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BABE BEAN: TRANSGRESSION AND PRIVILEGE

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THE stories of a notable handful of cross-dressing women peppered nineteenth-century newspapers and medical journals. Despite multiple instances of women attempting to pass as men, the information available about them is generally sensationalized and sparse. The case of Babe Bean offers a rare exception to the typical lack of documentation. Bean lived in Stockton, California between 1897 and 1900, and received tremendous public attention for wearing male attire. Newspapers consistently reported even the most mundane details of Bean's day-to-day life. She was interviewed several times by reporters from various publications, asked to write a biography for the *San Francisco Call*, questioned about her views on feminism and gender relations for the *Stockton Evening Mail*, and was eventually hired as a reporter for the *Mail*.

The opinions Bean expressed in the *Mail* vehemently reinforced the social status quo, although her clothing was unorthodox. Bean was highly critical of women, especially feminists. She opposed suffrage, advocated traditional women's roles, and praised men. She was particularly complementary of men in power, including police officers, the police chief, and the governor. Bean's writings outline her shift from an unusual outsider, ridiculed for her gender deviation, to a town authority empowered to pontificate upon appropriate female behavior and characteristics. Bean's atypical clothing became less threatening in the public mind as a consequence of these traditional views. Her attire came to be viewed as a quirky personal preference, rather than an indication of militant political leanings, deviant sexual appetites, or a desire to undermine male prerogatives.

Bean's ability to access power by ingratiating herself with male authority is remarkable when contrasted with the unfortunate consequences that frequently befell cross-dressing women. Lillian Faderman has documented several women in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europe who faced death as a consequence of claiming "for themselves a

variety of privileges ordinarily reserved for men,” including “self-sufficiency, freedom to wander unmolested, [and] freedom to explore occupations more varied than those open to women.” While also typified by “a basic feminine protest,” domestic tales of discovered passing reveal a variety of similarly severe consequences, with evidence or appearance of lesbianism and political ambition generally increasing the repercussions. In 1880, Lucy Ann Lobdell, a transvestite lesbian, was admitted to the Willard Asylum for the Insane in New York “upon the discovery of her sex.” The physician treating Lobdell asserted that her lesbianism and male identity confirmed “the development of positive insanity . . . a rare form of mental disease” and, later in his report, “a pathological condition and a peculiar manifestation of insanity.” Lobdell died institutionalized.¹

The trial of nineteen-year-old Alice Mitchell, accused of murdering her seventeen-year-old lover Freda Ward, was lurid fodder for a multitude of newspapers. Lisa Duggan analyzes the case in “The Trial of Alice Mitchell: Sensationalism, Sexology, and the Lesbian Subject in Turn-of-the-Century America.” Interestingly, Duggan demonstrates that it was not the emotional intensity of the girls’ relationship that inspired concern. While their relationship was viewed by many as “excessive,” it was understood within the confines of nineteenth-century “romantic friendship.” Instead, their exposed “plans for cross-dressing and marriage pushed them beyond the bounds of that category.” Duggan continues that this “classic passing strategy” was “so rare among bourgeois white women that their plan was perceived as so radically inappropriate as to be insane.” It was the masculine attire that aroused the initial concern that then resulted in the girls’ relatives terminating their relationship, and ultimately, in Mitchell stabbing Ward to death for ending their engagement. Newspapers around the country ran the story, inspiring an inundation of popular dialog about the dangers of gender deviation. Moreover, their violence corresponded with the insanity and depravity popularly attributed to inverts (homosexuals) in the discourse of contemporary sexologists. Cross-dressing became a widely recognized signifier of peril.²

This peril was especially pertinent because, in popular discourse, it was imbued with political significance. While women were increasingly tight-laced, corseted, and otherwise confined within restrictive, body-

¹ Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men* (London: Women’s Press, 1985), 54; Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1976), 209, 225, 221, 223.

² Lisa Duggan, “The Trials of Alice Mitchell: Sensationalism, Sexology and the Lesbian Subject in Turn-of-the-Century America,” in “Theorizing Lesbian Experience,” special issue, *Signs* 18, no. 4 (Summer 1993): 798.

contouring clothing, male clothing “began to show more sobriety and became progressively more somber and drab,” as a consequence of the utility necessitated by the market revolution. According to Gayle Fisher, the practicality of “bifurcation [pants] and lack of ornamentation became associated with masculine dominance in the public sphere and male superiority in general,” while women were relegated to an increasingly ornamental role within the private sphere. Deviation from this ornamental role was understood to signify a desire for increased political participation. As such, it was remarkably transgressive, inspiring both contempt and curiosity.³

Female political participation was particularly controversial in the San Francisco Bay Area, as evidenced by the 1896 California Suffrage Campaign. In 1896, a year prior to Bean’s arrival in Stockton, Susan B. Anthony assumed control of a massive women’s suffrage campaign which attempted to acquire suffrage gains in every county within the state. Although the Democrats remained consistently hostile to female suffrage, both the People’s and Republican parties voiced tepid support. The San Francisco Bay Area remained particularly hostile to suffrage despite the increasing sympathies of many California voters, especially in southern California. In part, the association between suffrage and temperance undermined the efficacy of suffrage campaigns within the city, its immigrant enclaves, and the surrounding grape-producing areas. Unable to overcome this obstacle, “the 1896 California suffrage campaign was defeated primarily because it lost in San Francisco, the state’s population center.” Over 74 percent of voters in the region voted against suffrage, resulting in suffragists losing every precinct and city assembly district.⁴

Against this backdrop, in August 1897, newspapers in Stockton, California reported several sightings of a young woman dressed in male attire. Immediately, authorities attempted to locate the stranger. When police finally located her, they found that she created more questions than she answered. She intentionally obscured most information about her past, giving an alias, refusing to disclose her city of origin, or her business in Stockton. Moreover, she feigned dumbness, answering all inquiries with a pencil and paper, presumably so as not to expose her

³ Gayle V. Fischer, *Pantaloon and Power: A Nineteenth-Century Dress Reform in the United States* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2001), 3, 4.

⁴ Gayle Gullet, *Becoming Citizens: The Emergence and Development of the California Women’s Movement 1880–1911* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 93, 96.

feminine voice. These obfuscations contributed to the air of mystery that continued to surround Bean throughout her time in Stockton.⁵

What Stocktonites would never know is that Babe Bean was born Elvira Virginia Mugarrieta on December 9, 1869, to Jose Marcos Murgarrieta and Eliza Alice Denny Garland. Known as “The Great Patriot,” Bean’s father served with distinction in the Mexican Army, was an assistant to President Arista, and in 1857 was appointed to the Mexican Consulship in San Francisco, where Bean was born and raised. Bean’s mother was the daughter of a Louisiana Congressman who later served as a Louisiana Supreme Court justice. Despite these prominent roots, the story of the Murgarrieta family is that of a family in decline. After a dispute with officials in the Mexican government, Jose Murgarrieta was removed from his position and forced to work as a Spanish teacher. The circumstances of the family upon his death in 1866 have been described as “nearly destitute.” When Bean arrived in Stockton at age twenty-eight, she did so with only a small monthly allowance, the origins of which are unknown.⁶

While Bean successfully hid her background from the people of Stockton, it has nonetheless been revealed through the work of two historians. First was Alan Berube of the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Historical Society. Bean’s story was originally brought to light in a slide show documentary entitled, “She Drank, She Swore, She Courted Girls, She Even Chewed Tobacco.” The narration for the film, originally penned by Berube, was edited by Martha Vicinus into an essay of the same name for inclusion in their book, *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*. This collection tells the stories of a variety of cross-dressing women, revealing that their motives for passing as men included political freedom, autonomy, and lesbianism. Berube uses the extensive newspaper coverage of Babe Bean’s life in Stockton to capture the town’s fascination with the “Trousered Puzzle.” Louis Sullivan wrote Bean’s only biography, entitled, *From Female to Male: The Life of Jack B. Garland*, building upon Berube’s research into her life. Sullivan’s work remains the only printed collection of material relating to Bean, and has been cited in at least two other scholarly works addressing the history of female transvestism.⁷

⁵ “A Woman in Male Clothing,” *Stockton Evening Mail*, 2 August 1897; “In Man’s Attire Tenants an Ark,” *San Francisco Call*, 24 August 1897; “Mystery in a Gloomy Ark,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 24 August 1897; “Wears Trousers But Her Tongue is Silent,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 24 August 1897; *San Francisco Bulletin*, 24 August 1897.

⁶ Louis Sullivan, *From Female to Male: The Life of Jack B. Garland* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1990), 157, 156, 155, 162.

⁷ Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr., eds., *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: Meridian, 1989), 189–192.

Ultimately, the crux of Sullivan's argument is that Bean was a homosexual female-to-male transgendered individual. This means that Bean both viewed herself as a man and had sexual interest in other men. It is a plausible argument that Bean was not simply a lesbian, as there is no evidence that Bean had intimate relationships with women. In fact, Bean's frequent condemnations of the female sex suggest that she had no interest in pursuing relationships of any kind with women. Conversely, Bean lavished praise upon men, extolling both individual men and the attributes of the sex generally. Sullivan claims Bean's gender dysphoria is evidenced by "sexist male attitudes," hostility toward the image of "the New Woman," and Bean's opposition to suffrage for women. Sullivan continues that Bean's praise of men indicates not only a common gender identity, but also homosexual affection.⁸

It is impossible to reconstruct accurate insight into Bean's mind as none of her personal writings or correspondences are known to survive. It is possible that Bean was one of the multitudes of female anti-suffragists and anti-feminists throughout history who were not male-identified. As such, Bean's conservative political leanings would not automatically indicate that she was male-identified. Similarly, Bean's expressed admiration of men and avowed dislike of women does not necessarily suggest attraction to men. Instead of revealing a transgendered homosexual, the published writings and interviews from Stockton reveal the processes by which Bean moved from the objectified spectacle of the "queer young woman" and "freak" to the exalted position of a "sensible" and "excellent young lady" with opinions of value. Bean fomented this transition by publicly allying herself with traditional male authority. She minimized the likelihood that she would be stigmatized as a radical feminist, lesbian, or similarly threatening social or sexual deviant. Analyzing Bean's public writings increases understanding of the process by which Bean gained acceptance into Stockton society. It also highlights the most politically threatening aspects of female transvestism, as well as her response to those concerns. Her conservative views ameliorated the anxiety with which she was initially received and subverted the often-tragic consequences that befell other contemporary women discovered passing as men for political or sexual reasons.⁹

On August 2, 1897, a page-one headline of the *Stockton Evening Mail* declared, "a woman in male clothing" had been "masquerading in Stockton a week." Foreshadowing the town's seemingly endless fascina-

⁸ Sullivan, 57.

⁹ "Male-Clad Girl of the Lake," *Stockton Evening Mail*, 27 August 1897; "Here Are Other Girls," *Stockton Evening Mail*, 5 October 1897; "Oh. Babe, Babe, Look Out!" *Stockton Evening Mail*, 2 October 1897.

tion with Bean, the article described Bean in great detail, and listed every known sighting of her. The author surmised a variety of motives for the strange girl's attire, including the theory that she was perhaps underage and cavorting with an older man. Authorities were so eager to detain Bean that a watch was stationed outside the hotel where she was suspected of procuring lodging.¹⁰

Bean's attire was not, in itself, illegal according to either Stockton or California law, a fact that was known to the authorities prior to her apprehension. While unorthodox, and frowned upon, a woman dressed in male attire was not committing a criminal act, nor indicating insanity as would have been the understanding in prior periods of American history. Instead, the law interpreted Bean's clothing as a disguise. With regard to disguise, the law stated:

it shall be unlawful for any person to wear any mask, false whiskers, or any personal disguise for the purpose of: 1. Evading or escaping discovery, recognition, or identification in the commission of any public offense. 2. Concealment, flight, or escape, when charged with, arrested for, or convicted of any public offense.¹¹

As such, Bean's clothing would be a misdemeanor only if it could be proven that it was worn for the purposes committing or aiding in the commission of a crime. There was no evidence that Bean posed a criminal threat, but this did not shield her from the suspicion of the police department.

Consequently, officers continued to search for Bean, hoping to extract an explanation for her bizarre behavior. According to the *San Francisco Call*, "Police Detectives Carroll and Klech overtook Miss Bean masquerading in male attire" on August 23, 1897. Bean was taken to the police station and questioned at length by Chief Gall. Bean feigned dumbness. All of her communications were conducted with a pencil and paper, which she kept in the pocket of her suit. Reports of her interrogation indicate that Bean handled her brief detention with confidence. It is clear that she was knowledgeable about the law, from the observation "that she was careful not to infringe against" it. Moreover, Bean knew that "the wearing of apparel belonging to the other sex is punishable only when it is done for the purpose of committing an offense against the law." She reportedly asserted, "that she had committed no error and therefore had no fear." Bean's confidence in dealing with the police was equaled only by her deftness in handling a pencil. Another article

¹⁰ "A Woman in Male Clothing," *Stockton Evening Mail*, 2 August 1897.

¹¹ "Oh, Babe, Babe, Look Out!" *Stockton Evening Mail*, 2 October 1897.

detailing Bean's encounter with the police asserted that "what she says on paper . . . is always written in the best of English, and it is evident that Miss Bean has generally traveled in the better walks of life." While the initial interviews with Bean may have mitigated police fears that she was a criminal, she remained an enigmatic figure. Even the information she offered regarding her age was later proven false. Those early deceits ensured that Bean maintained the power to obscure her true identity. They also revealed her ability to manipulate authority figures. Bean refused to reveal her true name, city of origin, family history, or specific business in Stockton. As a consequence, the information reprinted from the police interview failed to satiate the curiosity of many of Stockton's citizens.¹²

Capitalizing upon the draw of Babe Bean, the *Stockton Evening Mail* continued to report a variety of speculative theories that accounted for Bean's strangeness, as well as her mysterious appearance in Stockton. One article asserted, "Chief Gall thinks that Babe Bean is an actress and learned how to wear pantaloons on the stage." Other theories abounded; one was that Bean was a newspaperwoman sent to Stockton for a story; another was that she was a private detective. Suspicions mounted when a man from Montana arrived in Stockton claiming that Bean was his sister and had fled from home two years earlier in male attire. He threatened to reclaim Bean by force. Bean disavowed knowledge of the man, and he eventually admitted that she was not, in fact, the sister that he was seeking. Bean seems to have viewed the multiple theories about her origins with a degree of amusement. Although she asserted that these were not her motives for donning pants, she did little to provide verifiable answers to the abounding questions.¹³

Throughout interviews with the police and newspapers, Bean claimed her clothing served largely professional ends. While disclaiming "any intention of violating any law . . . [Bean] said that she preferred to travel in male attire as her chances for procuring work were made better." For example, Bean claimed to have secured work as a painter upon arriving in Stockton, work that would not have been available to her had she not been passing as a man. Additionally, Bean commented, "that to dress in men's clothes was her only protection," as she was a woman who lived and traveled alone. Throughout her time in Stockton, she continued to assert that her attire was "at once a convenience and a protection." Despite these purely practical motives, Bean alluded to a

¹² "Story of a Modern Rosalind," *San Francisco Call*, 27 August 1897; "Wears Trousers but Her Tongue is Silent," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 24 August 1897; *San Francisco Bulletin*, 24 August 1897; "In Man's Attire Tenants an Ark," *San Francisco Call*, 24 August 1897.

¹³ "Male-Clad Girl of the Lake," *Stockton Evening Mail*, 27 August 1897.

natural predisposition toward male attire beginning in childhood, enabling the emergence of a more complex personal history.¹⁴

Writing for the *San Francisco Call*, Bean offered a history of her life. In what the *Mail* called “a very clever little novelette, under the guise of a biographical sketch,” Bean traced her life through childhood, her time in a convent, a bad marriage, and a variety of adventures culminating with her arrival in Stockton. While Bean’s story started with an expression of the highest esteem for her parents, Bean wrote that “from a tomboy full of ambitions [she] was made into a sad and thoughtful woman.” This unfortunate transition resulted from her mother’s attempts to feminize her. Despite her mother’s desire to curb her youthful rebelliousness, Bean “wanted to be out in the air always.” In fact, she claimed that “a desire for liberty and freedom took such a hold upon me that at night when all were asleep I would get up and wander about in our immediate grounds as if in search of something I could not tell what.” Bean’s desire for adventure was fueled by stories of world travel. Increasingly aware of the limitations imposed on her sex, Bean wondered if she would be doomed to hear about these things from others while never having the joy of experiencing them for herself. She recalled her adolescent laments: “Oh, that I were a boy! Just to be able to see all these beautiful things!” She added that she “yearned for the freedom [she] had dreamed of, and how often [she] wished [she] could enjoy the liberty that the world seems to allow a boy.” In addition to her desire for autonomy, Bean highlighted many youthful attributes that were inconsistent with femininity. She rode astride, enjoyed dressing in her brother’s clothes, and was closer to her father, as she felt he was capable of understanding her better than her mother did.¹⁵

Despite the family’s precarious financial circumstances, Bean received an admirable education. While Bean recalled the difficulty of her time at a convent, she also stated that as an adult she “realized the sacrifices that must have been made in order to keep [her] at school.” Bean’s education is remarkable not only because of her family’s “reduced circumstances,” but because higher education was not generally a priority for women in the mid-1870s. Bean’s writing skills, likely a result of her remarkable education, served her well, as both means for earning an income as a reporter at various times throughout her life, and also as an indication of a prominent background and membership in a family of

¹⁴ “In Man’s Attire Tenants an Ark,” *San Francisco Call*, 24 August 1897; *San Francisco Bulletin*, 24 August 1897; “Babe Won’t See You Girls,” *Stockton Evening Mail*, 4 October 1897.

¹⁵ “Oh, Babe, Babe, Look Out!” *Stockton Evening Mail*, 2 October 1897; “Story of a Modern Rosalind,” *San Francisco Call*, 27 August 1897.

significant financial means (despite the fact that this was not her family's reality through most of her life). A variety of accounts also note the benefit Bean's education must have afforded her in her written communications with police. It is likely that the class implications of having such skill provided Bean with more respect and credibility than would have been attainable by a woman believed to be poor or ignorant. Bean's education provided a distinct advantage, making her both more remarkable, and more intriguing.¹⁶

Stockton's women were especially interested in Bean's peculiarities. Bean became "an object of still more curiosity especially among the fair sex." Perhaps it was that Bean represented a world of possibility that the vast majority of women would never experience. It could have been because of her unabashed deviation from gender expectation. But, whether she served as an inspiration, a symbol of political emancipation, or an object of scorn, "women [were] much more curious to catch a glimpse of the trousered puzzle than men [were]." Consequently, "several fashionable ladies" extended invitations to Bean. She refused them all, declining to "put herself on display." Her refusal is interesting because it contrasts sharply with Bean's willingness to create a spectacle for a litany of newspapermen eager to publish tidbits of information about her life and opinions. Bean's refusal to associate with women created the first of many instances in which she vociferously avowed distrust of the intentions of the women in Stockton. Also, it illuminated Bean's surprisingly conventional stance on gender relations given her deviation.¹⁷

Despite drastically deviating from the attire and behavior deemed appropriate for her sex, Bean espoused shockingly conservative views on relations between the sexes and the roles appropriate for women. On September 15, 1897, a first page headline of the *Stockton Evening Mail* declared, "Although she wears trousers she is not a 'New Woman' and doesn't want the vote." Bean harnessed her seemingly insatiable desire for autonomy by publicly asserting that she had no desire to trespass on the male preserve of politics. The article declared, "Beebe Beam [sic] has gone a step further than even Susan B. Anthony, inasmuch as she has discarded petticoats for pantaloons, [y]et she is not a new woman." This assertion separated Bean from the women's suffrage movement, which was largely unpopular with men in northern California. Additionally, it framed her clothing choices as nothing more than a quirky personal preference, thereby ameliorating fears that her attire was indicative of a desire to undermine patriarchal authority.

¹⁶ "Story of a Modern Rosalind," *San Francisco Call*, 27 August 1897.

¹⁷ "Babe Bean Hunts Bandits," *Stockton Evening Mail*, 15 September 1897; "Rosalind Up-To-Date," *Stockton Evening Mail*, 27 September 1897.

In isolating herself from the feminist movement, Bean clearly stated “No. No new woman for me.” Bean further criticized suffragists, writing, “the majority put me in mind of the old saying ‘Monkey see, monkey do.’” In this, Bean went beyond separating herself from the suffrage movement. She consciously allied herself with male authority by echoing their condemnatory attitudes toward suffrage. While Bean tempered her disapproval by expressing “heartfelt sympathy” for female property owners, she continued to assert that “the better class of women would not go to the polls.”

Even though Bean observed that “it seems a pity that women who pay large taxes and who help support a community are kicked out,” she had, for women “who are so presumptuous as to want to rule the State and the people . . . nothing but contempt.” She further rejected political ambition by asserting that after a day as governor she “would be only too glad to go back to where all women belong.” Ironically, Bean lived her life beyond the boundaries of space which society allocated to women. These statements prove Bean’s ambition to ingratiate herself with authority, and represent the attitude that she had developed in her rebellious early years. Regardless of her reasons for the statements, they reinforced her public vow to support rather than subvert the social and political power structure.¹⁸

Bean was publicly contemptuous toward women in general, even if they were not feminists with political ambitions. In addition to refusing to have any female visitors, she commented that she and other females “somehow . . . never were very good friends.” She asserted that “their little deceits . . . [and] petty jealousies” made her more likely to have male friends, adding, “that is what made me in my early youth, such a Tomboy.” Bean accomplished two important things by publicly voicing this hostility toward females. First, she further aligned herself with men by supporting their dominant political opinions about women, and reinforced popular sexism by attributing to women, as a group, the same unlikable characteristics that men often attributed to them. Second, Bean avoided any appearance of, or opportunity for, speculation about sexual attraction to or interest in women. Bean eliminated occasion for conjecture by entertaining no women in her home, and fostering no close relationships with women. She was so firm in her blanket condemnation of women that the reporter interviewing her observed that she “appear[ed] to be a veritable woman hater.” Bean half-heartedly rebuffed this allegation by asserting that it was only women of a certain type that she disdained. Those whom she found to be “worthy of the name

¹⁸ “Babe Bean Hunts Bandits,” *Stockton Evening Mail*, 15 September 1897.

woman,” she claimed to hold in high regard. Yet, she allowed the distinctions between these types of women to remain a mystery.¹⁹

Revelations about Bean’s political and misogynistic leanings greatly contributed to her intrigue. On September 28, 1897, another front-page article explored Bean’s views of gender, this one penned by Bean herself. Bean was successfully ingratiating herself with authority as indicated by the paper’s solicitation of her opinions. A similar honor would not likely have been conferred upon one who was deemed a threat to the order of society. Again, Bean took the opportunity to strongly criticize women. She said “the young women whom I have met are too vain and fickle—think too much . . . about looks,” and were, she continued, “too easily won on this account [vanity] by the shine of a dollar or the sparkle of a diamond.” It is interesting that Bean felt she could competently critique those with whom she refused to associate. Bean universally attributed the “detestable failings” of vanity and fickleness to the shortcomings of mothers, advising them to “make your daughters from childhood admire cleanliness and simplicity.” Bean phrased her advice in language reminiscent of parenting and housekeeping manuals of the day that sought to preserve the home as the woman’s sphere.²⁰

Men were not entirely spared Bean’s censure, although they were handled more delicately. Bean asserted that “there is nothing that women detest more in men than deception.” Consequently, she advised men “to be open and above board with women.” She also advised men in marriage, suggesting that “if young men would hesitate and weigh the meaning of what marriage is, they in turn, would know less of misery in after years.” She also noted that men need not be “brutal or profane” in marriage, but could simply give their wives “an occasional gentle reprimand . . . [which] will help to impress upon their minds the fault or faults which have given rise to displeasure on the part of those whom they hold most dear.” While she did not view men as viceless, Bean advised them cautiously. She was mindful of their presumed dominance within marriage. Much like Bean’s view of gender relations in politics, she assumed that men would rule in the home, and urged them not to share power, but simply to wield it benevolently.²¹

Bean balanced her gentle criticism of men by lavishing unrestrained praise on men in general. Although “many [had] thought it strange that [Bean did] not care to mingle with women” and was “partial to men’s company,” she defended this preference as a natural consequence of men’s superiority. In spending time with men in male spaces, she said

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Babe Bean, “Stockton’s Men and Women,” *Stockton Evening Mail*, 28 September 1897.

²¹ “Babe Bean Hunts Bandits,” *Stockton Evening Mail*, 15 September 1897.

that “men soon forget that a woman is among them, and they talk and act naturally—without the conceit or affectations so often practiced in the drawing-rooms.” She continued, “Could women see men as I have, they would love them all. Why? Because they are, with one another, open and frank. They know each other’s little secrets and altogether are congenial.” By espousing the perfection of intermale relationships, Bean defined the previously noted “deceptiveness” as being a problem between the sexes, not one inherent in male character. This is unlike vanity, which Bean believed to be a flaw inextricably linked to womanhood. She proclaimed that her time with men was “a perfect schooling,” expressing gratitude that is both flattering to male authority and properly deferential to male domination. Bean’s praise for men remained a consistent aspect of her writing.

In a later article about accompanying men on a boating expedition, Bean took the opportunity to contrast the merits of manhood with the shortcomings evidenced by groups of women. In retelling the work of towing the boat ashore, Bean wrote, “what a pleasure to see each one help the other, and willingly at that.” She contrasted this group effort with a mocking example of dialogue among women forced to work together. It read, “No ‘you do this,’ and ‘someone else do that,’ and ‘I just won’t do a thing’ and ‘make Susie do this, she has not done a lick of work to-day.” Bean claimed, “this is what I always heard wherever a crowd of girls had gathered for recreation, or, perhaps, around a camp,” which was “not so with the boys at the club-house. All was as regular clock-work.”²²

The pleasure with which readers of the *Mail* perused Bean’s writings on gender was attested to in an article announcing the paper’s intention to hire her. The article read that Bean’s “impressions of the men and women whom she has met in Stockton, together with her views on humanity generally, attracted a great deal of attention and was favorably commented upon from all sides.” The acclaim with which Bean was received depended upon her adherence to prevalent beliefs about the roles of men and women.

Bean’s adherence to gender expectations continued into her first article, where she was assigned to cover the baby fair, a competition in which infants competed for prizes based on overall beauty and health. Bean again seized the opportunity to ridicule female flaws. She noted one over-accessorized child, commenting, “this sort of thing makes vain women.” She also claimed that “another instance of woman’s vanity was evidenced” by a mother who brought her baby to compete despite the child’s illness. Bean contrasted these circumstances with a winner from

²² Ibid.; “Babe Bean was Coxswain,” *Stockton Evening Mail*, 8 October 1897.

the previous year who she believed would “bloom into true and pure womanhood.”²³

Eventually, the broad acceptance of Bean’s motives enabled her to gradually move beyond the restrictive confines of human-interest stories. As Bean became a more established journalist with the *Stockton Evening Mail*, she undertook investigative reporting. She was known to walk “the streets at all hours of the night” looking for stories. Additionally, her attire enabled her to enter typically male spaces, writing exposés on Keno joints, asylums, and mines. Passing as a man, Bean gained the confidence of a young hobo. After spending an evening with him, she was able to produce an article about “vicious and filthy looking specimens of humanity.” These liberties confirm the convenience of wearing men’s clothing. Additionally, the autonomy with which Bean dictated what stories she would report indicated the freedom that she was given. Yet, while Bean was gaining credibility within male circles, backlash was brewing among a group of women.²⁴

Whether provoked by the liberty afforded Babe Bean, or its contrast with her anti-feminist stance, a scathing letter signed “The Girls of Stockton” was published in the *Mail* on October 2, 1897. The letter first asserted that Bean must have heard bad things about Stockton or she “would not have come here dressed in men’s clothes, expecting to be tolerated and received into good society.” In addition to bemoaning Bean’s acceptance within the city, “the Girls” continued their tirade by asserting, “what puzzles us girls is why Babe Bean should be allowed to dress that way, while if any of the rest of us wanted to walk out in that kind of costume for a change we would be arrested quicker than quick.” They then sarcastically noted, “there used to be a law against females dressing as the male human, but it seems not to apply to Babe Bean.” Rather than receiving the censure “the Girls” believed Bean deserved, “*the Mail*, which always has a sarcastic word for women . . . pats her and pets her while the police look on and smile.” “The Girls” then shifted their reproach of the *Mail*’s handling of women generally, to Bean’s gender politics specifically. Despite her disavowal of the New Woman, “the Girls” asserted that Bean’s attire rendered her “about the newest kind of woman” known to exist. Closing their letter with a threat, they summarized their frustration saying:

²³ “Babies by the Score To-day,” *Stockton Evening Mail*, 29 September 1897; Babe Bean, “Babe Bean on the Baby Show,” *Stockton Evening Mail*, 30 September 1897.

²⁴ “Male-Clad Girl of the Lake,” *Stockton Evening Mail*, 27 August 1897; Babe Bean, “Home Life of the Tramp,” *Stockton Evening Mail*, 9 December 1897.

the long and short of it is, if Babe Bean is a girl and continues to dress in boys' clothes, the rest of us ought to have the same privilege, and we are going to do it. Some fine evening there's going to be twenty-five young women on the streets of Stockton, all dressed in men's clothes, and we're going to the ark [where Bean lived] and get Babe Bean and duck her in McLeod's lake till she cries "Nuff."

The palpable frustration voiced in "the Girls" letter leveled a two-fold condemnation. First, they were critical of the town's authorities, both the police and the media. The impunity with which Bean operated doubtlessly stood in sharp contrast to the restrictions that social mores imposed upon "the Girls." Their overall frustrations spoke more to their desire for liberty than their desire to restrict Bean. Second, "the Girls" voiced clear animosity toward Bean. This grievance was grounded in the contradiction between Bean's attire and the lifestyle it afforded her as contrasted with the conservatism and scorn with which Bean viewed other women. While excusing herself from the patriarchal limitations imposed upon other women, Bean was complicit in the oppression of other women by contributing to the rhetoric used as justification.²⁵

Not surprisingly, the letter from "the Girls" prompted much response. The editors of the paper replied that "that there's no law in Stockton against lovely woman appearing in men's clothes," continuing that "there used to be in the days gone by, when women were just beginning their struggle for men's privileges, but the ordinance dropped out of the municipal statute book long long ago." Bean herself assumed a much harsher tone in her rebuttal. In sardonic prose, Bean began, "permit me to ease your burning brain about the weighty question that seems to have eaten up all else that should have been in a head less shallow and light viz.: Why I am allowed to dress as I choose." Bean reiterated that she was well within her right to do so, and questioned what qualified "the Girls" to "take it upon your shoulders to dictate to strangers what they shall or shall not wear in the way of apparel? It is your privilege to dress as you see fit, whether it is after the fashion Venus or Babe Bean. I wish to state that boys' clothes are still selling in Stockton at reduced rates. You are quite welcome to this information." She continued, "if my boys' clothes are so shocking to the fine sensibilities that none of you seem to possess, it is a wonder that you would come down from the high pedestal upon which you have without any reason, placed yourselves long enough to do the very thing that you are finding fault with."²⁶

²⁵ "Oh. Babe, Babe, Look Out!" *Stockton Evening Mail*, 2 October 1897.

²⁶ *Ibid.*; "Babe Won't See You Girls," *Stockton Evening Mail*, 4 October 1897.

Several responses sympathetic to Bean were reprinted in the *Mail*. One letter accused “the Girls of Stockton” of being jealous and posed the question, “if that threat is to be taken as an index of character is it any wonder Babe Bean does not favor her sex?” Another reader hypothesized that the true author of the letter was “a fond mamma whose precious darling was mentioned disparagingly in the Babe’s write-up of the baby show at the Pavilion last week.” This response in particular undercut the valid grievances voiced by “the Girls” regarding society’s restrictions upon them by attributing their commentary to a slighted and vengeful mother. Another letter called the authors “narrow-minded” and “spiteful,” attributing their jealousies not to Bean’s freedoms, but to her ability to “command the respect of most men, even dressed in male attire.” The author went on to assert that men’s “evident respect for her is what has stirred up [the girls’] wrath.” Calling Bean “one of the most sensible young women in this city” and expressing admiration for her courage, the letter was signed “not one girl, but many.” Despite the criticisms leveled by “the Girls,” the outpouring of support Bean received from the editors of the *Mail*, as well as from the other letter writers, reveals the extent to which she had successfully ingratiated herself into Stockton society.²⁷

Bean actively courted the continued goodwill of authority. In an article about the happenings at the police station, she extolled the attributes of Police Chief Gall, calling him “the kind-hearted,” and later “the ever patient Chief.” She further admired “the cool and unpretentious way he handled [a] shameless fellow.” Again, in January 1898, Bean complimented the Chief’s “sturdy Captain,” noting the multitude of officers “who are ever ready to risk their lives in the noble discharge of their duty to the public’s well being,” and giving “thanks to the vigilance of the police that so much order prevails in the lower quarters of the city.”²⁸

Bean cultivated further affirmation from the men of Stockton as is evidenced by her affiliation with Stockton’s Naomi Bachelor Club. On September 13, 1897, an article told of Bean being hosted by the club and being made an honorable member. Bean was assured that she was “among those who are ready at all times and in all places to offer [her] the protection that every American is ever ready to offer a defenseless woman.” Bean returned the hospitable sentiment while reporting for the *Mail*. She defended the group against popular rebuke by publishing an

²⁷ “Babe Won’t See You Girls,” *Stockton Evening Mail*, 4 October 1897; “Here Are Other Girls,” *Stockton Evening Mail*, 5 October 1897.

²⁸ Babe Bean, “Those Who Seek Police Aid,” *Stockton Evening Mail*, 7 October 1897; Babe Bean, “Babe Bean’s Night Walks,” *Stockton Evening Mail*, 28 January 1898.

article in which she listed the merits of the group as a whole, as well as those of individual members. She described club members as “good natured boys,” asserted that they imbibed only “distilled iced-water,” and stated that “any person who has been fortunate enough to gain admittance into this little bachelor circle” would confirm the cleanliness of their home as well as the taste with which it was decorated.²⁹

The vulnerability Bean faced as a woman publicly donning male attire is evident in her later life. While a less thorough historical record exists for Bean after her three years in Stockton, it is known that she continued to dress as a man. In this capacity, she served as an imbedded reporter in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War. Additionally, she aided the Twenty-ninth Infantry by functioning as an interpreter and a medic. In 1900, Bean wrote an article titled, “My Life as a Soldier,” for the *Sunday-Examiner* magazine, in which she explained that her adventures in Manila were motivated by her “desire to see war from the soldier’s point of view, with a woman’s eyes.” As in her time in Stockton, Bean attempted to pass as a man en route to Manila, but was eventually discovered to be a woman, and was tolerated as such by the men who surrounded her.³⁰

Later, Bean was detained by Los Angeles police and “involuntarily incarcerated on psychiatric grounds” for her clothing choice. Little is known of this incident and it is documented only by an anonymous man named John in a letter written to Stockton-born playwright Sophie Treadwell. The letter is dated February 11, 1918. In it, Bean, under the alias, Ben Garland, was described as “one who cries all the time and who won’t eat.” Doctors hoped to turn Bean over to the custody of her sister, but, according to John, her incarceration continued despite her “perfect health,” because “she has flatly refused to go back to her own sex and flatly says that she would rather go to prison than do so.” How Bean escaped incarceration is unknown. It is possible that she temporarily heeded the doctors’ demands and returned to women’s clothing in order to be turned over to the custody of her sister. With the mysterious resolution of these unfortunate circumstances, Bean reappeared in San Francisco as Jack B. Garland. Under this alias, Bean passed exclusively as a man for the remainder of her life. Upon her death, Bean was described as “a slight figure . . . who moved in the San Francisco streets at night to give pieces of money to the desperate.” It was not until the autopsy

²⁹ “The Naomi’s Bean Dinner,” *Stockton Evening Mail*, 13 September 1897; Babe Bean, “Alone With a Savage Band,” *Stockton Evening Mail*, 3 December 1897.

³⁰ Sullivan, 120.

following Bean's death on September 19, 1936, that she was once again discovered to be female.³¹

The ease with which Los Angeles authorities denied Bean liberty for her clothing choices highlighted the urgency of her need to ally with men in general, and with men in positions of authority in particular while in Stockton. Bean's defense of the Bachelors, the police, and men in general, combined with her criticism of women and their politics, insulated her from the repercussions of her clothing choices that she would face later in life. In Stockton, Bean removed opportunity for speculation about lesbianism, ameliorated concerns about political subversion, and contributed to the misogynistic rhetoric utilized in the oppression of women. Despite corralling women into traditional spaces and assigning them traditional flaws, Bean self-servingly claimed more freedom to travel and participate in public space. Interestingly, Bean's ability to live freely in men's attire was buttressed by the perceived sensibility she displayed in her writing by reinforcing accepted gender restrictions. Ultimately, conventional gender restrictions were thrust on her even in death: Bean was not entombed wearing the suits in which she felt most comfortable, but instead, in a white satin dress.³²

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³¹ Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk, *Gay by the Bay: A History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996), 16, 17; Sullivan, 11.

³² Sullivan, 172.