Ever since first reading about female gladiators, the concept and details behind such "woman warriors" has continued to fascinate me. While there are fewer primary sources that discuss female gladiators and their involvement in the arena, the sources I did locate helped me compile an interesting insight into the potential life of a female gladiator. I decided to direct my focus on a woman of the upper, elite class becoming a gladiator because I believe that "transformation" from *femina* (a woman of upper class status) to gladiator is more interesting than a woman of lower status making the choice to fight in the arena. I draw evidence from two books: *Gladiatrix: The True Story of History's Unknown Woman Warrior* by Amy Zoll, and *Women in Ancient Rome: A Sourcebook* by Bonnie Maclachlan. I also cite two scholarly articles: "Female Gladiators in Imperial Rome: Literary Context and Historical Fact" by Anna McCollough, and "New Evidence of Female Gladiators" by Alfanso Manas, and I utilize three readings from class, including: "Roman Sexualities" by Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner, "Sexuality and Gender in the Classical World" by Laura McClure, and "Recruitment and Training of Gladiators" by Rodger Dunkle.

In the first part of my letter, I mention the shame and *infamia* that Cassia has brought upon her family by making the choice to become a female gladiator: "I know you both fund it disgusting and unthinkable that I gave up my status as the daughter of a wealthy senator to pursue the lifestyle of a female gladiator". I drew a lot of my information for this section from Anna McCollough's article "Female Gladiators in Imperial Rome: Literary Context and Historical Fact". When addressing the concept of *infamia* in regards to the upper class woman's family, I referred to a section on page 205, where McCollough paraphrases the ideas of Roman poet and intellectual Juvenal:

"…elite women who train as gladiators and/or appear in the arena betray their order to a great degree…it involves not only personal shame but a betrayal of social order" (McCollough, 205). Alfanso Manas's article from *The International Journal of the History of Sport* entitled "New Evidence of Female Gladiators" also references this as: "a threat to the established social order; high classes must not entertain the other classes, only vice versa"(Manas, 2729).

Cassia pleads that her parents continue to read the rest of the letter, in hopes that she can explain to them the choice that she made. When she starts to talk about her expectations as a young Roman elite and how she feels restricted and confined by them, I cite the chapter "Roman Women: Virgo, Matrona, Lupa" in *Gladiatrix: The True Story of History's Unknown Woman Warrior.* The first half of the chapter is committed to talking the role of Roman women, especially those of the upper class: "expectations were that she would marry, bear children, and manage her husband's household. These were the sole duties of a proper wife and girls were groomed for this role from an early age" (Zoll, 63). The "grooming" mentioned by Zoll prompted me to construct Cassia's attitude towards the path her life was taking, and inspired me to formulate the questions that Cassia asks her parents in her letter: "But what if I want a name of my own…Aren't I deserving of more?"

Because the lives of Roman women appeared to serve no true purpose other than to benefit others, it was easy to form the feelings of rebellion and defiance felt by Cassia. The line "What if I want to be recognized as an individual, powerful woman rather than apart of a collective group of women that have no voice, no autonomy?" was inspired by an excerpt of reading we did in class from "Sexuality and Gender in the Classical World"

by Laura McClure. The excerpt was from a eulogy for Murdia, who was the ideal, perfect Roman woman, and claims that "by necessity women ought to be honored as a group" (McClure, 160), which serves as a basis for Cassia's frustration. Additionally, when Cassia asserts she "chose to join this lifestyle…because it offers me an escape, and an alternate way to live my life" which was prompted by a section from Manas's piece, which claimed upper class women would train: "to reaffirm their independence from the patriarchal society in which they lived" (Manas, 2731).

In the second part of the letter, Cassia reflects on her life in the *ludus*. As I described her training methods and weapons being the same as men, as well as cutting her hair short, I was drawn by Manas's article, which speculates: "many female gladiators cut their hair very short, like a man, which was a typical feature of the Amazons" (Manas, 2735). Cassia also talks about the quality of the food at the *ludus*, while making a reference to barley, something that Rodger Dunkle discusses in his work "Recruitment and Training of Gladiators", claiming: "gladiators were often called *horndearii* (barley men), as cheap grain was a chief staple in their diet" (Dunkle, 43). I also have cited that the food served was "worse than hunger", which was an actual quote from a fictional gladiator's account of his time in the *ludus*, as retold by Dunkle.

In the third part of the letter, Cassia describes a fight in the arena, where I draw on sources from Manas's article "New Evidence of Female Gladiators", Dunkle's piece "Gladiators" and an excerpt of reading we had for class by Lucilius. The names for the pieces of armor Cassia wears I took directly from Manas's piece, which discusses: "female gladiators carried both a *subligaculum* (loincloth), *balteus* (belt),…and a *pugio* (dagger) in the right hand" (Manas, 2735). In this same piece Manas hypothesizes that:

"free women did not tend to perform in public with their breasts naked" (Manas, 2735), and this notion is also supported later in the text:

"since no father or husband of status would have allowed his daughter or wife to exhibit herself in public half naked (i.e with her breasts exposed) so that the upper class women who fought in the combats recorded by sources very likely did it with their torsos covered" (Manas, 2739).

Cassia goes on to describe the fight in detail, much of which was inspired by a conjunction of both my own imagination and collective of Dunkle's study on gladiatorial combats. When she claims: "I think if the crowd had wanted me to [kill him] I would have" I was allowing her to take on the persona of the gladiator Paideianus described by Lucilius in *Satires*: "Then I will kill him and I'll win, if that's what you're asking for,' says Paideianus" (172). This piece of personal narrative I think reflects Cassia's aggressive and rebellious attitude, as well as her motives to please the crowd and in turn, satisfy her own personal needs for recognition and attention.

Finally, the last part of the letter serves partially as Cassia's small plea to her parents to forgive her for her choices, but mostly as an indicator that Cassia plans on remaining apart of the lifestyle she has chosen and has no intentions of returning home. By recognizing: "I may be mocked and shunned, I could be killed or seriously wounded", Cassia reflects on the notion that most female gladiators were used as comedic relief; or as Dunkle would describe: "did not seem to be taken seriously in Domitian's shows…any combat involving dwarves was for laughs" (120-121). This also connects to why Cassia was placed in the arena to fight "three very short men", and she even recalls hearing Domitian's name being chanted as she enters the arena. Despite the fact that "volunteer" female gladiators from the upper classes (like Cassia) were subject to the harsh

connotations and consequences associated with *infamia*, I thought it would provide an interesting twist to portray Cassia as firmly grounded in her new life, writing at the end of the letter: “I plan to honor [my decision] for the remainder of my life, however long or short that may be.”

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