

Natalia and Gender-Bending in *Passio Sanctorum Adriani et Nataliae*

As Polycarp, the 84-year-old bishop of Smyrna, entered the amphitheater in preparation for his upcoming martyrdom, a voice from heaven came to Polycarp, saying, “Ἴσχυε, Πολύκαρπε, καὶ ἀνδρίζου.”¹ The notion of the importance of displaying masculine qualities — dominant traits such as volition, strength, leadership, and bravery — played a prominent role within martyr literature, as is evidenced in many martyr texts such as that of Justin,² Carpus,³ and others, who not only stood for their Christian faith, but withstood various means of torture before willingly going to their own deaths. The importance of this pattern is further portrayed as the pagans accused Blandina, a female, and other male Christians of being “ἄνανδροι.”⁴ While Polycarp was a man and Blandina was included with the men in the accusation of their effeminacy, these instances imply that, regardless of gender, one is not only

¹ “Be strong and be a man, Polycarp!” The Greek text is taken from Herbert Musurillo, “The Martyrdom of Polycarp,” in *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 9.1. Note: all quotations from martyr texts are the author’s own translation.

² For more information about Justin Martyr and his martyrdom, see Herbert Musurillo, “The Martyrdom of Saints Justin, Chariton, Charito, Evelpistus, Hierax, Paeon, Liberian, and their Community,” in *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 42-61.

³ For more information regarding Carpus and those martyred with him, see Herbert Musurillo, “The Martyrdom of Saints Carpus, Papyrus, and Agathonice,” in *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 22-37.

⁴ “Effeminate.” The Greek text is taken from Herbert Musurillo, “The Martyrs of Lyons,” in *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 35.

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able, but must obtain and retain their masculinity when facing martyrdom. However, masculinity is capable of being lost, as shown by Quintus, a Phrygian who the author described in the beginning of *Martyrium Polycarpi*. The author tells his readers to not be like Quintus, who, trying to evidence his masculinity, volunteered to be martyred but grew afraid and renounced the faith when he saw the beasts.⁵ It is paramount that one, regardless of gender, establishes himself or herself on the higher end of this spectrum of masculinity by replacing their femininity with masculinity.

The idea of gender-bending — the process of reversing traditional gender roles — is a common aspect of martyrdom literature.⁶ Authors of these martyrdoms often portray women as masculine by showing their own volition and strength in the arena,⁷ withstanding torture to the point of exhausting their torturers,⁸ and, in the case of Perpetua, even transforming into a man in a vision.⁹ One prominent example of gender-bending is *Passio Sanctorum Adriani et Nataliae*, a martyr account of Adrian and his wife Natalia, who helped strengthen her husband towards his martyrdom in Nicomedia in the early fourth century C.E. Originally a Herculian Guard under Emperor Galerius Maximian, Adrian converted to Christianity while torturing

⁵ *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 4.1.

⁶ For some background on gender-bending in early Christianity, particularly in martyr texts, see Anders Klostergaard Petersen, "Gender-bending in Early Christian and Jewish Martyr Texts," in *Contextualising Early Christian Martyrdom*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011, 225-56. (*Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity - ECCA*; Journal number 8).

⁷ J.A. Robinson, "The Passion of S. Perpetua" in *Texts and Studies* 1.2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), 61-95. Accessed March 10, 2018, Retrieved from: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/Iris/Cite?2016:001:0, 20.1-21.10>.

⁸ *The Martyrs of Lyons*, 1.18.

⁹ *The Passion of S. Perpetua*, 10.7.

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twenty-three Christians who refused to renounce the faith. Adrian told the scribes around him to add him onto the list of Christians and was thereafter thrown into prison. Much of the account focuses on Adrian's wife Natalia and her unique actions as Adrian progresses towards his martyrdom, including actions such as volunteering her husband to be the first to die, holding her husband's limbs while the executioners sever his limbs, and claiming that she desires to be called the wife of a martyr. After Adrian's death by dismemberment, the saints took his and other Christians' remains to Byzantium, where Natalia later followed. Natalia soon died in her sleep where Adrian appears to her in a dream, beckoning her to join him. The female protagonist was later canonized as a saint and a martyr with her husband for her unyielding aid to Adrian and the other Christians who died with him. These two were frequently represented in art throughout Medieval and modern Europe and are still revered to the present day.¹⁰

The importance of gender-bending varies in the opinion of historians and classicists, although many agree that the use of gendered language in martyr texts was important to the early saints. For example, Petersen claims that the use of gender transformation in martyrdoms proves that the Christian idea of gender is similar to the conception of gender in the ancient

¹⁰ For examples of some artwork, the reliquary of Saint Adrian, made in the twelfth century, is currently housed at the Art Institute of Chicago. See *The Reliquary Casket of Saints Adrian and Natalia*, 1100/50. 15.9 x 25.4 x 14.5 cm. Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago. Accessed March 11, 2018. <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/46230>. There is also a stained glass window of Natalia holding the limbs of Adrian at his execution in the Basilica Notre-Dame of Geneva, created in the nineteenth century.

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Greco-Roman world.¹¹ Marjanen argues that the ancient authors' uses of gender transformation language illustrate how gender-bending signifies a woman's endurance and success in martyrdom rather than symbolizing a female's spiritual progress.¹² Cobb's *Dying to be Men* claims that gendered language in martyr texts was used to educate the Christians during times of persecution, as shown in the martyrdoms of Polycarp,¹³ Pionius,¹⁴ Perpetua and Felicity,¹⁵ and Marian and James.¹⁶ Cobb further claims that the early Christians used gendered language in order to create a masculine identity for Christians regardless of their gender. Although the importance of gender-bending has been discussed amongst modern historians, scholars such as those mentioned above have generally agreed that the ancient author's use of gender-bending in martyr texts was not an accident and played a very important role within martyr accounts and early Christianity.

While Cobb, Marjanen, and others have written abundantly on the topic of female martyrs and gender-bending in Christian martyr texts, much of the emphasis is placed on characters such as Perpetua, Blandina, and Agathonike, with very little reference to other martyrdoms. However, very little

¹¹ See Petersen, *Gender-Bending*, 235-36.

¹² See Antti Marjanen, "Male Women Martyrs: The Function of Gender-Transformation Language in Early Christian Martyrdom Accounts." In *Metamorphoses: Resurrection, Body and Transformative Practices in Early Christianity* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 231-47.

¹³ *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 1.1-2; 19.1; 22.1.

¹⁴ Herbert Musurillo, "The Martyrdom of Pionius the Presbyter and his Companions," in *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 1.1-2.

¹⁵ *The Passion of S. Perpetua*, 1.1-2.

¹⁶ Herbert Musurillo, "The Martyrdom of Saints Marian and James," in *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 1.3. See also Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 93.

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has been written about *Passio Sanctorum Adriani et Nataliae*, which is unfortunate as the martyrdom portrays some very important themes, including the idea of gender roles and gender-bending within the corpus of martyr literature. The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the author's use of gender-bending in *Passio Sanctorum Adriani et Nataliae*. In *Passio Sanctorum Adriani et Nataliae*, the author of the martyrdom account, like the accounts of Perpetua, Blandina, Agathonike, and others, uses gender-bending to illustrate to the early Christians the importance of attaining and maintaining masculine traits. Unlike these other martyrdoms, however, this account shows how obtaining the eternal crown is possible within a temporal, conjugal relationship, thus also showing Christian women how achieving masculinity is possible for those who are married.

Gender in the Ancient World

In order to understand the concept of gender-bending, one must also understand how the ancient world viewed gender. Unlike our modern conception of male and female, a modern historian must imagine this ancient view more as a continuum than as a binary system.¹⁷ Galen writes, "All the parts, then, that men have, women have too, the difference between them lying in only one thing ... that in women the parts are within [the body],

¹⁷ See Petersen, *Gender-Bending*, 229-36. Both Petersen's article and Cobb's book describe the ancient view of gender within their respective works. While Cobb gives very useful insight and evidence on how the ancient world viewed gender and what traits were considered masculine and feminine, Petersen gives a superior introductory section regarding the scale of ancient masculinity and its function in the ancient world.

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whereas in men they are outside.”¹⁸ Galen also mentions shortly before the previous quotation, “The female is less perfect than the male.”¹⁹ With the belief that men and women have the same body parts and that man were made more perfect than the female, the ancients viewed gender as a scale ranging from imperfection (femininity) to perfection (masculinity) rather than anatomically dividing the two genders. Rather than male and female, a person’s identity in the ancient world stemmed from their masculine, or feminine, traits.

Understanding the ancient conception of gender as a continuum, one must now be able to differentiate between masculine and feminine traits. Polemo, in his *Physiognomy*, writes,

*The male is physically stronger and braver, less prone to defects and more likely to be sincere and loyal. He is more keen to win honor and he is worthier of respect. The female has the contrary properties: she has but little courage and abounds in deceptions. Her behavior is exceptionally bitter and she tends to hide what is on her mind. She is impulsive, lacks a sense of justice, and loves to quarrel: a blustering coward ... it is possible to find masculine qualities also in women.*²⁰

The use of polar opposites is important to discerning masculine and feminine traits. While traits that were considered honorable in the ancient world such as bravery, strength, being active, and volition are considered masculine traits, feminine traits are often disdained and include cowardice, weakness, passivity, and a

¹⁸ Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, Translated by Margaret Tallmadge May (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 14.6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.6.

²⁰ Polemo, *Physiognomy*, 2.1.192-194F, quoted in Cobb, *Dying to be Men*, 29.

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reliance on someone else's decisions. When discussing what makes a perfect woman, Juvenal writes, "She can be beautiful, graceful, wealthy, fertile, she can display her ancient ancestors all around her colonnades ... a rare birth on this earth, exactly like a black swan — but who can stand a wife who is perfection itself?"²¹ Although Juvenal ends this quote saying that he is unable to stand such a woman, the fact remains that he believes that traits such as beauty and grace are considered to be important feminine traits. While there are many instances of gender-bending within *Passio Sanctorum Adriani et Nataliae*, the most important masculine traits presented within the text are Natalia's use of volition, that is, her masculine trait of being active in determining her and her husband's decisions rather than as a passive woman; her forsaking of earthly connections such as her marriage; and her literal, physical transformation into a male. Understanding the author's use of gender-bending in this text allows scholars not only to comprehend better ancient ideas about gender, but also how these texts taught Christian women to attain the eternal crown while in a marital relationship by exhibiting masculine characteristics.

***Gender-Bending in Passio Sanctorum Adriani et Nataliae* Volition**

One of the strongest masculine traits on the spectrum of masculinity is the use of volition in the lives of Greeks and Romans. To be coerced into denying the faith and thus rejecting martyrdom, such as Quintus in the martyrdom of Polycarp, is considered to be very feminine. In order for death to be considered manly, one must not supplicate for mercy or fight off

²¹ Juvenal, *Satires*, Translated by Susanna Morton Braund (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 6.162-66.

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the inevitable. Instead, one becomes masculine by being the master of their own fate and demise, such as Perpetua who pulled the executioner's knife to her throat²² and Agathonike who willingly threw herself onto the fire.²³ Tertullian further emphasizes this point in *To the Martyrs*. Using Lucretia, the wife of Hasdrubal, Dido, Cleopatra, and an Athenian harlot as examples, Tertullian illustrates the importance of using volition, not coercion, when attaining martyrdom.²⁴ Choosing death of one's own accord and facing it boldly is a masculine trait, portrayed by many authors both within and outside of Christian martyr literature.²⁵

Like these other women, Natalia repeatedly portrays her will as being that of becoming a martyr through her husband Adrian and not for their own survival and welfare. When Natalia visited Adrian for the first time in prison, her first act when she sees her husband is a revealing sign of volition: "καταφιλήσασα τὰ δέσμια αὐτοῦ ἐμακάριζε καὶ ἐπεστήριζεν αὐτόν."²⁶ The fact that Natalia first kisses Adrian's chains is telling in the fact that she first recognizes the importance of martyrdom before that of being a wife. Rather than running to her husband in order to

²² *The Passion of S. Perpetua*, 21.9-10.

²³ *The Martyrdom of Saints Carpus, Papyrus, and Agathonikê*, 42-7.

²⁴ Tertullian, "An Address to the Martyrs," *Library of the Fathers* 10: 150-57. Translated by C. Dodgson. Accessed November 15, 2016. Retrieved from: <http://www.tertullian.org/articles/lof/martyrs.htm>, IV.

²⁵ The concept of "dying well" in the ancient world is explained thoroughly by Candida Moss in her book, *The Myth of Persecution*. For examples of those who "died well," refer to characters such as Achilles, who chose his fate of dying a glorious death rather than living a long, unknown life and Socrates, who, according to Plato's *Phaedo*, was fearless and noble when meeting his death.

²⁶ "After Natalia kissed his chains she blessed and strengthened him." The Greek text is taken from F. Halkin, "Une Passion Grecque Inédite des Saints Adrien et Natalie," in *Hagiologie Byzantine* (1986), 48-51. Accessed February 28, 2018. Retrieved from: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/Iris/Cite?5138:001:0, II>.

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bless him and anoint his wounds, as would be expected according to the continuum of masculinity and femininity, she first showed her willingness and desire for her husband's martyrdom by kissing her husband's chains before blessing and anointing him. Regardless of how one translates καταφιλήσασα, the participle, the temporal meaning remains the same. Natalia first kisses the chains before addressing Adrian. Even before supporting him, she shows her husband and others her intentions of guiding her husband to his martyrdom, thus showing her volition.

After Adrian is sentenced to dismemberment, the author of the text portrays another example of volition. Instead of watching her husband's martyrdom from afar, Natalia plays a very active role in his death, further showing her determination and her own decision for her husband's martyrdom: "Λαβομένη δὲ Ναταλία τῶν ποδῶν Ἀδριανοῦ εἴλκεν ἐπὶ τοῦ ἄκμωνος· οὐς καὶ κρατοῦσα παρεκάλει νουθετοῦσα αὐτὸν ὑπομεῖναι."²⁷ While Adrian, the man and husband, was the one sentenced to martyrdom, it was Natalia, the female and wife, who performed the masculine duty of deciding the many difficult choices that they had to make, such as deciding the fate of Adrian, who normally would be the one to make that decision. Natalia not only witnessed Adrian's trial and death, but also actively demonstrated her masculine trait of volition by willingly holding him down while his torturers severed his hands and feet. The decision to hold Adrian's feet during his martyrdom illustrates Natalia's masculine will and desire to not only permit her husband's death, but also to help bring it to pass on her own

²⁷ *Passio Sanctorum Adriani et Nataliae*, III: "Natalia, taking the feet of Adrian, drew them upon the anvil and, while holding his feet, she exhorted him to endure."

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terms, like other female martyrs such as Perpetua and Agathonike.

The death of Natalia also points to the author's use of volition to illustrate Natalia's masculinity. After Natalia travels to Byzantium, Adrian appeared to Natalia in a dream, saying, "Καλῶς ἦλθες ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἢ δούλῃ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θυγάτηρ τῶν ἁγίων μαρτύρων. Δεῦρο πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ἀπολαβοῦσα τὰ ὀφειλόμενά σοι.' Καὶ εὐθέως ἀφῆκε τὸ πνεῦμα."²⁸ Even though the courts never convicted Natalia for being a Christian and sentenced her to execution, the author of the account continues to portray the masculinity of Natalia by her choosing to die willingly in order to return to Adrian and receive the immortal crown. Like the other female martyrs, Natalia made the decision to die and brought it about herself rather than being passive, which is what women would have done according to the ancient view of gender. The fact that Natalia chooses not to volunteer to be martyred with her husband is explained through Justin's counsel to the Christians in his *Second Apology*: "ἐρῶ δι' ἣν αἰτίαν τοῦτο οὐ πράττομεν ... εἰ οὖν πάντες ἑαυτοὺς φονεῦσόμεν, τοῦ μὴ γεννηθῆναι τινα καὶ μαθητευθῆναι εἰς τὰ θεῖα διδάγματα ... ἐναντίον τῆ τοῦ θεοῦ βουλῆ καὶ αὐτοὶ ποιοῦντες, ἔαν τοῦτο πράξωμεν."²⁹ Natalia's decision not to volunteer herself for

²⁸*Passio Sanctorum Adriani et Nataliae*, IV: "Servant of Christ and daughter of the holy martyrs, come well in peace. Come to us. Receive the things which are owed to you.' And straightway her spirit went away."

²⁹ "I speak on account of what reason we do not [kill ourselves through volunteering ourselves for martyrdom] ... If we all kill ourselves, we will be the reason of some [Christians] not being produced and some [pagans] not being taught the holy teachings...if we do this we would be acting contrary to the word of God." The Greek text is taken from Justin Martyr's *Apologia Secunda* in D. Minns and P. Parvis, "Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, Apologies," in *Oxford Early Christian Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 270-322. Accessed March 10,

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martyrdom is showing her adherence to Justin's teachings. Instead of volunteering herself, she chooses to help her husband attain the martyrdom that she would have willingly accepted if she were accused, as is evidenced by her willingness to leave her earthly life in order to be reunited with her husband and obtain her eternal reward. This willingness to leave her earthly life is particularly telling because when a certain Roman official desired to marry Natalia, she steadfastly refused him in the hopes of being reunited with her husband. The ability to choose and be staunch in that decision is a paramount masculine trait, and the author of this text portrays this idea well in bending the gender of Natalia into becoming a masculine figure.

Forsaking Earthly Connections

While one's use of volition and being active in decision making is a masculine trait, making the decision of showing disinterest in one's earthly connections and relationships leads to enhanced masculinity due to their further recognizing of the importance of something beyond themselves — in this case, martyrdom and the eternal crown. Much like the Roman soldiers who left their families for the safety and glory of Rome, so also did Christian martyrs forsake their closest relations and other secular attachments in order to obtain eternal life. Martyr texts used gender-bending, among other reasons, to teach the early Christians how one can sever connections with their family to procure the immortal crown: Perpetua showed her masculinity by standing up to her father multiple times when he tried to dissuade her from her martyrdom, eventually leading to her

2018. Retrieved from:
<http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/Iris/Cite?0645:006:0, IV.1-3>.

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disownment;³⁰ both Perpetua and Felicity willingly gave up their infants in order to prepare for their fight in the arena;³¹ and Agathonike proclaimed that God would look after her child as she threw herself onto the fire.³² In the martyrdom of Agape, Irene, and Chione, these three forsook all earthly things:

Αὗται ἑαυτὰς ταῖς ἀρεταῖς κοσμήσασαι καὶ τοῖς εὐαγγελικοῖς νόμοις πειθόμεναι, καταλείπουσι μὲν τὴν πατρίδα καὶ γένος καὶ περιουσίαν καὶ κτήσιν διὰ τὴν περὶ τὸν θεὸν ἀγάπην καὶ προσδοκίαν τῶν ἐπουρανίων ἀγαθῶν, ἄξια τοῦ πατρὸς Ἀβραάμ διαπραττόμεναι.³³

It is masculine to forsake worldly things for that which is greater than themselves. In the case of Christian martyrdoms, that important achievement is eternal life.

Passio Sanctorum Adriani et Nataliae is no different from these other martyrdom accounts in the fact that the author portrays Natalia's masculinity through her focus on immortality rather than her relationship with her husband. This text is particularly unique because of the fact that, unlike many others who had pagan family members, the spouse in the text is also a Christian. Cobb points out that "persuasion by and in reference to family poses the most significant risk for Christian women,"³⁴ as evidenced by multiple pleas from Perpetua's father and the crowd around Agathonike to not go through their martyrdoms

³⁰ *The Passion of S. Perpetua*, 3.1-3; 5.1-5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 6.7; 15.7.

³² *The Martyrdom of Saints Carpus, Papyrus, and Agathonikê*, 42-44.

³³ "These women who adorned themselves with virtue and who were persuaded by the gospel laws, they left behind their native town, their family, wealth, and possessions on account of their love for God and the expectation of good, heavenly things, while accomplishing deeds worthy of father Abraham." The Greek text was taken from Herbert Musurillo, "The Martyrdom of Saints Agapê, Irenê, and Chionê at Saloniki," in *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 1.

³⁴ Cobb, *Dying to Be Men*, 122.

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on account of their children or familial relations. This is contrasted by Polycarp and Germanicus, who were told to have pity on themselves and their old age.³⁵ Natalia not only overcomes this risk of succumbing to her feminine desire of being attached to earthly desires, particularly the earthly and feminine attachment of family, but is entirely successful in her focus of Adrian's martyrdom rather than worrying about his life, as any ancient woman was supposed to do. The author portrays Natalia's masculinity by her own exhortation to Adrian in his preparation: "Καὶ ἀσπασαμένη αὐτὸν ἐνουθέτει καὶ ἐπυστήριζε καὶ ἐκ πάντων τῶν γηϊνῶν πραγμάτων παρήνει τὸν νοῦν αὐτοῦ χωρισθῆναι."³⁶ Natalia already shows her desire for martyrdom and lack of devotion to her husband by exhorting her husband to do the same thing that she has already done to Adrian — to forsake her and pursue martyrdom rather than renounce his faith in order to remain alive with his wife.

Natalia's masculine trait of detachment is further shown upon Adrian's arrival in order to summon her to his trial and sentencing:

Ἡ δὲ ἀκούσασα ὅτι ἀπελύθη καὶ ἔρχεται, νομίσασα λιποτακτήσαντα πεφευγένοι αὐτὸν τὸ μαρτύριον, ἔκλεισε κατ' αὐτοῦ τὴν θύραν καὶ ἤρξατο ἀποπέμπειν αὐτὸν μετ' ὀργῆς καὶ στηλιτεύειν τὴν ἄρνησιν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀποδύρεσθαι τὸ ναυάγιον τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ καὶ ὅτι "Οὐκ ἠξιώθη μίαν ἡμέραν γυνὴ μάρτυρος κληθῆναι."³⁷

³⁵ *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 3.1; 9.2.

³⁶ *Passio Sanctorum Adriani et Nataliae*, II: "After greeting Adrian, she instructed him and strengthened him, and she exhorted his mind to be separated from all earthly things."

³⁷ *Passio Sanctorum Adriani et Nataliae*, II: "After [Natalia] heard that Adrian was dismissed [from prison], she left, thinking that he, deserting his post, would flee his martyrdom. She shut her door and began to send him off with anger and began to denounce his rejection

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Natalia's detachment from her husband is shown here as she locks out her husband and laments over his damned soul. However, Adrian never renounced his faith; he just came to summon Natalia to the trial. Even though Natalia was incorrect about Adrian's intentions, Natalia shows that her earthly concern and relationship with her husband is not as important as the necessity of his martyrdom. While women were expected to be devoted to their husbands, Natalia was devoted to the Lord and to her desire for her husband to attain martyrdom. However, unlike other martyrs who abandoned their children or were disowned in order to obtain eternal life, Natalia focused on strengthening her husband so that he could achieve martyrdom in order to gain not only his salvation, but her own reward as well. By pointing her mind towards martyrdom, the author portrays Natalia as a masculine figure by illustrating her detachment from her earthly marital relationship.

Gender Transformation

While authors of martyr texts usually portray inner transformations such as volition and detachment in regards to gender-bending, sometimes there are also physical transformations with these females in martyr literature. In the *Gospel of Thomas*, Jesus says in response to Peter's request to have Mary leave their conversation, "Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself

[of the faith] and to lament bitterly for the wreckage of his soul, saying, 'In one day I was not deemed worthy to be called the wife of a martyr.'"

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male will enter the kingdom of Heaven."³⁸ In Marjanen's analysis of this apocryphal scripture, she writes, "Whether or not *Gospel of Thomas* 114 should be understood in these concrete terms, in the apocryphal acts there are several references to women whose 'becoming or making oneself male' is not only an internal transformation but affects their physical appearance as well."³⁹ The starkest example of this change is Perpetua's vision where she faced the Egyptian in the arena and became a literal man.⁴⁰ While gender-bending, such as Blandina and Agathonike, were often shown as internal transformations into becoming a man shown through their actions and personality, gender-bending can also be used literally in the sense that a woman actually became a man.

Passio Sanctorum Adriani et Nataliae is one of those unique martyr texts which uses this literal meaning of gender-bending. After Adrian's torture, the courts barred women from coming to the prison. To combat this ban, Natalia dressed as a man to sneak into the prison: "Τῶν δὲ εὐσεβῶν καὶ πιστῶν γυναικῶν κωλυομένων εἰσερχεσθαι πρὸς τὴν ἐπίσκεψιν τῶν ἁγίων, δραμοῦσα ἡ Ναταλία καὶ ἀνδρικὸν σχῆμα περιβαλομένη, οὕτως εἰσῆει εἰς τὴν φυλακὴν."⁴¹ This change of outward appearance encompasses many masculine traits including

³⁸ *The Gospel of Thomas*, Translated by Thomas O. Lambdin, The Gnostic Society Library. Accessed November 25, 2016. Retrieved from: <http://gnosis.org/naghamm/gthlamb.html>, 114.

³⁹ Marjanen, *Male Women Martyrs*, 235. For more information regarding early Christian women disguising themselves as men, see also Stephen J. Davis, "Crossed Texts, Crossed Sex: Intertextuality and Gender in Early Christian Legends of Holy Women Disguised as Men," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 1-36.

⁴⁰ *The Passion of S. Perpetua*, 10.7.

⁴¹ *Passio Sanctorum Adriani et Nataliae*, III: "But because pious and faithful women were hindered from going to the investigation of the saints, Natalia, after rushing and putting on a manly form, thus went to the prison."

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volition and courage while the author also portrays the female protagonist as a true masculine figure not only through personality, but also in appearance. This passage is particularly important as her manly action inspired other women to do the same thing shortly after, namely to dress as men to go into the prison in order to anoint and bless the Christians within the prison.⁴² Natalia has literally shed her femininity in order to be a true, masculine, Christian character. The author's literal use of gender-bending in this martyrdom evidences Natalia's transformation into a man not only by character, but also by appearance.

Conclusion

In the same way that Polycarp was told to be a man, a similar call was made to men and women alike — to obtain and retain ancient masculine qualities in order to endure their martyrdom and receive the immortal crown. While many Christian men illustrate these masculine characteristics, authors of martyrdoms also focused on calling women to that same manhood, who then heeded that very call for their own successful martyrdoms. The author of *Passio Sanctorum Adriani et Nataliae* stands alongside these other martyr texts by portraying the prominent gender-bending of Natalia. The author of this account not only taught the early Christians how to attain masculine qualities, but also how to encourage one's spouse towards martyrdom so that both spouses can become true Christian martyrs in pursuit of the glorious, eternal crown.

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⁴² Ibid., III.

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