preserve and distribute to every subordinate and inferior father, and to their children, their rights and privileges, so that all the duties of a king are summed up in an universal fatherly care of his people. (p. 12)

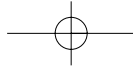
The distinction between the father’s authority over a family and a monarch’s reign over his subjects is merely a difference of degree. At the same time, the theorist insists that every father of a household is subordinate to the king. Filmer focuses so intently on patriarchalist power as derived from paternal rights that his neglect of women appears to be entirely the point. In the realm of patriarchal authority, women have no voice and no presence.

In several passages of *Leviathan*, Hobbes seems to echo Filmer’s vision of the primacy of the father over his children.¹⁵ Hobbes asserts the necessity of children’s obedience to parents as part of the education and formation of subjects who will respect sovereign authority. He argues that children are

to be taught, that originally the Father of every man was also his Sovereign Lord, with power over him of life and death; and that the Fathers of families, when by instituting a Common-wealth, they resigned that absolute Power, yet it was never intended, they should lose the honour due unto them for their education. For to relinquish such right, was not necessary to the Institution of Sovereign Power; nor would there be any reason, why any man should desire to have children, or take the care to nourish and instruct them, if they were afterwards to have no other benefit from them, than from other men. And this accordeth with the fifth Commandment. (p. 235)

This passage describes the father as the sole figure of authority over the children, gendered exclusively as male. Like the fathers in Filmer’s treatise, the fathers in this passage give up their right to absolute power to the sovereign but still retain authority over their children. Again, as in *Patriarcha*, wives are absent from the description. In fact, Hobbes’s depiction of the family in this passage seems to give the father the maternal role as well as paternal authority when he discusses men desiring to ‘have children’ or taking the care ‘to nourish’ them, terms associated with the tasks of birthing, nursing, and nurturing traditionally assigned to women.¹⁶





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However, in another domestic scenario outlined by Hobbes in *Leviathan*, women assume a dominant presence as mothers who have the initial control over their children. Instead of asserting, as Filmer does, that fathers automatically are the heads of households, a claim based on biblical interpretation, Hobbes grants the possibility of equality between the sexes in terms of parental dominion over children. He also contradicts his stance in the passage cited above, which established the sovereignty of fathers. Here, he explicitly denies paternal dominion, even though it is the title of his chapter:

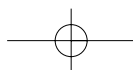
And whereas some have attributed the Dominion to the Man onely, as being of the more excellent Sex; they misreckon in it. For there is not alwayes that difference of strength, or prudence between the man and the woman, as that the right can be determined without War. In Commonwealth, this controversie is decided by the Civill Law; and for the most part, (but not alwayes) the sentence is in favour of the Father; because for the most part Common-wealths have been erected by the Fathers, not by the Mothers of families. (pp. 139–40)

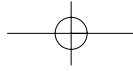
The ‘some who have attributed’ appears to be a reference to the long line of theologians, humanists, and political theorists who justified male dominance through scriptural interpretation. Instead of accepting the traditional masculinist rhetoric, Hobbes suggests the possibility of female preeminence.

In describing paternal dominion over children, Hobbes is insistent that mother and father – at least theoretically – are ‘equally Parents’ (p. 139). Consequently, ‘the Dominion therefor over the Child, should belong equally to both; and he be equally subject to both’ (p. 139). However, Hobbes concludes, this situation is untenable because ‘no man can obey two Masters’ (p. 139); therefore the dominion must be established either by contract in the state of nature or by civil law, which generally, under the rule of a Commonwealth, favours the father. The family is thus an artificially constructed arrangement where the father’s supremacy is ‘purely conventional or contractual, which, for Hobbes, means based on force’.¹⁷

If there is no contractual agreement between the parents concerning dominion, then the control over the children automatically passes to the mother, who has the primordial power of nurture and protection over her infants. Hobbes also gives the primacy to the mother because of the uncertainty of paternity: ‘For in the condition of meer Nature, where there are no Matrimoniall lawes, it cannot be known who is the Father, unlesse it be declared by the Mother: and therefore the right of Dominion over the Child dependeth on her will, and is consequently hers’ (p. 140). He makes a similar assertion in *De Cive*, arguing that ‘original dominion over children belongs to the mother: and among men no less than other creatures, the birth follows the belly’ (p. 107).¹⁸

In his discussion of parental dominion in *Leviathan*, Hobbes makes a succession of rhetorical moves that conflate the parent/child relationship with the master/servant dyad. Typical of this linguistic slippage is Hobbes’s



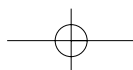


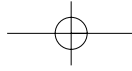
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assertion that ‘the Dominion therefore over the Child should belong equally to both [mother and father]; and he be equally subject to both, which is impossible; for no man can obey two Masters’ (p. 139). This syntactic construction transforms the child into a man, and implicitly links the parent/child relationship to the master/servant analogy. Later in the same chapter, Hobbes draws a correspondence between the relationship of servant and master and that of child and parent, quoting St Paul: ‘*Servants obey your masters in All things; and Children obey your Parents in All things.* There is simple obedience in those that are subject to Paternall, or Despotically Dominion’ (p. 143). This rhetorical move equates the obedience of parent to child with that of servant to master, obscuring the hierarchy that places children above servants in the family household. What is most striking about this series of Pauline analogies, however, is its omission of the husband/wife hierarchy. In Colossians, St Paul presents a trio of calls to obedience, beginning with: ‘Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord’ (3:18). The next two exhortations are the ones that Hobbes quotes: ‘Children, obey your parents in all things’ (3:20) and ‘Servants, obey in all things your masters’ (3:22). This suggests that Hobbes deliberately excludes the marital relationship as a potential model of political subjection.

Wives are also absent in another passage describing the acquisition of sovereign power. In addition to the establishment of a monarch through agreement among men, Hobbes argues that sovereign power may be attained by ‘Naturall force; as when a man maketh his children, to submit themselves, and their children to his government’ (p. 121). Here, by the use of the word ‘government’, he conflates the domestic and political spheres. He reiterates the family/state analogy again in another passage discussing the subject’s role as the vanquished, placed in a position of allegiance to the victor, similar to the position of ‘Child to the Parent’ (p. 151). Throughout the text, where Hobbes might have used the wife’s presumed subordination to her husband to exemplify the subject’s position in relation to the sovereign, he instead emphasizes the father’s rule over his children, as exemplified by the following passage:

Private Bodies Regular, and Lawfull, are those that are constituted without Letters, or other written Authority, saving the Lawes common to all other Subjects. And because they be united in one Person Representative, they are held for Regular; such as are all Families, in which the Father, or Master ordereth the whole Family. For he obligeth his Children, and Servants, as farre as the Law permitteth, though not further, because none of them are bound to obedience in those actions, which the Law hath forbidden to be done. In all other actions, during the time they are under domestique government, they are subject to their Fathers, and Masters, as to their immediate Sovereigns. For the Father, and Master being before the Institution of Common-wealth, absolute Sovereigns in their own Families, they lose afterward no more of their Authority, than the Law of the Common-wealth taketh from them. (pp. 162–3)





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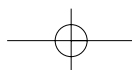
Although fathers retain authority over their children and servants, it is not absolute authority in the sense that children and servants are not obliged to perform tasks that would break laws. The laws of the Commonwealth do not restrain the sovereign, but they limit the authority of the father. The passage also suggests that families establish a hierarchy before the institution of the Commonwealth, contradicting the notion of the state of nature as chaotic and lawless. Filmer also points out this inconsistency, referring to the passage cited above: ‘how can it be said that either children or servants were in the state of *jus naturae* [the right of nature] till the institution of commonweals?’ (p. 192). One encounters another contradiction between Hobbes’s assertion in this passage that fathers are automatically the domestic rulers and his account of the need for mothers and fathers to settle the dominion over the child through contract because they are equally entitled to such supremacy.

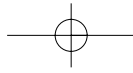
In her reading of *Leviathan*, Amussen points out that the power of the father as well as the sovereign is based on contract, but the mother’s original dominion over the infant creates a hurdle for Hobbes. She notes that ‘having recognized this problem, Hobbes never addressed the relation between husband and wife, but instead explained how men formed the commonwealth’.¹⁹

Filmer takes issue with Hobbes’s account of the formation of a Commonwealth, claiming that he departs from Scripture and reason by failure to establish the rights of sovereignty based on a paternal kingdom. In *Observations Concerning the Originall of Government*, he attacks Hobbes’s description of the family and his creation of a sovereignty based on contract as being faulty foundations for his theory of government. Instead, he insists that Hobbes’s argument would have been strengthened by resorting to paternal power, which is at the core of Filmer’s own theory:

I consent with him about the rights of exercising government, but I cannot agree to his means of acquiring it. It may seem strange I should praise his building and yet mislike his foundation, but so it is. His *jus naturae* [right of nature] and his *regnum institutum* [kingdom by institution] will not down with me, they appear full of contradiction and impossibilities. A few short notes about them I here offer, wishing he would consider whether his building would not stand firmer upon the principles of *regnum patrimoniale* [a paternal kingdom], as he calls it, both according to Scripture and reason – since he confesseth the ‘father being before the institution of a commonwealth’ was originally an ‘absolute sovereign’ ‘with power of life and death’, and that ‘a great family, as to the rights of sovereignty is a little monarchy’. . . . If, according to the order of nature, he had handled paternal government before that by institution, there would have been little liberty left in the subjects of the family to consent to institution of government. (p. 185)

Filmer sees Hobbes’s rejection of patriarchal authority as the basis for sovereignty as a weakness in his political theory. He also implicitly counters Hobbes’s assertions of maternal dominion and potential female independence, exemplified by the Amazons, when he states that ‘God gave to Adam not only the dominion over the woman and the children that should issue





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from them, but also over the whole earth to subdue it' (p. 187). In Filmer's patriarchal vision, women are not in a position to consent to be subjects or challenge men for parental dominion.

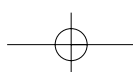
Hobbes, however, emphasizes the possibility of maternal supremacy, citing the Amazons as an example in both *De Cive* and *Leviathan*. In the latter, he contradicts the notion of male dominance by describing the Amazons as a group of women who 'Contracted with the Men of the neighbouring Countries to whom they had recourse for issue, that the issue Male should be sent back, but the Female remain with themselves: so that the dominion of the Females was in the Mother' (p. 140). In *De Cive*, in addition to citing the Amazons as an example, Hobbes notes that 'at this day in divers places, women are invested with the principal authority' (p. 106). Hobbes does not elaborate on this point so it is not possible to speculate whether he was referring to places within England or a foreign culture. He refers elsewhere in the text to the 'savage people' in America so his examples are not confined to England (p. 89). Regardless of the examples he had in mind, the significant point is his recognition of masculine dominion as culturally instituted, not naturally derived, a view that differs from Filmer and other theorists.

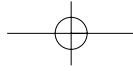
Female Subjects and Subjectivity

In her book, *The Sexual Contract*, Pateman claims that nearly all seventeenth-century contract theorists exclude women from the original pact that forms the basis for civil society. She observes:

With the exception of Hobbes, the classic theorists claim that women naturally lack the attributes and capacities of 'individuals'. Sexual difference is political difference; sexual difference is the difference between freedom and subjection. Women are not party to the original contract through which men transformed their natural freedom into the security of civil freedom. (p. 6)

Even though Pateman distinguishes Hobbes from other contract theorists in terms of his views of women, she nevertheless believes that in *Leviathan*, 'all women are excluded from becoming civil individuals' (p. 50). According to Pateman, since women and men are equal in the state of nature, the elimination of women as free subjects would occur after the Commonwealth is founded. I contend that this distinction is not so clear in *Leviathan*. Since seventeenth-century writers commonly used only masculine terms such as *mankind* even when including women, it is difficult to determine whether Hobbes excluded women as subjects. However, women are not among those whom Hobbes excuses from following the law and excludes from participating in the social contract. In his chapter on Civil Laws, he exempts 'naturall fooles' (p. 187), children, and madmen from obeying the law because they lack the capacity to understand the law, 'nor are they capable of the title of





 THE MISSING WIVES OF *LEVIATHAN*

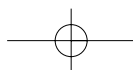
just, or unjust; because they had never power to make any covenant, or to understand the consequences thereof; and consequently never took upon them to authorise the actions of any Sovereign, as they must do that make to themselves a Common-wealth' (p. 187). The absence of women in this sentence does not prove conclusively that women are party to the contract that establishes the Commonwealth; however, it calls into question the assumption that women are not involved in the creation of *Leviathan*. Elsewhere in the text and in *De Cive*, Hobbes uses examples of men and women entering into contracts, such as agreements over control of children. The issue does not seem to be women's capacity to enter into contracts; instead, the issue is whether they can consent to be governed or whether they are coerced into subjection by fear or the greater strength of men. The transformation of women from dominating mothers to obedient wives is a story not told in *Leviathan*. Once granting women equality with men in the state of nature, Hobbes does not offer a justification for female subordination. Margaret R. Sommerville notes the contradiction in contract theory, including the grounding assumptions of Hobbes: 'If all males were born free, so also were all women. If no male could justly be subjected without his own consent, so, too, could no female. Patriarchalist writers gleefully pointed to the contradictions in contractarian theory that appeared to result'.²⁰

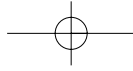
Although *Leviathan* describes the Hobbesian subject in masculine terms, *De Cive* explicitly refers to mothers as subjects. But in doing so, Hobbes sets up a conflict between the authority of the father and the power of the sovereign in relation to the female subject:

if the mother be a subject under what government soever, he that hath the supreme authority in that government, will also have the dominion over him that is born of her; for he is lord also of the mother, who is bound to obey him in all things. . . . if a woman for society's sake give herself to a man on this condition, that he shall bear the sway, he that receives his being from the contribution of both parties, is the father's in regard of the command he hath over the mother. (p. 107)

The woman is placed in contradictory positions. Is she subject to the command of her husband or is she subject to the authority of the sovereign? Hobbes eliminates this passage and its resulting conflict from *Leviathan*. Perhaps he must evade the issue of women as subjects of both husbands and sovereigns because it creates the dilemma of divided loyalty and, as Hobbes claims in the case of parental dominion, 'no man can obey two Masters' (p. 139).

It is not clear from the passage cited above what Hobbes means by a woman giving herself to a man for society's sake. In the next paragraph, he specifically mentions 'a contract of marriage between a man and woman' (p. 108). The terms could be synonymous but, since Hobbes presents the family as a voluntary arrangement, he does not limit its structure to that of husband, wife, and children. Instead, he imagines the possibility of cohabitation outside of marriage. In *De Cive*, he distinguishes marriage from men and





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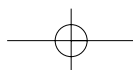
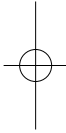
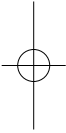
women who ‘agree only to lie together’, a relationship apparently based solely on sexual satisfaction, perhaps even a form of prostitution (p. 128). Offspring produced from such a union are ‘the father’s or the mother’s variously, according to the differing civil laws of divers cities’ (p. 108). In *Leviathan*, the union of male and female under Amazonian rule also exists outside of marriage, purely for procreative purposes.

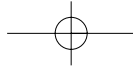
Unravelling the Analogy

By omitting discussion of the relationship between husbands and wives, Hobbes stops short of making a connection between the possibility of breaking the domestic contract as well as the political contract. By eliminating the marriage analogy from his treatise, Hobbes avoids the dilemma over divorce that vexed both royalist and parliamentarian theorists, especially during the Civil War and the rule of Oliver Cromwell. However, Shanley believes the contradictory uses of the marriage analogy during these debates over political sovereignty ‘eventually – although very slowly – became the bases for Liberal arguments about female equality and marriage’.²¹

As Shanley notes, the possibility of women initiating a separation from their husbands is explored by John Locke in his *Two Treatises of Government*, published in 1690, eleven years after Hobbes’s death and nearly forty years after *Leviathan* was released in print. Locke set out to refute the doctrine of absolute monarchy founded on divine right, specifically the theory espoused by Filmer, whose *Patriarcha* was published in 1680. In a critique of Filmer’s theory, which had become fashionable among royalists, Locke proposed that government exists by consent of the people, who delegate limited power to it. As part of his theory, Locke defines conjugal society as ‘a voluntary compact between man and woman’ necessary chiefly for procreation but providing ‘a communion of interests’ in spousal affection and care of children.²² He argues that such a pact need not be for life. Although the rule over common interest and property ‘naturally falls to the man’s share as the abler and stronger’, he retains ‘no more power over her [the wife] than she has over his life; the power of the husband being so far from that of an absolute monarch that the wife has, in many cases, a liberty to separate from him where natural right or their contract allows it’ (p. 157). In addition to granting the possibility of a divorce initiated by the wife, Locke makes a radical break with the traditional use of the family/state analogy:

Let us therefore consider a master of a family with all these subordinate relations of wife, children, servants and slaves, united under the domestic rule of a family, with what resemblances soever it may have in its order, offices, and number too, with a little commonwealth, yet is very far from it both in its constitution, power, and end; or if it must be thought a monarchy, and the pater-familias the absolute monarch in it, absolute monarchy will have but a very shattered and short power,





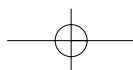
THE MISSING WIVES OF *LEVIATHAN*

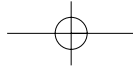
when it is plain . . . that the master of the family has a very distinct and differently limited power both as to time and extent over those several persons that are in it; for excepting the slave . . . he has no legislative power of life and death over any of them, and none too but what a mistress of a family may have as well as he. (p. 158)

Locke completely rejects the comparison of family with monarchy that forms the basis of Filmer's patriarchal polemics and James's dramatic appeal to his subjects to consider him as their husband.

Hobbes comes close to making a similar move in *Leviathan*, but his use of the analogy exhibits contradictory impulses. In one passage, he sets up the historical precedent for the Commonwealth by describing how bands of marauders living in small families formed alliances with other families so that they could fend off invaders and acquire control over a larger territory. This pattern is a paradigm for the political state: 'As small Families [sic] did then; so now do Cities and Kingdomes which are but greater Families' (p. 118). In another passage, however, he disrupts the analogy by suggesting that domestic management requires a different kind of wisdom from that which is necessary to rule a kingdom. He argues that 'To govern well a family, and a kingdom, are not different degrees of Prudence; but different sorts of businesse . . . A plain husband-man is more Prudent in affaires of his own house, then [sic] a Privy Counsellor in the affaires of another man' (p. 53). In this example, Hobbes is not using the domestic realm as a microcosm of the political state. If he were, he would have emphasized that the control of a kingdom required a higher degree of prudence than governing a household. This is the way that James and Filmer used the family/state analogy: the household as the microcosm of the body politic. Instead, as Locke does, Hobbes separates the domestic and the political spheres. In addition, he suggests that the administration of a family is an entirely different business from ruling a kingdom. Implicitly, he suggests that the husband has more at stake in his household than a counsellor has in dealing with the governmental affairs of another man. Most striking, however, is the complete disassociation of the husband from the sovereign in this example. Instead of the analogy of James I as the 'husband', there is no reference to a king in Hobbes's example.

Hobbes again distinguishes between the domestic and the political in describing the theoretical state of nature, where there is always the potential for a war 'of every man, against every man' (p. 88). He provides a contemporary example of people living in such a state by pointing to 'the savage people in many places of America' who, aside from 'the government of small Families, the concord whereof dependeth on naturall lust, have no government at all; and live at this day in that brutish manner' (p. 89). The description politicizes family relations in the so-called state of nature by using the word 'government', but it deflates the political stability of such a 'family' by defining it as a tenuous arrangement relying precariously on the satisfaction





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of sexual desires. Such a precarious government, Hobbes suggests, is tantamount to the absence of government.

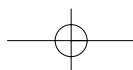
His most explicit dislocation of the family/state analogy follows his definition of a 'great Family [which] if it be not part of some Common-wealth, is of itself, as to the Rights of Sovereignty, a little Monarchy' (p. 142). Immediately after comparing the power of a father or master to the monarch, Hobbes overturns the figurative link: 'yet a Family is not properly a Common-wealth; unless it be of that power by its own number, or by other opportunities, as not to be subdued without the hazard of war' (p. 142). The family, because of its limitations in magnitude, cannot be equated with the kingdom.

Hobbes can be viewed along a continuum of political theorists who used the family/state analogy in their work. At one end of the spectrum are James I and Filmer, who view the domestic and political spheres as mirrors of each other. At the opposite end is Locke, who explicitly separates the two realms. Hobbes's work lies somewhere between these two poles. His examples in *Leviathan* occasionally rely on the correspondence between the domestic and the political; at other times, he presents a disjunction between the two spheres. The point at which he disrupts the analogy is centred on his distorted family, which calls attention to its artifice by eliminating wives, the primary force for creating and continuing the family. The dominating mother, the female monarch, and the Amazon make appearances in the text as examples of female agency that are inconsistent with the traditional early modern portrait of the domesticated wife who willingly submits to her husband's authority. The wives are missing in *Leviathan* because Hobbes is not certain where they belong in his system. The gaps and contradictions within his text – and between texts – reflect the conflicting views of women that were at the centre of the *querelle des femmes* and at the fringes of political theories of the period. Made more powerful by their absence, the wives of *Leviathan* escape from merely being inscribed into the patriarchal order of things.

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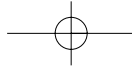
Notes

- 1 *King James VI and I, Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1994), p. 136.
- 2 Amussen points out that Anglican catechism 'taught young people how to be good subjects. In doing so, it asserted that the family was the fundamental social institution, and that order in families was both necessary for, and parallel to, order in the state.' (Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 35).
- 3 Mary Lyndon Shanley, 'Marriage Contract and the Social Contract in Seventeenth-Century English Political Thought', *Western Political Quarterly*, 32 (1979), 79–91 (pp. 80–1).



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- 4 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1991), p. 151. Future references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
- 5 Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive or The Citizen*, ed. Sterling P. Lamprecht (New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949), p. 108. Future references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
- 6 Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, p. 63.
- 7 Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (New York, Harper & Rowe, 1977), pp. 225–6.
- 8 Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, Stanford UP, 1988), p. 48.
- 9 In *Patriarcha*, Filmer notes Aristotle's distinction, in his *Politics*, between a wife and a servant as entities serving different ends, the wife for generation and the servant for preservation. However, Filmer believes this distinction is irrelevant to his use of the family/state analogy: 'nothing doth follow but only this, that conjugal and despotical communities do differ. But it is no consequence that therefor economical and political societies do the like. For though it prove a family to consist of two distinct communities, yet it follows not that a family and commonwealth are distinct, because, as well in the commonwealth as in the family, both these communities are found.' (Sir Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1991), p. 17. Future references to this edition are given after quotations in the text). In a poem titled 'To the Ladies', Lady Mary Chudleigh, who defended women against misogynistic attitudes in essays and verse, writes: 'Wife and servant are the same, / But only differ in the name' (quoted in Angeline Goreau, *The Whole Duty of a Woman: Female Writers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Garden City, NY, Dial Press-Doubleday, 1986), p. 273). Margaret R. Sommerville asserts that women and servants were not synonymous terms. She argues that 'sexual union placed the wife higher in the family's hierarchy than servants' (*Sex and Subjection: Attitudes to Women in Early-Modern Society* (London, Arnold, 1995), p. 238).
- 10 William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (Amsterdam, Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, Ltd., and Norwood, NJ, Walter J. Johnson, Inc., 1976), pp. 29–30.
- 11 Margaret R. Sommerville emphasizes the prominence of the Bible in the formation of social and political theories. 'Early-modern theorists believed they found female inferiority and subjection writ large in Scripture just as in the classical tradition and anthropological observation. The book of Genesis was the most important source, for the Creation story provided the hard evidence of God's original intentions about the human condition and the relationship that should obtain between male and female' (*Sex and Subjection*, p. 23).
- 12 *Sex and Subjection*, p. 211.
- 13 Filmer makes a similar assertion: 'Do we not find that in every family the government of one alone is most natural?' (*Patriarcha*, p. 23).
- 14 *Political Writings*, ed. Sommerville, p. 65.
- 15 Both Hobbes and Filmer refer to James I in a favourable light. Hobbes mentions the king briefly in *Leviathan* at the end of Chapter 19, which describes the several kinds of Commonwealth. He compares James's policy towards Scotland with the Roman Empire's practice of conquering nations but granting them membership in the governance of Rome: 'And this was it our most wise King James, aymed at, in endeavouring the Union of his two realms of England and Scotland' (p. 138). However, Filmer pays much greater tribute to James, whom he calls 'his



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- late majesty of happy memory' (p. 57), by quoting extensively from James's *Trew Law of Free Monarchies*, which Filmer considers a 'majestical discourse' (p. 36).
- 16 Pateman calls attention to a similar conjunction of maternal and paternal roles in *Patriarcha*. She notes that 'Filmer's father, embodying both female and male capacities, stands at the end of a very long history of traditional patriarchal argument in which the creation of political society has been seen as a masculine act of birth, and in which women and their capacities have been seen, at best, as irrelevant, and, at worst, as dangerous to political order' (*The Sexual Contract*, p. 89).
- 17 Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, p. 26.
- 18 Freud refers to the child's recognition of maternal certainty and paternal uncertainty as a stage in the evolution of 'the neurotic's family romance' in his essay, 'Family Romances' in Volume IX of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London, Hogarth Press, 1959), pp. 238–9.
- 19 *An Ordered Society*, p. 63.
- 20 *Sex and Subjection*, p. 218.
- 21 'Marriage Contract and the Social Contract', 80.
- 22 John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, introd. W. S. Parker (London, Dent, 1975), p. 155. Future references to this edition are given after quotations.

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