CICERO TO LUCCEIUS (*FAM.* 5.12) IN ITS SOCIAL CONTEXT: *VALDE BELLA?*

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CICERO WAS EVIDENTLY rather pleased with his letter of 55 B.C. to the historian L. Lucceius (*Fam.* 5.12). He describes it as "valde bella" and suggests that Atticus acquire a copy for his perusal (*Att.* 4.6.4). It is a judgment, however, with which few modern commentators concur. For many, the letter provides plain evidence of the orator's stupendous vanity and cynical opportunism. Not only does he ask Lucceius for a monograph on his consulship and exile (63–57 B.C.); he even presses for a little embellishment of the truth (*Fam.* 5.12.3).[1] And when critics do attempt to explain Cicero's satisfaction with the letter, the most they offer are brief references to its "form" and "ornate style."[2]

There are two related problems here. First, these interpretations adopt a severely limited critical approach that extends little beyond questions of character or formal style.[3] And yet, from Cicero's point of view, the composition of such a letter almost certainly involved a far wider range of issues. He is initiating a complex social exchange which has its own nexus of obligations and expectations. If we ignore these issues, we ignore powerful social forces.

The second problem is that such interpretations dismiss too lightly Cicero's own opinion of the letter. True, we should not trust blindly in his critical judgment. But to dismiss his view as the delusion of a rabid egotist is equally myopic. If other coherent explanations can be found, they deserve consideration.

The explanation that I would like to offer in the present article focuses in particular on the letter's function as a request. This facet of its social context, I suggest, forces us to view several of its passages in a rather differ-

1. On Cicero's supposed vanity, cf. Guillemin 1938, 97 (quoting Hild 1895): "Il n'y en a point où la vanité de l'auteur s'étale avec plus de naïveté." Almost a century later, Rudd 1992 sets out to examine what he terms Cicero's "stratagems of vanity." The request that Lucceius embroider the truth seems to many scholars to contradict quite cynically the concern for historical accuracy that Cicero asserts elsewhere in his writings. For a review of these criticisms, see most conveniently Rambaud 1953, 14–18; also Kelly 1968, 23–32. All Latin texts referred to in the present article are by Cicero unless stated otherwise.

2. See How 1926, 206; Shackleton Bailey 1980, 139; Constans 1950, p. 121, n. 2, with reference to the letter's clausulae. Jäger 1986, 172–73 highlights its "ausgedehnte Satzperioden."

3. For further examples, see Bléry 1909, 95; Balsdon 1965, 202–3; and (inevitably) Carcopino 1947, 401–2.

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ent light and helps us to appreciate more fully Cicero's description of the letter as "valde bella."[4]

THE LETTER AS A FORMAL REQUEST

Requests for favors necessarily involve Cicero in delicate social negotiations. This fact has been perceptively discussed with regard to his letters of recommendation, but little attempt has been made to explore its full ramifications vis-à-vis his other letters.[5] As sociolinguists have noted, requests are particularly tricky tasks to accomplish smoothly. They are (in the parlance) prime examples of "face-threatening acts." Cicero here lays himself open to rejection, while Lucceius may resent the request's intrusion upon his time and actions. The letter thus has the potential to upset the social equilibrium of their relationship.[6]

It is for this reason that requests in Latin, as in most other languages, can be presented in different ways, being shaped by a wide variety of factors implicit in the social context. These can include, for example, the social distance between those involved, their relative social status, and the nature of the favor being sought.[7] On one level these factors influence the precise phrasing of the request.[8] But they can also determine how it is introduced and presented as a whole—what we may call its "supportive strategies" or "moves."[9]

Two examples from Cicero's correspondence well illustrate the Roman aristocrat's sensitivity to these issues. At *QFr.* 3.1.10, Cicero remarks that Caesar has jokingly chided him for his "in rogando verecundia" when seeking a favor for his friend M. Curtius. And from *Att.* 12.6a.2 we infer that Atticus too had struck slightly the wrong note in a petition to Caesar by his frequent repetition of *quaeso*—a point about which Caesar had apparently teased him (*Att.* 12.6a.2): "Caesar autem mihi irridere visus est 'quaeso' illud tuum." Achieving the appropriate balance of deference and familiarity is a continual challenge in a competitive society where favors are frequently traded among acquaintances of high social standing.[10]

We may note too that written requests differ significantly from spoken ones in that all moves must be made in one go, without any response from

4. White 1993, 64–66 and 77 considers the letter's function as a literary request and rightly notes its importance for our view of aristocratic literary relationships; but our approach here considers its composition and function from a wider perspective.

5. See Cotton 1981, 45 with reference to the "delicate and fragile equilibrium between different claims," and 50: "being in a position to write a recommendation is a measure of one's station in life and influence, and similarly . . . executing it well is a measure of one's versability, tact, ingenuity, culture and sense of *decorum*."

6. For requests and the notion of "face," see Brown and Levinson 1987, 61–66. In their terms, Cicero's "positive face" and Lucceius' "negative face" are at risk here. Cf. Trosborg 1995, 188–89.

7. See discussions in Ervin-Tripp 1976; Brown and Levinson 1987, 74; Blum-Kulka and House 1989, 140–49; Risselada 1993, 3–10.

8. See Risselada 1993 on requests in Latin.

9. Cf. Faerch and Kasper 1989, 222.

10. Caesar's role in these examples may give us a glimpse into the nature of his charm: in both he seems to be attempting to reduce the social distance that Cicero's *verecundia* and Atticus' deferential repetition of *quaeso* imply. (On Atticus' use of the word, cf. Shackleton Bailey 1966, 305: "No doubt Atticus had overworked the expression *quaeso* in his petition.")

the other party. Spoken requests on the other hand usually involve a sequence of exchanges between the two speakers, during which each can adapt their strategies according to the reactions of the other. The letter writer must thus adopt an approach that takes these differences into account.[11]

Much of *Fam.* 5.12, I suggest, is better understood as a response to the tensions of these social negotiations than as a product of Cicero's vanity and hypocrisy. Its content and manner derive largely from the social challenges inherent in the request. Moreover Cicero's positive assessment of the letter reflects his satisfaction at the handling of these challenges, not just a pleasure in his clausulae.

The problem that he faces is this: his ambition drives him to make a potentially intrusive request and tempts him to be as coercive as possible. And yet he is also aware that he must observe certain precepts of courtesy. Moreover an approach that is so coercive that Lucceius takes exception to it will be counter-productive in persuasive terms. How then is he to resolve these conflicting aims? Many parts of the letter take on a new significance when considered in the light of such a question, and we can identify several distinct strategies or supportive moves that Cicero employs in order to mitigate the tensions of this situation.

CICERO'S STRATEGIES OF SOCIAL NEGOTIATION

He begins the letter with an elaborately hesitant preface (*Fam.* 5.12.1):

> coram me tecum eadem haec agere saepe conantem deterruit pudor quidam paene subrusticus quae nunc expromam absens audacius; epistula enim non erubescit.

The most striking feature here is Cicero's self-deprecation. This witty portrayal of himself as red-faced, irresolute, and socially embarrassed has an important apologetic function which helps to soothe the possible irritation of the upcoming request.[12] Moreover, by adopting this self-effacing stance, Cicero signals that he is not concerned with flaunting his status or power in front of Lucceius. This is not the leaden letter of a self-important politician solemnly invoking a favor.

Nevertheless it is notable that in the next sentence (as elsewhere in the letter) Cicero ensures that the main intent of his request goes unmistakably "on record" (*Fam.* 5.12.1): "ardeo cupiditate incredibili neque, ut ego arbitror, reprehendenda nomen ut nostrum scriptis illustretur et celebretur tuis." Whether we consider this phrasing disturbingly direct or admirably frank depends on a variety of factors, not least on our own societal norms of directness in speech.[13] But while requests for favors were an indispensable

11. Cf. Risselada 1993, 15–16.

12. Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989, 21: "[R]ecognition of one's fault is face-threatening to the speaker and intended to appease the hearer." Cf. Rudd 1992, 23 with reference to the "qui s'accuse s'excuse" line of defense.

13. For discussions of "directness" and "indirectness" in phrasing, see Blum-Kulka 1987; Weizman 1989; Risselada 1993, 86–96. On cultural differences in norms of directness, see, e.g., Wierzbicka 1985, Katriel 1986 and the summary in Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989, 5–9. These norms however are just one of several factors that determine how a request is eventually phrased.

part of Roman politics and so to this extent a regular feature of aristocratic interaction,[14] it is clear that this particular petition to Lucceius is quite different in kind from the regular requests found, for example, in letters of recommendation. It asks for a specific favor that requires a significant and sustained undertaking. By phrasing it in this explicit manner, Cicero certainly does nothing to diminish its face-threatening potential. Moreover the letter's considerable length endows the request with a formality that adds even further to the sense of imposition.[15]

The purpose of such directness, we may suspect, is at least partly coercive. The letter's formality and explicitness neatly forestall any possibility of misunderstanding. Lucceius cannot now evade the request by pretending that he does not quite understand what Cicero wants.[16] Nor is he able to treat it in a trivial, offhand way—an important point since several years earlier Posidonius seems to have successfully sidestepped a request to write on Cicero's consulship simply by bestowing upon the orator a single gracious compliment (*Att.* 2.1.1).[17] Lucceius by contrast is now obliged to respond in a rather more formal manner.

But it is important also to catch the subtler nuances of the phrasing here. For all its explicitness, Cicero skillfully frames the request as one not of an ambitious politician, but of an eager sophisticate carried away with literary passion. *ardeo, cupiditas* and associated metaphors are usually employed in contexts of enthusiasm and high emotion, frequently with reference to urbane literary eagerness (note too the urgency suggested by the asyndeton).[18] Cicero abandons the role of stodgy Roman senator who is supposed to value *gravitas* and *constantia,* and seeks to appeal to Lucceius on a very different level—that of passionate littérateur.[19]

The elegant interlacing of words here is also carefully designed to throw emphasis on Lucceius' writings ("scriptis . . . tuis") rather than Cicero's own reputation ("nomen . . . nostrum").[20] It is Lucceius in particular, he asserts, whom he wants as commemorator of his deeds. This contriving of urbane compliments to the historian is an important strategy that Cicero employs on several occasions in the course of the letter. Such compliments function essentially as offerings intended to compensate for the imposition involved in the request.[21] But the element of wit is important here too. The arch way in which such compliments are usually contrived prevents them from descending into gauche flattery.

14. E.g., Q. Cic. *Pet.* 5: *ii rogandi omnes sunt diligenter.* Also 19–21; 24.

15. Guillemin's 1929, 29 claim that the request is a complimentary literary convention may have some truth to it, but it is also rather misleading (cf. also Guillemin 1938, 98). The parallels quoted do not request favors of this magnitude and hence are quite different in kind. Moreover Cicero certainly does not intend Lucceius to dismiss the request as *just* a polite compliment.

16. Cf. Risselada 1993, 250.

17. Cf. Hall 1996, 113.

18. Fantham 1972, 8 and, e.g., *de Orat.* 2.1; *Att.* 16.13a.2; *Brut.* 302; *de Orat.* 1.134; *de Orat.* 1.97.

19. On the traditional value attached to *constantia* and *gravitas,* and the customary suspicion of *cupiditas* (a point reinforced by Cicero's need here to assert that his *cupiditas* is *non reprehendenda*), cf. Narducci 1989, 136 and 182. Cf. also *Att.* 13.1.2 and 7.2.6.

20. Cf. Rudd 1992, 22.

21. Cf. Brown and Levinson 1987, 129.

The next sentence provides a good example. Cicero here indulges in further self-deprecation as he admits to being in something of a hurry, a failing for which he solicitously begs Lucceius' pardon (*Fam.* 5.12.1): "ignoscas velim huic festinationi meae."[22] But this admission is then wittily put to complimentary effect. This impatience, he claims, is due to the literary passion recently kindled by Lucceius' work (*Fam.* 5.12.1):

> genus enim scriptorum tuorum, etsi erat semper a me vehementer exspectatum, tamen vicit opinionem meam meque ita vel cepit vel incendit ut cuperem quam celerrime res nostras monumentis commendari tuis.

Indeed, the exuberant overstatement here further develops the depiction of Cicero's heady enthusiasm for literature: note the intensification of *vehementer,* the forceful metaphors of *vicit* and *incendit,* and further suggestions of impatience in *cuperem* and *quam celerrime.*[23]

This praise of Lucceius is taken a step further in the following sentence (*Fam.* 5.12.1):

> neque enim me solum commemoratio posteritatis ad spem quandam immortalitatis rapit, sed etiam illa cupiditas, ut vel auctoritate testimoni tui vel indicio benevolentiae vel suavitate ingeni vivi perfruamur.

Cicero here skillfully contrives an emphatic compliment that also succeeds in drawing attention to the urgency of his request. He plays up Lucceius' *auctoritas, benevolentia,* and *ingenium,* but also brings home an important point: a lasting memorial in Lucceius' history would be wonderful; but what he really wants is something now, to enjoy while alive ("ut . . . vivi perfruamur").[24] This sense of urgency builds upon the reference to his *festinatio* already mentioned, and is stressed a little later also (*Fam.* 5.12.2: "properationem meam"). Conveying such urgency is clearly one of the letter's main aims; Cicero's skill lies in communicating this in an affable and non-coercive way. He begins by apologizing for his *festinatio* and then sweetens the potentially sour implications of "ut . . . vivi perfruamur" with his various compliments.[25]

Having announced the letter's main purpose in this way, Cicero backs off a little, acknowledging that the historian may already be burdened by other obligations (*Fam.* 5.12.2): "neque tamen, haec cum scribebam, eram nescius quantis oneribus premere susceptarum rerum et iam institutarum." This acknowledgement, however, is swiftly followed by some suggestions

22. Cf. *Att.* 13.1.2 where Cicero regards his *festinatio* as inappropriate and undesirable. One of his precepts at *De Off.* 1.136 is that a "gentleman" does not betray any element of excitability in his manners.

23. The translation of Woodman 1988, 70–73 strives to convey some of this liveliness; see also his remarks at p. 101, n. 4.

24. This indeed is the point of the sentence. While Cicero's *spes immortalitatis* may at first glance seem to be further evidence for his conceit, *commemoratio posteritatis* was, as Wiseman 1985 has succinctly shown, an important aim for most Roman aristocrats. Cf. also Cicero's comments at *Phil.* 14.33; *Tusc.* 1.32–33; *Arch.* 29–30.

25. Cf. also *Fam.* 5.12.2 where Cicero's self-deprecating acknowledgement of his *properatio* encourages Lucceius to view the quick fulfillment of his request as the indulging of a friend's foible rather than the exploitation of a politically expedient moment.

regarding how Lucceius could in fact approach the work that he is proposing (*Fam.* 5.12.2). This pattern is then repeated. He retreats once more, going so far as to provide Lucceius with a ready-made excuse for *not* undertaking the proposed project (*Fam.* 5.12.2): "potest enim mihi denegare occupatio tua." But he then proceeds in the next few lines to make a further request (*Fam.* 5.12.3, see below).

We see here the typical flow and counterflow of social negotiation, a process especially necessary in the written format where, as we have noted, there can be no exchange of turns between the parties involved. Cicero must at one moment press his case, while at the next, repair the possible damage caused by the request. Indeed, it is important not to dismiss these hesitations and polite professions of concern as empty or insincere.[26] True, Cicero is now graciously offering Lucceius an excuse, now trying to coax a monograph from him. But strategies of politeness do not work by removing these contradictions on a rational level. Their effect depends rather on the bow that they make to the addressee's status and situation—important factors in the less-than-rational world of social relationships.[27] In this example, Cicero demonstrates a refined awareness of Lucceius' point of view and signals that he does not take his compliance for granted.

The next request is introduced by another admission of fault, although his previous *pudor subrusticus* is now amusingly transformed into its opposite, an utter lack of *pudor,* a devil-may-care "impudence" (*Fam.* 5.12.3): "sed tamen qui semel verecundiae finis transierit, eum bene et naviter oportet esse impudentem."[28] Despite this explicit and jocular warning, however, to many modern commentators the request itself is a disastrous indictment of Cicero's sense of tact, discretion, and moral integrity.[29] But again we must pay attention to its nuances of phrasing and context. Cicero does indeed go well and truly beyond the *verecundiae finis;* but in doing so he deliberately exaggerates the outrageousness of the request *for humorous effect.* Indeed, his approach here illustrates well the letter's essential dilemma and his use of irony and wit to confront it (*Fam.* 5.12.3):

> itaque te plane etiam atque etiam rogo, ut et ornes ea vehementius etiam quam fortasse sentis, et in eo leges historiae neglegas gratiamque illam, de qua suavissime quodam in proemio scripsisti, a qua te deflecti non magis potuisse demonstras quam Herculem Xenophontium illum a Voluptate, eam, si me tibi vehementius commendabit, ne aspernere amorique nostro plusculum etiam, quam concedet Veritas, largiare.

26. Cf. Jäger's 1986, 171 reference to Cicero's "vorgetäuschter Selbstkritik."

27. Cf. Brown and Levinson 1987, 71.

28. The colloquial phrase *bene et naviter* neatly suggests the image of straight-speaker who throws social niceties to the winds—another amusing pose for the consular Cicero (Livy at 43.7.3 uses the phrase to convey the urgent claims of a lowly centurion). Cf. Jäger 1986, 171 who characterizes the thought in general as proverbial.

29. For negative interpretations, see n. 1. Guillemin 1938, 99 long ago asserted that the passage is mere badinage, but does not identify the essence of the wit. Shackleton Bailey 1980, 141 is likewise wary of taking the passage at face value, suggesting that it is "really a parade of modesty and an exercise in flattery." But again no explication of the subtleties is attempted. His interpretation is apparently influenced by Schütz 1809 whom he quotes elsewhere with hesitant approval (Shackleton Bailey 1977, 320).

To appreciate the joke, we need to appreciate that Cicero here is wittily playing off the conventions of aristocratic letters of recommendation. The opening phrase "plane etiam atque etiam rogo" is typical of these kinds of formal and earnest requests, and so sets up a number of expectations that are wryly overturned as the sentence progresses.[30] First, there is an amusing incongruity between the request's somber formality and its glib content: the distinguished historian whose *auctoritas testimoni* has just been so resoundingly lauded is now asked to casually ignore the *leges historiae*. Furthermore, Cicero wittily depicts himself as a client relying on the support and patronage of *gratia* personified—a portrayal that takes the edge off the professed outrageousness (*commendabit* here makes explicit the connection with recommendations and aristocratic favor-asking).

Moreover he concludes with a variation on another formula often used in such letters. In asking Lucceius to be swayed by his *amor* rather than the strict claims of *veritas,* Cicero plays off the custom whereby one aristocrat asks another to bear in mind their ties of *amicitia* when considering a friend's court-case. In serious letters of this kind Cicero always stops short of suggesting that the principles of *iustitia* be discarded entirely.[31] That he oversteps the mark here points to a wry inversion of these conventions. He is well aware that what he is asking is incongruous both with aristocratic etiquette and Lucceius' high-minded principles of historiography: therein lies the humor. And the jest gains extra piquancy by being phrased in highly formal and polite language. Cicero is impudent in an ever-so-genteel way.

But there is a serious point to this wit. It helps once again to mediate the letter's intrinsic conflicts. One of Cicero's problems here is his very real need to point to the propagandist element that he wants from the project. Several years earlier, in response to a similar request, Atticus had produced a verse account of his consulship which was rather less embellished than Cicero had hoped for (*Att.* 2.1.1). And Lucceius, as Cicero makes clear, is already on record as renouncing all partiality. So he must try to ensure that the historian, having agreed to the project, does not simply end up producing a sober, unadorned account along the lines of Atticus' poem. The challenge is to do so without irrevocably insulting the historian's integrity.[32]

The bantering, ironical language achieves this. Cicero gets to hint at the celebratory tone of the work that he wants; but his ironical stance mitigates the element of presumption here by giving them both an "out." They can both laugh it off as light-hearted badinage—Lucceius, should he wish to

30. *Vehementer* rather than *plane* is usually the preferred adverb, but Cicero's choice here is presumably determined by his repeated use of *vehementius* later in the sentence. See, e.g., *Fam.* 13.5.3, 13.8.3, 13.11.3 (among many); *Att.* 11.12.2; *Fam.* 3.1.3, 9.11.2, 12.29.3; Deniaux 1993, 50–51; Risselada 1993, 255–57.

31. See Cotton 1986, and Kelly's 1966, 58 acknowledgement of this fact, despite his divergence in general from Cotton's view. As Cotton 1986, 459–60 notes, Cicero's analogous remark at *Fam.* 13.5.3 is facetious. Note also Pliny's scruples in *Ep.* 7.33 and those of Fronto in *Amic.* 1.1.1–2 (Naber).

32. Shackleton Bailey 1980, 141 asserts that the passage should not be taken at face value because "Cicero did not seriously believe that the wine of his achievement needed any bush." This may be true, but he was also aware by now that getting other writers to treat the theme in the way that he wanted was not an easy matter. Requests to Archias and Thyillus seem not to have been carried out at all (*Att.* 1.16.15).

decline the request, and Cicero, should he need to deny that he is proposing illicit historiographical practices.[33]

That Cicero is able to adopt this kind of bantering strategy is determined to a large extent by the nature of his relationship with Lucceius. It is clear from the evidence available that they were well acquainted with one another and both steeped in the kind of urbane sophistication that would allow them to indulge in such badinage.[34] While in terms of political careers Cicero was senior by virtue of his consular status, in other respects the two were essentially peers. Lucceius had held the praetorship, possibly a year before Cicero, in 67 B.C., and had run for the consulship in 59 B.C.[35] He was a rich and influential associate of Pompey,[36] and while one recent commentator characterizes his relationship with Cicero as rather formal, there is evidence in *Fam.* 5.12 itself that places Cicero's literary request in a more intimate context.[37]

It is clear, for example, that Cicero had already had personal discussions with Lucceius about his on-going history (*Fam.* 5.12.2): "dixeras autem mihi te reliquas res ordiri." Indeed, we are told that this was not an isolated conversation (*Fam.* 5.12.1): "quod etsi mihi *saepe* ostendisti te esse facturum" (cf. also *Fam.* 5.12.9). The letter then is playing off elements in their relationship that are already well established, presumably through literary discussions at dinner parties with shared acquaintances (it might even have been at such a dinner party that Cicero had first heard Lucceius read his prologue referred to at *Fam.* 5.12.3).[38] Indeed, the enduring nature of their relationship is evident from Lucceius' letters to Cicero a decade or so later following the death of Tullia.[39]

Cicero also shared with Lucceius a passion for literary learning, and this indeed is a further feature that Cicero exploits in the letter in his attempts to dispose the historian favorably to his request. Indeed the letter is carefully designed in many places to celebrate their intellectual kinship and

33. Unfortunately he did not anticipate the dourness of modern scholars. This is not the first time that a joke at his own expense has rebounded badly upon Cicero in modern times. See Douglas 1962, 50 on the joking description of his philosophical works as ἀπόγραφα (*Att.* 12.52.3).

34. On Lucceius' sophistication, see *Cael.* 54: "vir illa humanitate praeditus, illis studiis, illis artibus atque doctrina." See also Ehrhardt 1985 for Lucceius' apparent concern with literary prose style. Cicero's comment at *Fam.* 5.13.3 ("quae eleganter copioseque conlegisti") suggests that Lucceius' *consolatio* following the death of Tullia may (like *Fam.* 5.12) have been composed with a degree of literary self-consciousness. Cicero's use of *subrusticus* at *Fam.* 5.12.1 plays off these expectations of *urbanitas* or sophistication, a point not fully grasped by commentators (see Ullman 1942, 53; Woodman 1988, p. 101, n. 4; Rudd 1992, 22).

35. On the difficulties of Lucceius' praetorship, see Broughton 1986, 127–28. On his candidacy for consulship, see Suet. *Jul.* 19.1 and Asc. *Tog.* 81 (despite McDermott 1969). For general discussions, see Münzer 1927, and most recently Deniaux 1993, 516–19. Unfortunately a complete understanding of Cicero's relationship with our historian Lucceius Q. f. is hampered by the ambiguity of several references in his letters where no filiation is expressed.

36. On his wealth, see Suet. *Jul.* 19.1. On his associations with Pompey, see Caes. *Civ.* 3.18.3; Anderson 1963, 30–34.

37. Deniaux 1993, 519 (based only on the form of address used in the letters exchanged between the two men).

38. Cf. good comments by Jäger 1986, 170. As presented in modern editions and collections, *Fam.* 5.12 all too easily appears as an isolated demand placed upon Lucceius out of the blue.

39. See *Fam.* 5.13 and 5.14, not just the single letter required by aristocratic etiquette. Cf. also Cicero's professions of intimacy with Lucceius in *Fam.* 5.15.2, tinged with regret that their relationship never blossomed as fully as it might have done.

camaraderie. Cicero's perceptive observations on historiography at sections 4–5, for example, help to forge a distinctive bond between them (few of Lucceius' other friends, one imagines, could have engaged him in such a discerning discussion). Moreover, the casual manner in which Cicero lets fall the names of Greek historians is a further nod to Lucceius' learning.[40]

Sections 6–7 are also specifically designed to play off this dimension of their relationship, as well as to introduce further elegant compliments to Lucceius. Once again Cicero claims that the letter has been inspired by Lucceius' talents, which, he now asserts, outstrip those even of renowned Greek historians (*Fam.* 5.12.7):

> atque hoc praestantius mihi fuerit . . . si in tua scripta pervenero quam si in ceterorum, quod non ingenium mihi solum suppeditatum fuerit tuum, sicut Timoleonti a Timaeo aut ab Herodoto Themistocli, sed etiam auctoritas clarissimi et spectatissimi viri et in rei p. maximis gravissimisque causis cogniti atque in primis probati. . . .

This passage too has received its share of criticism, with its references to Greek leaders regarded as typical of Cicero's fanciful desire to equate himself with figures whose greatness he could never match.[41] But this again is to distort the passage's emphasis. Cicero, it is true, is in logical terms to be identified with the Greek leaders mentioned. But his prime aim here is one that we have identified elsewhere in the letter—to work in compliments to Lucceius. This focus is clear enough from the second part of the passage quoted, with its references to the "auctoritas clarissimi et spectatissimi viri" and so on. These flattering comparisons of Lucceius with Timaeus, Herodotus and, a few lines later, even Homer, may seem a little strained perhaps, but they are consistent with the tone of heady literary enthusiasm that, as we have seen, pervades the letter. Not only are these compliments a kind of compensation for the request's intrusion; Cicero hopes that his excitement will be infectious and fire Lucceius' literary imagination.

Finally, we may point to other small touches through which Cicero strives to take the edge off the presumptuousness of his request and keep its subject open for negotiation. In section 3, he needs to make his career seem an enticing and artistically viable literary project. But since such claims may suggest an excessive conceit, he scrupulously inserts disclaimers to forestall any sense of bravado. The phrase "ut mihi persuadeo," for example, stresses the subjective nature of his assertion (*Fam.* 5.12.3): "quod si adducemus ut hoc suscipias, erit, ut mihi persuadeo, materies digna facultate et copia tua." And his claim in the next sentence is depicted as mere opinion ("videtur mihi") rather than fact (*Fam.* 5.12.4): "a principio enim coniurationis usque ad reditum nostrum videtur mihi modicum quoddam corpus confici posse." The words *modicum* and *quoddam* here also show tact in

40. Cicero refers to three Greek historians in section 2, three more in section 7, anecdotes from Greek history in sections 5, 6, and 7, and several Greek artists in section 7. There is nothing especially recherché here perhaps, but it does presuppose a specialized interest in Greek history beyond the general school syllabus (Clarke 1971, 21–22). Cf. the enthusiastic reaction of Caesar Strabo to a similar discussion at *De Orat.* 2.55. If we can believe *Leg.* 1.5–10, Cicero himself was perceived as one of the most knowledgeable figures in the field of historiography. For contemporary interest in the subject, see Rawson 1985, 215–32.

41. Rudd 1992, 25–26.

their qualification of his statements. Again, it is crucial not to dismiss such features as examples of "mock-modesty" slyly introduced to draw attention to Cicero's achievements.[42] Their aim is to mitigate the element of boastfulness that inevitably arises from the nature of his request.[43]

While to some extent all these strategies can be viewed as persuasive or rhetorical in design, they have as much to do with social skills acquired in the course of aristocratic socialization as with oratorical training.[44] Cicero here is asking an acquaintance for a favor, not trying to gain support for a motion in the senate. The strategies that he employs are likely to be those drawn from his everyday experience of such situations. And this indeed represents one of the most valuable features of the letter: it offers firsthand evidence of how Romans might approach some of the more difficult tasks of interpersonal relations.

Indeed, a brief comparison with another of his letters will show that the strategies that he uses here with Lucceius are employed with other acquaintances too. In *Fam.* 9.8, a letter written in 45 B.C. to accompany the *Academica,* a dialogue that Cicero had just finished and dedicated to Varro, Cicero takes the opportunity to dun the polymath for a reciprocal literary dedication. So, in what constitutes (at least in part) a kind of literary request,[45] it is striking that here too he begins with a witty piece of self-deprecation, as he confesses that his upcoming demand may seem more presumptuous than the demands of the lowly *populus* (*Fam.* 9.8.1): "etsi munus flagitare, quamvis quis ostenderit, ne populus quidem solet nisi concitatus, tamen ego exspectatione promissi tui moveor ut admoneam te, non ut flagitem."[46]

He then proceeds to give a whimsically witty justification for his gauche behavior by claiming that the books that comprise the *Academica* have a mind of their own (*Fam.* 9.8.1):

> misi autem ad te quattuor admonitores non nimis verecundos; nosti enim profecto os illius adulescentioris Academiae. ex ea igitur media excitatos misi; qui metuo ne te forte flagitent; ego autem mandavi ut rogarent.

The joke in this personification relies of course on Varro's acquaintance with Greek philosophy. The New Academy is not just young; it is young and brash, exactly the type that would make such an importunate demand. And the wit here works on a linguistic level also: this metaphorical application of *adulescentioris* to the New Academy is evidently original, as too the transferred use of *admonitores*.[47]

42. Cf. the references to "mock-modesty" in Woodman 1988, p. 101, n. 4.

43. He strives for similar effect in other passages (see, e.g., the diminutive "gloriola nostra" and the polite "si tibi non est molestum" in sections 9–10).

44. Cf. Jäger 1986, 172: "Der persuasiv-rhetorische Charakter dieses Briefes, den Cicero selbst für wohlgelungen hält ('valde bella est')." The letter is undoubtedly persuasive in intent, but the strategies employed are not "rhetorical" in the sense of being based on a codified system of persuasion.

45. Cf. White 1993, 69.

46. Cf. *Fam.* 5.12.8 where Cicero compares himself unfavorably with the loud-voiced Greek herald at an athletic contest.

47. On *adulescentioris, TLL* vol. 1, 795, 27–28; on *admonitores, TLL* vol. 1, 769, 12–16. Cf. the apparent coining of *gloriola* at *Fam.* 5.12.9 (*TLL* vol. 6, 2092, 80–85), as well as the personification of *gratia* at *Fam.* 5.12.3 and the phrase "epistula non erubescit" at *Fam.* 5.12.1. Note also the pun on *munus* in the first sentence: the *populus* demands games (*munus*); Cicero is requesting a reciprocal gift (*munus*).

Moreover, as he sets his request in motion, Cicero demonstrates the same punctilious awareness of social niceties as he does to Lucceius: note the careful distinction between appropriate "requesting" or "urging" (*rogo, admoneo*) on the one hand, and gauche "insistence" (*flagito*) on the other. And Varro here, like Lucceius, is offered a ready-made excuse for not meeting his request (*Fam.* 9.8.1): "sed cum tu tardius faceres, id est, ut ego interpretor, diligentius."[48]

In short, this letter too, like the one to Lucceius, is a witty tour de force, featuring arch self-deprecation, careful courtesy, an appeal to shared philosophical (or literary) passions, and sophisticated verbal wit.[49] And these similarities in approach and situation provide an important clue for our interpretation of *Fam.* 5.12. When Cicero asks Atticus with reference to *Fam.* 9.8 (*Att.* 13.25.3)—"sed, quaeso, epistula mea ad Varronem valdene tibi placuit?"—it is clear that he is not just concerned with the letter's clausulae and "formal style." Two things in particular cause him considerable anxiety: his literary request and (to a far greater extent) the dialogue's depiction of Varro and how Varro will react to it.[50] Both of these features have the potential to create social friction, and it is this friction that Cicero strives so hard in his letter to ease (he tells us at *Att.* 13.25.3 that he labored long and hard over it). The strategies that we have identified play an important part in this process.

The same considerations then apply in the case of *Fam.* 5.12, a letter also laden with potential for social rupture. Much of its context and approach is best viewed as determined by the tensions inherent in its request. When Cicero describes the letter to Atticus as "valde bella," he is referring to much more than its stylistic ornament; it is an accomplished solution to a delicate and difficult social situation.

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This interpretation of the letter clearly differs quite significantly from the conventional one. But although it calls into question some of the standard criticisms of Cicero's vanity and hypocrisy, its wider aim is to suggest new angles from which to approach Cicero's correspondence. By viewing *Fam.* 5.12 in terms of its social dynamics, we can appreciate more readily Cicero's wit and delicacy of touch—features that are easily missed if (as has often been done) the letter is reduced to paraphrases that ignore its social context.

48. Cf. also *Fam.* 5.12.8: "quod si a te non impetro, hoc est, si quae te res impedierit."

49. Perhaps inevitably, there are some differences in approach also. Cf. the more restrained "exspectatione promissi tui moveor" to Varro with the exuberance of "ardeo cupiditate incredibili" to Lucceius—a sign perhaps of the more reserved nature of the relationship between the two men (for Cicero's perception of Varro's rather eccentric character, see *Att.* 2.25.1: "mirabiliter enim moratum est sicut nosti"). He also foregoes the lavish bestowal of compliments in Varro's case—perhaps because his present dedication of the *Academica* puts him less in Varro's debt, or because such a mannerism seems less appropriate to Varro's character.

50. For Cicero's concern with this issue, see *Att.* 13.22.1; 13.23.2; 13.24.1; 13.25.3; 13.35–36.2; 13.44.2.

This discussion also confirms, however, how inconveniently complex human affairs can be. While it has focused on several important factors that can influence how requests are formulated, it has inevitably glossed over many others. The issue of Roman conventions of favor asking, for example, has raised its head and warrants more extended treatment. The differences between Cicero's letters to Varro and Lucceius likewise point to the possible influences of social distance and status on requests.[51] Moreover the letter's place within a *wider* social context may also play a part. For if the letter is intended for a wider readership, Cicero may well have had one eye on cultivating a particular image of himself in front of other aristocrats, as well as negotiating his request with Lucceius.[52]

Indeed, in this respect, it is striking that many of the strategies identified above are typical of urbane aristocratic manners. Self-deprecation has long been recognized as a mark of urbanity in Cicero's letters and dialogues; compliments, together with a scrupulous courtesy, form part of his dialogues' sophisticated manners; and a reputation for wit and literary learning was highly prized by Cicero and his contemporaries.[53] In a society where the claims to sophistication were fiercely contested, Cicero takes care to accomplish this awkward task with elegance and flair.[54]

This complexity can inspire a certain despair in the social historian: how to unravel the multifarious dimensions of human relationships and give each its full due? The best answer here, as in other disciplines with the same problems, seems to be *pedetemptim*. Individual studies are bound to focus on certain factors at the expense of others. But only by drawing out the several strands individually can we begin to appreciate the complex whole that constitutes Roman society.[55]

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51. See n. 49. These aspects could also be profitably explored with reference to Caelius' brief literary request in *Fam.* 8.3.3.

52. Cicero may well have expected a wider audience for the letter (as several commentators have assumed, although apparently for the promotion of Cicero's political image, not his urbanity; see Guillemin 1938, 97 and Fantham 1972, 184). Note that Cicero probably wrote the letter at Cumae, while Atticus was in Rome (Ross Taylor 1949, 217–19). Given Atticus' role in the distribution of Cicero's works, the suggestion that he acquire a copy of the letter may be a tacit invitation to read it to friends at a dinner party or literary gathering. See *Att.* 16.2.6, 16.3.1 and Nepos *Att.* 14 for Atticus' literary readings.

53. Self-deprecation: Haury 1955, 252–55 on "auto-ironie," esp. 253; in the dialogues, Becker 1938, 21; Zoll 1962, 116–24. Compliments: Becker 1938, 21. Wit: Frank 1932, 37–41. Learning: Bléry 1909, 97; Frank 1932, 25–30. It is tempting to argue in this context that Cicero uses the adjective in the phrase "valde bella est" in its sense of "smart," "neat," or "sophisticated" (see Ross 1969, 110–11, esp. n. 264). But the remark appears to be thrown out quite hurriedly towards the end of the letter, and probably carries the more general meaning of "good," "fine," "appealing."

54. The air of sophistication that compliments and self-deprecation acquire probably derives from the very fact that they are so effective in easing social tensions. For contemporary concern with ideals of sophistication, see, e.g., Catul. 22, 39, 84; Cicero *Clod.* frag. 21 (Crawford 1994, 249); *Att.* 1.16.10; *Fam.* 3.8.3. See also Frank 1932.

55. The social sciences have long recognized these methodological problems. For a good example, see the careful discussion in Hinde 1987, 1–53. On these problems in the study of Roman political history, see Brunt 1988, 88–89.

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