

MEMMIUS THE EPICUREAN

In *Fam.* 13.1 Cicero, visiting Athens en route to Cilicia in the summer of 51 B.C., writes to C. Memmius L.f., praetor in 58 but by the time of Cicero's communication an exile in Athens after the shambolic consular elections for 53;¹ Memmius was (temporarily, one assumes) absent from Athens in Mytilene, hence the need for Cicero to write to him. This letter, along with *Att.* 5.11.6 and 19.3, is our focus in the argument that follows, but, to summarize the situation in the very broadest terms, Cicero's concern in it is with Memmius' intentions regarding a plot of land in Athens occupied by a house of Epicurus, and with the objections to Memmius' plans that had been raised with Cicero by the scholarch of the Epicurean community in Athens, Patro.

A letter from Cicero to the presumed addressee of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* should by rights represent an unusually precious and informative survival, even in the context of Cicero's invaluable correspondence. But *Fam.* 13.1 has proved an awkward item of evidence, seeming to give us a Memmius at once unsympathetic to Epicureanism and intimately involved with Epicureans. The mainstream view has been that Memmius' implication in a dispute about Epicurus cannot be coincidental, given his likely role in the *De Rerum Natura*, but equally cannot indicate that relations between Memmius and the Epicurean school were good, much less that he might himself have professed Epicureanism. The recent discussion of *Fam.* 13.1 by Hutchinson, in the course of an argument for re-dating the publication of the *De Rerum Natura*, finds in it evidence that the recipient of Cicero's letter and Lucretius' addressee might not be the same man, although Hutchinson sees no insurmountable difficulty in supposing that a *De Rerum Natura* published in 49 or 48 could be addressed to this Memmius, C. Memmius L.f., the praetor of 58.²

We propose a reading of Cicero's letter different from the current dominant reading, one that will reveal Memmius' involvement with Epicurus' house to have been neither coincidental nor (at least from his own perspective) of malign intent, and remove obstacles to the identification of the Memmius of *De Rerum Natura* and of *Fam.* 13.1. It will also iron out other wrinkles in the standard interpretation of the letter, most notably Cicero's ostensibly troubling characterization of Atticus' attitude to Epicureanism, and even allow some tentative conclusions to be drawn regarding both Memmius' role in the *De Rerum Natura* and the currently much disputed question of the publication date of Lucretius' poem.³ We should acknowledge here at the outset that dissenting

¹ For a commendably clear account of a horribly convoluted campaign and aftermath, see E.S. Gruen, 'The consular elections for 53 B.C.', in J. Brabauw (ed.), *Hommages à Marcel Renard* (Brussels, 1969), 2.311–21. We thank Miriam Griffin, Gregory Hutchinson and the anonymous reader for *CQ* for advice and comments on this article. Remaining errors are our own.

² G.O. Hutchinson, 'The date of *De Rerum Natura*', *CQ* 51 (2001), 150–62, at 158–9.

³ Hutchinson's argument (n. 2) for a date coinciding with the outbreak of Civil War in 49 B.C. or shortly afterwards has provoked responses from Volk and Krebs, reasserting the traditional date in the

views on the implications of Memmius' behaviour in Athens have been registered before. Both Stearns in 1931⁴ and Griffin in a penetrating footnote⁵ sketch readings of Cicero's letter to which we are sympathetic. But recent debate on the date of the *De Rerum Natura*, whether explicitly in the case of Hutchinson or implicitly in Volk's and Krebs' avoidance of the topic of the house, confirms how marginal these alternative views remain. There is a strong consensus that Cicero's exchange with Memmius precludes any sympathy on Memmius' part for Epicurean philosophy.

At the heart of Cicero's request to Memmius is a dispute about a property, the property in question being a house in the Melite deme of Athens that had once belonged to Epicurus. It was quite separate from the famous Garden that lay outside the Dipylon Gate on the road to the Academy, which persisted as a place of Epicurean observance probably as late as the third century A.D.,⁶ although the two locations have not always been clearly distinguished in scholarly accounts.⁷ Most of our knowledge of this other property in Melite is derived from Epicurus' will, preserved at Diog. Laert. 10.16–21 (the provisions for property are located at 10.16–17), and the terms of this will in 270 B.C. go some way toward explaining how the house could have become the bone of contention it was in 51 B.C. Whereas Epicurus describes at some length his wishes for the Garden, which was to be placed at the disposal of Epicurus' successor Hermarchus of Mytilene and his fellow Epicureans and Hermarchus' successors to pursue philosophy, and to be maintained as a home for the Epicureans *for all time*, provision for 'the house in Melite' is only legally defined for a single generation: the trustees of the will, Amynomachus and Timocrates, are to allow Hermarchus and his fellow philosophers to live in the house for the lifetime of Hermarchus, τὴν δ' οἰκίαν τὴν ἐν Μελίτῃ παρεχέτωσαν Ἀμυνομάχος καὶ Τιμοκράτης ἐνοικεῖν Ἐρμάρχῳ καὶ τοῖς μετ' αὐτοῦ φιλοσοφοῦσιν, ἕως ἂν Ἐρμάρχος ζῆ (10.17). Thereafter, Epicurus' will makes no provision, and the house must to all appearances have been legally alienable. Cicero states (*Fam.* 13.1.4) that Patro's case for Memmius ceding his rights over the house included an appeal to *testamentorum ius* and *Epicuri auctoritatem*; if these appeals included any claim to the effect that Epicurus' will required the house in Melite to remain in the possession of the Epicurean school, we can see how Memmius might have been unpersuaded.

By 51 B.C., on the evidence of Cicero's letters, the house in Melite found itself in a sorry state. The word Cicero consistently uses of it is *parietinae*, walls in a dilapidated condition (*nescio quid illud Epicuri parietinarum*, *Fam.* 13.1.3; *parietinis in Melita*, *Att.* 5.19.3).⁸ Cicero further informs us that Memmius possessed the right to build on

mid fifties on the basis of the narrative conventions of didactic poetry and verbal parallels between the *De Rerum Natura* and Caesar's *De Bello Gallico* respectively: K. Volk, 'Lucretius' prayer for peace and the date of *De rerum natura*', *CQ* 60 (2010), 127–31; C.B. Krebs, 'Caesar, Lucretius and the dates of *De Rerum Natura* and the *Commentarii*', *CQ* 63 (2013), 772–9.

⁴ J.B. Stearns, 'A note on Gaius Memmius', *The Classical Weekly* 24 (1931), 161–2.

⁵ M. Griffin, 'Philosophical badinage in Cicero's letters to his friends', in J.G.F. Powell (ed.), *Cicero the Philosopher: Twelve Papers* (Oxford, 1995), 325–46, at 333 n. 36, a development of her nuanced reading of the letter at M. Griffin, 'Philosophy, politics, and politicians at Rome', in M. Griffin and J. Barnes (edd.), *Philosophia Togata* (Oxford, 1989), 1–37, at 16–17.

⁶ D. Clay, 'The Athenian Garden', in J. Warren (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism* (Cambridge, 2009), 9–28, at 28.

⁷ There is a succinct rehearsal of the evidence for the location of the Epicurean sites in Athens at Clay (n. 6), 10 n. 3.

⁸ Griffin (n. 5 [1989]), 16 speculates that the damage had been done during Sulla's sack of Athens in 86 B.C.

the site of this house, and had that right by virtue of a decree of the Areopagus (Cicero uses the technical term ὑπομνηματισμός, *Fam.* 13.1.5; *Att.* 5.11.6), which Cicero (perhaps humorously) dates to the Eponymous Archonship of Polycharmos (*Polycharmo praetore*, *Att.* 5.11.6).⁹ It is worth emphasizing that Cicero describes Memmius' designs on the location exclusively in terms of building, with no suggestion of demolition: *aedificatio* twice at *Fam.* 13.1.3 and again at 13.1.5 alongside *etiam si aedificaturus esses*; *aedificationis consilium* at *Att.* 5.11.6.

So Memmius was licensed at the very highest level to build on the site in Melite. What stood in his way was Patro, scholar of the Epicureans in Athens after the death of Phaedrus, and what apparently motivated Patro in his stubborn resistance to whatever Memmius had in mind was the cult status accorded to Epicurus by later adherents of his school, and the central role played in Epicureanism by this lionization of the founder. That, at any rate, is an easy conclusion from ... *Epicuri auctoritatem ... sedem, domicilium, uestigia summorum hominum sibi tuenda esse* (*Fam.* 13.1.4). The prominence and sanctity of Epicurus in the later history of the school had its roots in Epicurus' own provision, later confirmed in his will, of cults celebrating himself and his family and philosophical associates. In his lifetime he had established an annual celebration of his own birthday and—something that became a key Epicurean ritual—gatherings on the twentieth day of every month to commemorate himself and Metrodorus. There were also cults of family members and of Polyaeus, one of the three καθηγεμόνες alongside Hermarchus and Metrodorus, secondary leaders of the school after Epicurus himself. As Clay notes, the observance of a celebration every month implied that Epicurus and Metrodorus were divinities:¹⁰ any reader of the *De Rerum Natura* will see the force of the exposé of Epicureanism by Timocrates, Epicurus' great critic (and Metrodorus' brother), as ἡ μυστικὴ ἐκείνη συνδιαγωγή, 'that coven of mystics' (Diog. Laert. 10.7), a philosophical school consciously shaped by its founder as a quasi-religious community. In relation to Epicurus' house in Melite, we might suspect that just this fetishization of Epicurus motivated Patro to assert proprietorial rights over a site to which, as we have seen, he seems to have had no claim in law.

⁹ Dating by Archonship seems redundant for Cicero's purposes, and recalls Epicurus' habits of dating, discussed in D. Clay's fascinating article, 'Epicurus in the archives of Athens', *Paradosis and Survival* (Ann Arbor, 1998), 40–54 = *Studies in Greek Epigraphy, History, and Topography Presented to Eugene Vanderpool* (*Hesp. Supp.* 19) (Princeton, 1982), 17–26. Cicero enjoys aping Epicurus' idiolect, cf. *condiscipuli* (5.19.3) picking up on οἱ συμφιλοσοφοῦντες (Diog. Laert. 10.18, 10.20). W.B. Dinsmoor, *The Archons of Athens in the Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1931), 292 interprets Cicero's *praetor* as στρατηγός, and Polycharmos does not feature in modern reconstructions of the Archon List before 51 (Dinsmoor [this note], 280 places him in 45/44), even though Cicero's expression is clearly a dating formula. J.H. Oliver, 'Emperors and Athens', *Historia* 30 (1981), 412–23, at 423 n. 27 is adamant that Cicero's evidence, *pace* Dinsmoor, establishes Polycharmos as 'a well-known archon before 51 B.C.'. E. Rawson, *Roman Culture and Society: Collected Papers* (Oxford, 1991), 453 in turn disputes Oliver's interpretation of *praetor* as 'archon', but on the basis of just one Ciceronian example of *praetor* denoting a στρατηγός (*Off.* 1.44), and of one reference to an Archon as *archon* (*Fat.* 19). This hardly seems decisive, and there remains the problem that this is a dating formula: to refer to 'last year' as 'when Polycharmos was General' is, as Rawson allows, odd, and to explain it as indicating some kind of close involvement on Polycharmos' part in the matter suggests a General sharing in the deliberations of the Areopagus, which would also be odd. This question is tangential to our argument in this article, but one is left wondering if the reconstructed Archon Lists, which would preclude an archonship for Polycharmos in the late fifties, are as secure as Rawson assumes.

¹⁰ For a succinct account of Epicurus' cults, see Clay (n. 6), 22–6; and, in greater depth, D. Clay, 'The cults of Epicurus', *Paradosis and Survival* (Ann Arbor, 1998), 75–102 = *Cronache Ercolanesi* 16 (1986), 1–28.

The prevailing interpretation of the situation Cicero addresses in *Fam.* 13.1, *Att.* 5.11.6 and 5.19.3 is that it indicates a fundamental rift between C. Memmius and Epicureanism. The letter ‘cannot possibly stand scrutiny as a basis for attributing Epicureanism to C. Memmius’, in the uncompromising words of Castner.¹¹ Fowler is equally convinced of the ‘mismatch between [the *De Rerum Natura*] and addressee’, as illustrated by Cicero’s letter, although he sees no contradiction between the antipathy he attributes to Memmius and his role in the *De Rerum Natura*, a text which was, after all, designed to convert (non-Epicurean) readers to the philosophy.¹² This reading of Memmius’ activity has found more lurid expression. The references to building that we have highlighted in Cicero’s account of Memmius’ plans have tended to mutate into demolition of Epicurus’ house, on the one hand, and assumptions about the nature of Memmius’ construction, on the other. Thus, Clay talks of ‘Cicero’s purpose’ in *Fam.* 13.1 being ‘to dissuade Memmius from pulling down the ruins of Epicurus’ house in Melite’,¹³ and Kelly states that ‘Memmius had acquired’ the ruins of Epicurus’ house, ‘and had received approval from the Areopagus to tear down the remains of the old building and construct a new house’.¹⁴ It is worth reminding ourselves that the evidence available warrants no more than the word ‘construct’ in this latter clause: there is no suggestion that Memmius is building a house for himself, or destroying what already existed at the site. A fortiori, the reference in *RE* to a ‘magnificent palace’ that Memmius planned to build and Memmius’ own ‘Zerstörungslust’¹⁵ lacks evidential basis, though no doubt arising from some implicit characterization of Memmius as a stereotypically arrogant Roman interloper in Athenian affairs. Habicht also talks of Memmius’ intention to ‘build a palace on the site where Epicurus’ house had once stood’, and further assumes that it was his ‘money, influence and connections’ that had secured the relevant decree of the Areopagus,¹⁶ an assessment of Memmius that is potentially in tension with Habicht’s (accurate) acknowledgement elsewhere that he was ‘a gifted intellectual who wrote poetry and had an interest in philosophy’, a philhellene (*Cic. Brut.* 247) to whom Athens might have appeared ‘as the site where he could best endure his banishment’.¹⁷ Cicero’s brief sketch of Memmius’ accomplishments in the *Brutus* should perhaps always be borne in mind in relation to these circumstances.

Less speculative treatments of the evidence identify more compelling grounds for the view that Memmius was no friend of Epicureans: the clear impression of unfriendly relations between Memmius and the Epicurean scholar Patro that emerges from Cicero’s letters. ‘[H]is sympathy with Epicureanism seems slender,’ Hutchinson comments, ‘to judge from his disrespectful plans to build on the ruins of Epicurus’ house, and his obvious anger at the intervention of Patro the head of the Epicurean school.’ Hutchinson’s primary aim is to cast doubt on the identification of C. Memmius L.f. with the addressee of the *De Rerum Natura*, which in turn might support, without being crucial for, the later date for the poem that Hutchinson favours, and he suggests that Memmius’ attitude in Athens is hard to square with Lucretius’ aspirations

¹¹ C.J. Castner, *Prosopography of Roman Epicureans from the 2. Century B.C. to the 2. Century A.D.* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), 99–104, at 103.

¹² D.P. Fowler, ‘Lucretius and politics’, in M. Griffin and J. Barnes (edd.), *Philosophia Togata* (Oxford, 1989), 120–50, at 122.

¹³ Clay (n. 6), 28.

¹⁴ G.P. Kelly, *A History of Exile in the Roman Republic* (Cambridge, 2012), 194–5.

¹⁵ *RE* s.v. ‘Memmius’, 15 (1932), cols. 609–16, at col. 615.4.

¹⁶ C. Habicht, *Athens from Alexander to Antony* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), 335.

¹⁷ Habicht (n. 16), 348.

to convert him.¹⁸ When Shackleton Bailey remarks similarly that, ‘If this Memmius (and not his namesake C. Memmius C.f.) was indeed the dedicatee of the *De Rerum Natura*, he must have changed his views, or else Lucretius was sadly mistaken in him’, he does so in commenting on Cicero’s dismissive words on Patro at *Fam.* 13.1.4 (transl. Shackleton Bailey):¹⁹

totam hominis uitam²⁰ rationemque, quam sequitur in philosophia, derideamus licet, si hanc eius contentionem uolumus reprehendere; sed mehercules, quoniam illi ceterisque, quos illa delectant, non ualde inimici sumus, nescio an ignoscendum sit huic, si tanto opere laborat; in quo etiamsi peccat, magis ineptiis quam improbitate peccat.

If we wish to find fault with his insistence on this matter, we are at liberty to deride his whole life and philosophical principles. But really, since we have no deadly enmity towards him or others who find these doctrines to their taste, perhaps we ought not to be hard on him for taking it so much to heart. Even if he is wrong, it is silliness rather than wickedness that is leading him astray.

Don Fowler took this sense of the fundamental differences between C. Memmius and Epicureanism, and thus the paradox that Lucretius’ dedicatee should be addressed in these terms by Cicero, to a logical conclusion, pondering ‘whether it was the *De Rerum Natura* which Cicero refers to’ at *Fam.* 13.1.4 ‘when he talks of the “offensiuicula” caused to Memmius by the “peruersitas” of some Epicureans’.²¹ Clearly, an alternative reading of Memmius’ behaviour such as we are proposing needs not only to offer a more eirenic account of his building intentions but also to explain how remarks such as these between Cicero and Memmius could fail to amount to criticism of the entire philosophical school of Epicureanism, and fail to preclude attributing to Memmius any level of sympathy with Epicurean philosophy. We address these issues in reverse order.

Cicero frames his letter to Memmius as a recommendation (*commendatio*) made on behalf of Patro, who has requested Cicero’s intervention twice, first in writing and then in person (*Fam.* 13.1.3). That a non-Epicurean like Cicero was enlisted as a go-between suggests an absence of good relations between Memmius and Patro, who had previously been acquainted at Rome.²² This was no doubt rooted in the course of recent events concerning Memmius’ plans for the site: Cicero’s intervention did not constitute Patro’s initial approach to Memmius but was made after Memmius had rejected, and been angered by, an earlier approach (whether made by Patro directly or through another intermediary is unclear).²³ As such, the indirectness of this second approach stems from the recent falling-out, and should not be taken to suggest that Patro anticipated any broader anti-Epicurean sentiment on Memmius’ part.²⁴

At 13.1.4, Cicero anticipates that Memmius will be willing to engage in harsh criticism and ridicule of Patro. Accordingly, this passage constitutes the strongest *prima facie* evidence against the notion of a Memmius with Epicurean sympathies. If

¹⁸ Hutchinson (n. 2), 158.

¹⁹ D.R. Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero Epistulae ad Familiares* (Cambridge, 1977), 1.359.

²⁰ On Wesenberg’s emendation *uiam*, and its merits, see below.

²¹ Fowler (n. 12), 122.

²² *Fam.* 13.1.2. Relations between them were bad enough for Cicero to assume that a single letter of intervention would not suffice to persuade Memmius; at 13.1.5 he envisages the discussion continuing at another time (*dicendum enim aliquando est*), presumably on Memmius’ return from Mytilene.

²³ *Att.* 5.11.6: *Memmius autem aedificandi consilium abiecerat, sed erat Patroni iratus. itaque scripsi ad eum accurate; Fam.* 13.1.4: *Patronis et orationem et causam tibi cognitam esse certo scio.*

²⁴ We thus consider Patro’s ‘need to intercede with Memmius through a non-Epicurean, Cicero’ as less decisive evidence of Memmius’ philosophical affiliations than Castner (n. 11), 104.

Memmius was known to have sympathized with Epicurean philosophy, it is assumed, Cicero could not have expected him to respond well to the abuse of so eminent an Epicurean as Patro, especially when said abuse is not limited to Patro's recent behaviour but appears to extend to the very fact of his Epicureanism (*ratio ... quam sequitur in philosophia*). Memmius, says Cicero, had been affronted by the *peruersitas* of the members of a certain *gens* (usually understood to refer to Epicureans *simpliciter*)²⁵ and had been the target of a set of arguments and appeals from Patro to which the correct response was thorough ridicule of both man and underlying doctrine: *totam hominis uitam rationemque quam sequitur in philosophia derideamus*. While ridicule is appropriate, Patro's behaviour is not so bad as to preclude toleration and, indeed, clemency: *sed mehercules, quoniam illi ceterisque quos illa delectant non ualde inimici sumus, nescio an ignoscendum sit huic si tanto opere laborat*; his sin (*peccat*) is rooted less in moral failure (*improbitas*) than in the tactlessness of the narrow-minded (*ineptiae*).²⁶ Cicero, then, asks Memmius to view Patro and his associates as figures of fun; deeply misguided, perhaps, but essentially harmless.

An interpretation according to which Cicero's criticism of Patro and his associates at *Fam.* 13.1.4 is intended to appeal to broad anti-Epicurean attitudes on the part of Memmius is certainly compatible with the language of this part of the letter. A complication is presented, however, by the following paragraph (13.1.5), in which Atticus is introduced as another individual who has put pressure on him to intervene. Cicero, then, is writing to Memmius not only on behalf of Patro but also on behalf of a Roman Epicurean of a quite different complexion: Atticus, Cicero tells Memmius, is *non ex istis*; not a member of the *gens*, led by Patro, which Cicero has just invited Memmius to ridicule. While the seriousness of Atticus' commitment to Epicurean values has been questioned,²⁷ there is no doubt that he identified as, and was understood to be, an Epicurean.²⁸ As such, Cicero's statement at 13.1.5 that Atticus is 'not one of them' presents a serious difficulty for a reading according to which 'they'—the targets of the foregoing ridicule—are understood to be Epicureans *simpliciter*. A solution is easily found: the scope of Cicero's ridicule at 13.1.4, and likewise the scope of *istis* at 13.1.5, is restricted to those Epicureans, led by Patro, who are protesting Memmius' plans. The difference between this group of Epicureans and Epicurean individuals like Atticus is the relative paucity of their culture and the narrowness of their learning; *non quo [Atticus] sit ex istis; est enim omni liberali doctrina politissimus*.²⁹

²⁵ Shackleton Bailey (n. 19), 1.358 compares *Nat. D.* 1.89 and *Fin.* 4.51, each of which features *gens* used of a philosophical school, in the former case referring to Epicureans.

²⁶ For *ineptiae* as a lack of tact, see esp. *Cic. De or.* 2.17–18, where it is described as a social failing to which Greek hairsplitters are particularly prone, and compare *Att.* 6.1.26, on Cicero's mooted monument in the Academy: *num inepti fuerimus si nos quoque Academiae fecerimus? Improbitas and ineptiae* are contrasted only here in Cicero.

²⁷ D.R. Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero's Letters to Atticus Volume I* (Cambridge, 1965), 8 n. 5; E. Rawson, *Intellectual Life in the Late Roman Republic* (London, 1985), 100–1. Cicero's willingness to abuse Epicureans in his letters to Atticus is treated by both Shackleton Bailey and Rawson as evidence for Atticus' lukewarm attitude to Epicureanism. A central argument of this paper, however, is that abuse of this kind, contained within a letter, is in no way incompatible with pro-Epicurean feelings on the part of the addressee, whether Memmius or Atticus.

²⁸ Castner (n. 11), 57–61; Griffin (n. 5 [1989]), 16–18; Y. Benferhat, *Cives Epicurei: Les Épicuriens et l'idée de monarchie à Rome et en Italie de Sylla à Octave* (Brussels, 2005), 101–69.

²⁹ *Doctrina liberalis* refers to a broad learning that includes, but is not limited to, the technical details of philosophy: see *Fam.* 4.4.4, *De or.* 3.127, with A.D. Leeman and H. Pinkster, *Cicero, De Oratore Libri III* (Heidelberg, 1981), 1.39–40; F. Kühnert, *Allgemeinbildung und Fachbildung in der Antike* (Berlin, 1961), 26–31. On Cicero's pejorative attitudes to the culture of Epicureans,

This is not the only letter in which Cicero appears to draw a distinction between two different kinds of Epicurean, refined and unrefined. First, we may compare the language of the letter to Atticus (5.11), in which Cicero explains his motivation for writing to Memmius.³⁰ There Cicero claims that his intervention has generated appreciation for Atticus *apud Patronem et reliquos barones*. Again, given Atticus' identification as an Epicurean, the scope of *reliquos barones* should not extend to all Epicureans; the phrase should rather be understood as referring to those Epicureans supportive of Patro's cause, no doubt members of the Athenian school, of which he was leader, who appreciate their fellow Epicurean's intervention on their behalf. We may further compare *Fam.* 9.26.3, a letter to the Epicurean Papirius Paetus,³¹ where Paetus is said to have heckled the philosopher Dio, another Epicurean,³² who is subsequently called by Cicero a *baro*.³³ A pattern may be established, then, according to which Cicero expects his Roman Epicurean addressees to be receptive to the playful ridicule and denigration of their Greek counterparts, especially in contexts where their level of culture and sophistication is in question.

The significance of this for our reading of Cicero's intervention with Memmius should be clear. As we have seen, the internal logic of the letter, given the praise of the Epicurean Atticus at 13.1.5, does not allow for the criticisms of 13.1.4 to be aimed at Epicureans *simpliciter*. Rather, we have suggested that the targets of said criticism are limited to those Athenian Epicureans, including Patro, who were causing difficulties for Memmius. Such a reading does not require Memmius to have held broadly anti-Epicurean views but merely to have been opposed to the behaviour of the Epicurean protesters targeted at 13.1.4. What is more, criticism of certain Greek Epicureans in a Ciceronian letter does not preclude the letter's addressee from having pro-Epicurean sympathies, or even from identifying as an Epicurean himself. As such, not only do the criticisms and ridicule of 13.1.4 not demonstrate anti-Epicureanism on Memmius' part, they also cannot be used to rule out the possibility that Memmius, like Atticus and Papirius Paetus, identified as an Epicurean himself.

Such a reading may seem at odds with the central passage of Cicero's critique of Patro (*totam hominis uitam rationemque quam sequitur in philosophia derideamus*), where 'the system he follows in philosophy' has traditionally been interpreted as referring to Patro's Epicureanism *per se*. This traditional interpretation, however, is unnecessary; alternative readings are available, which offer a better fit both with the immediate context of 13.1.4 and with the praise of Atticus that will follow at 13.1.5. First, we note that the phrasing *totam hominis uitam ... derideamus* seems too strong for the context: Cicero had earlier stated (13.1.2) that *cum Patrone Epicurio mihi omnia sunt*, and had

see e.g. *Pis.* 70, *Fin.* 1.26, *Nat. D.* 1.72, with D.R. Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero's Letters to Atticus Volume III* (Cambridge, 1968), 209 (ad *Att.* 5.11.4).

³⁰ A copy of *Fam.* 13.1 was enclosed with this letter to Atticus (see 5.11.6), suggesting that Cicero did not expect Atticus to object to his ridicule of Patro and his associates in the letter to Memmius, or to the distinction he establishes there between Atticus and the Athenian Epicureans.

³¹ On whom, see Castner (n. 11), 43–4 and Benferhat (n. 28), 170–2.

³² As is made clear by his treatment of the topic of innumerable worlds (*Fam.* 9.26.3), an Epicurean doctrine: Epicurus, *Ep. Hdt.* 45; Lucr. 2.1048–89; H. Usener, *Epicurea* (Leipzig, 1887), 213 §301.

³³ On the meaning of *baro* in these contexts (referring to a certain kind of blinkered seriousness), see further Griffin (n. 5 [1989]), 16. Shackleton Bailey (n. 29), 209 (ad *Att.* 5.11.4) points out a further possible example of this pattern: the use of the term *baro* in a fragment of a letter to yet another Epicurean, Pansa (Cic. *Ep. Frr.* V.4 = *Gramm. Lat.* 5.572.17 Keil). The distribution of *baro* outside of Cicero (Lucilius, Persius, Petronius) suggests a satirical flavour: see further M.F. Smith, 'Lucretius 3.955', *Prometheus* 26 (2000), 35–40, who at 40 suggests emending Lucretius' *baratre* to *baro*.

described in the same passage how he personally and successfully lobbied for Patro to win certain unspecified *commoda et praemia*. What is more, Patro was recommended to Cicero by Phaedrus, a *uir bonus et suavis et officiosus* respected by Cicero and beloved by Atticus. In such a context, an invitation for Memmius to ridicule ‘the entire life’ of Patro would seem decidedly out of place. It is for this reason that Wesenberg suggested the emendation of *uiam* for the transmitted *uitam*,³⁴ on which reading Cicero invites Memmius to ridicule not Patro’s life but rather the ‘method’ or ‘approach’ (*uia ratioque*) he takes to philosophy.³⁵ While this succeeds in clearing up the difficulty posed by *uitam*, it also introduces a slight syntactic awkwardness, with both *hominis* and *quam sequitur in philosophia* competing to define the scope of *uiam rationemque*. An alternative solution, accepting the paradosis, is to understand *totam hominis uitam* to refer not to Patro’s whole life in respect of its duration but rather to the way of life he led as Epicurean scholar,³⁶ involving as it did the kind of devotional activity Cicero expected Memmius to find distasteful. *Rationemque quam sequitur in philosophia* may then be read in a similar sense as referring not to the fact of Patro’s Epicureanism but rather to his particular approach to the philosophical life.

As such, whether or not Wesenberg’s emendation is accepted, Cicero’s invitation to deride Patro at 13.1.4 may be read in such a way that it does not entail criticism of Patro’s Epicureanism *per se*. As we have seen, such a reading is desirable, given the positive treatment of the Epicurean Atticus that is to follow. Such a reading is further supported by the immediate context of the letter: Cicero’s invitation to ridicule Patro here stems directly from the terms of Patro’s appeal (*contentio*) to Memmius, in which he invoked the cult status in which Epicurus and his early disciples were held by his later followers: *honorem, officium, testamentorum ius, Epicuri auctoritatem, Phaedri obstationem, sedem, domicilium, uestigia summorum hominum sibi tuenda esse dicit*. This is the voice of the ideologue and the purist, the blinkered devotee of the cult of Epicurus, an approach to philosophy quite distinct from that of a Roman Epicurean like Atticus, whose cultural life and learning extend across a far wider ambit. The criticism of 13.1.4, then, is not targeted at each and every Epicurean but rather at a certain group of ideologically motivated Athenian Epicureans, led by Patro, who saw themselves as the guardians of the memory and cult of Epicurus.³⁷

As we have seen, earlier in 13.1.4 Cicero refers to the group whose *peruersitas* has so offended Memmius as a *gens*: *si qua offensiuncula facta est animi tui peruersitate aliquorum (noui enim gentem illam), des te ad lenitatem*. While elsewhere in Cicero *gens* may be used as a term to denote a philosophical school,³⁸ we have now provided arguments to demonstrate that the scope of Cicero’s abuse cannot have extended to each and every Epicurean. Accordingly, we reject Shackleton Bailey’s reading (ad loc.) of *gentem illam* as being equivalent to ‘the Epicureans’. As an alternative, we suggest that with this expression Cicero alludes to the aforementioned tendency of the tight-knit

³⁴ A.S. Wesenberg, *Emendationes alterae sive annotationes criticae ad Ciceronis epistolarum editionem* (Leipzig, 1873), 41.

³⁵ On the Ciceronian collocation *uia ratioque*, meaning ‘method’ or ‘approach’, see A. Yon, *Ratio et les mots de la famille de reor: contribution à l’étude historique du vocabulaire latin* (Paris, 1933), 187–90; T. Reinhardt, *Cicero’s Topica* (Oxford, 2003), 184.

³⁶ OLD s.v. *uita* 7.

³⁷ As such we understand the referents of *illa* in the phrase *quos illa delectant* at 13.1.4 to be not ‘the principles of Epicurean philosophy’ *vel sim.* but the list of abstract entities appealed to by Patro in the previous sentence.

³⁸ See n. 25 above.

group of Epicureans at Athens to spend much of their time eating together and observing cults of memory for Epicurus, his relatives and his disciples. On this interpretation, Cicero's phrase *gentem illam* casts the Athenian Epicureans as a kind of extended family-group.³⁹ As Clay points out, the closest analogue to the cult of memorialization that existed in the Garden was the memorial *γενέσια* of Greek family religion; a result of the memorializing cults of Epicurus was the transformation of those living together in the Garden into a quasi-family.⁴⁰ We further note that Philodemus, in his *On Epicurus*, describes the Epicurean group at Athens using the language of the family, or household: Epicurus, he says, invites to the feast 'all those who are members of his household' (τούς τε κατὰ τὴν οἰκίαν ὕπαντας), as well as any well-wishers from outside (ἔξωθεν).⁴¹ Not only is Philodemus' language of the household a useful comparandum for Cicero's use of *gens* at 13.1.4, but the distinction drawn here between members of the Epicurean οἰκία and Epicurean outsiders is instructive for our broader reading of *Fam.* 13.1.

Narrowing down the targets of the criticism at 13.1.4 to a select group of Epicurean ideologues removes any obstacle to identifying Memmius himself as someone with broad pro-Epicurean leanings of the type professed by Atticus. Such an identification is bolstered by the terms of Patro's appeal to Memmius, as related by Cicero at 13.1.4: Patro must have seen Memmius as someone who would respond positively to an appeal to the authority of Epicurus and Phaedrus, in other words as someone with pro-Epicurean sympathies. Indeed, the terms of the appeal would make little sense otherwise.⁴² Finally, as Griffin has suggested,⁴³ identifying Memmius as someone with Epicurean sympathies also allows us to make sense of the unusual way in which Cicero opens the letter, with what looks like a parody of the kind of hedonic calculation with which Epicurus expected his followers to determine each and every course of action:⁴⁴

etsi non satis mihi constiterat cum aliquane animi mei molestia an potius libenter te Athenis uisurus essem, quod iniuria quam accepisti dolore me adficeret, sapientia tua qua fers iniuriam laetitia, tamen uidisse te malle; nam quod est molestiae non sane multo leuius est cum te non uideo, quod esse potuit uoluptatis certe, si uidissem te, plus fuisset.

Although I was not quite certain whether I would have been somewhat pained or, rather, happy to see you in Athens—because the unjust treatment you have received would have caused me pain, while the wisdom with which you bear it would have caused me happiness—nevertheless I would prefer that I had seen you. For the pain I feel is not much lessened when I do not see you, while the pleasure I could have felt would certainly have been increased if I had seen you.

A parody of the Epicurean hedonic calculus is precisely the kind of philosophical play Cicero elsewhere enjoys when writing to his philosophically minded friends; Memmius, we may assume, was expected by Cicero both to recognize the outset of the letter as an example of such badinage and, indeed, to enjoy it. Not only, then, is Cicero's intervention perfectly compatible with an addressee who had broad sympathy with Epicurean

³⁹ *OLD* s.v. *gens* 6.

⁴⁰ D. Clay, 'Individual and community in the first generation of the Epicurean school', *Paradosis and Survival* (Ann Arbor, 1998), 55–74, at 70.

⁴¹ *PHerc.* 1232 fr. 8 col. 1.6–12, as edited and translated by Clay (n. 10 [1998]), 81.

⁴² Griffin (n. 5 [1989]), 17.

⁴³ Griffin (n. 5 [1995]), 333 n. 36.

⁴⁴ See especially Epicurus, *Ep. Men.* 129–30, 132 with P. Mitsis, *Epicurus' Ethical Theory: The Pleasures of Invulnerability* (London, 1988), 19–39.

philosophy, but the presence of such sympathy in the addressee makes good sense in the light of both Patro's appeal to Epicurus' authority and Cicero's playful engagement with Epicurean argumentation.

If *Fam.* 13.1 does not preclude, and may even support, sympathy on Memmius' part for Epicureanism, the question now presents itself, what designs Memmius did have for the site in Melite. If he was neither engaged in the wholesale demolition of Epicurean remains on the site nor set upon building a luxurious dwelling for himself, what did he have in mind? What can we propose which could provoke the objections of Patro while remaining compatible with a sympathy for Epicureanism? We have suggested that any malicious intent to hurt the Epicureans of Athens by vandalizing a place sacred to them is unwarranted by the evidence. Sheer coincidence, that the purported addressee of Lucretius' Epicurean masterpiece found himself involved in a dispute concerning a property of Epicurus, always remains a possibility. But we think a more likely explanation is available.

A salient detail in Cicero's account of these events is the involvement of the council of the Areopagus, still in Roman times a significant organ of the Athenian state. Cicero refers to the *decretum illud Areopagitarum, quem ὑπομνηματισμὸν illi uocant* (*Fam.* 13.1.5) and to the ὑπομνηματισμός that Patro hoped would be rescinded by the Areopagus (*Att.* 5.11.6). In the latter passage especially, the decree or ὑπομνηματισμός is intimately associated with Memmius' *aedificandi consilium*: if Memmius has given up his plan to build, Cicero suggests both to Memmius himself and in his report to Atticus, he should really have no objection to the rescinding of the decree. All that might prevent Memmius' agreement, Cicero suggests in both letters, is his lingering irritation with Patro. The role of the Areopagus in these circumstances has been explained by Geagan as an aspect of the council's (putative) jurisdiction over lands, originally proposed by Graindor on the basis of *IG* 12.8.26, a dedication of a statue of the Areopagus by the Athenian cleruchs of Hephaestia on Lemnos.⁴⁵ The ὑπομνηματισμός of the Areopagus, according to Geagan's interpretation, granted Memmius 'the lands containing the house of Epicurus for private building'. But Graindor rightly sees Cicero's letters as evidence that Memmius had been granted a right to *build* by this decree rather than ownership *per se*, and this does seem a more natural reading of Cicero's account. It also suggests a tidier explanation of the Areopagus' involvement, since a major function of the council, as extensively illustrated by Geagan himself, was 'as a body decreeing monuments'.⁴⁶ Now, we must presumably make allowance for the greater likelihood of dedications surviving than other information about the responsibilities of the Areopagus. Nevertheless, a process was clearly established whereby 'dedicatory monuments erected according to a ὑπομνηματισμός' were 'requested and built by a third party', the contribution of the Areopagus (the content of the ὑπομνηματισμός) being in effect a permission allowing the third party to construct a monument.⁴⁷ This approximates rather closely what we have shown that Cicero allows us to conclude about Memmius' intentions: he has won the right from the Areopagus to *build* something. What Memmius wanted to build, we propose, was a monument honouring Epicurus.

⁴⁵ D.J. Geagan, *The Athenian Constitution after Sulla* (Princeton, 1967), 50; P. Graindor, *Athènes sous Auguste* (Cairo, 1927), 105–7.

⁴⁶ Geagan (n. 45), 41.

⁴⁷ Geagan (n. 45), 42.

If in fact Memmius had sought and gained permission from the Areopagus to construct some kind of monument on the site of Epicurus' ruined house, it puts a radically different complexion both on his behaviour and on the response of Patro. This was not a fundamental disagreement between Epicureans and a man unsympathetic to the doctrine but rather an awkward difference of opinion between a Roman enthusiast and the established representatives of the philosophy in Athens about the appropriate way of managing the ruined legacy of the founder. Memmius wanted to construct a monument honouring Epicurus, and sought the Areopagus' approval; Patro, for whatever reason, objected. But it would be just the kind of disagreement to excite the level and character of irritation that Cicero attributes to Memmius: Memmius was as frustrated and hurt by an Epicurean's obstruction of a celebration of Epicurus as one might expect an enthusiast for Epicurean philosophy to be. But it is surely testament to Memmius' respect both for Athens and for Epicureanism that Cicero's proposal to him assumes a willingness on Memmius' part to observe the procedures of the Areopagus, and at the same time implies that Memmius, armed though he was with the ὑπομνηματισμός of the Areopagus, an unanswerable right to pursue his *aedificationis consilium*, was nevertheless prepared to abandon his building project in the face of Patro's objections. Would a hardened enemy of Epicureanism, or even a callously insensitive boor, do any such thing? On the other hand, isn't this exactly the reaction we would expect if Memmius had attempted to express his respect for Epicurus at the home of his philosophical school but had been rebuffed?

Griffin ponders a parallel with Cicero's plans, divulged to Atticus, to construct a *propylon* at the entrance to the Academy in Athens (*Att.* 6.1.26, 6.6.2).⁴⁸ The tentativeness with which Cicero shares his intentions with his friend, and the role he assigns Atticus as his *arbiter elegantiae*, a man unusually alive to the sensitivities of Athenians, illustrates very nicely the delicacy of any such project on the part of a Roman in Athens.⁴⁹ It is surely such sensitivities that Memmius has fallen foul of, with Atticus again cast as intermediary between Athenians and Romans, the role he fulfils at *Fam.* 13.1.5. As for Memmius, we propose that he is a sufficiently keen Epicurean to conceive of constructing at his own expense a monument to Epicurus at the site of his house in Melite. We might even imagine him following a similar path to T. Albuicius, exiled in around 105 B.C. for misdeeds in Sardinia, and choosing Athens as *doctus ... Graecis ... uel potius paene Graecus* (*Cic. Brut.* 131; cf. *Fin.* 1.9 quoting Lucilius' satires, 87–93 Warmington; *De Prouinciis Consularibus* 15), but more specifically as a follower of Epicurus (*Tusc.* 5.108; *Pis.* 92). In other words, far from being unsympathetic to Epicureanism, Memmius' very choice of Athens as his place of exile may have been guided by his philosophical affiliations.⁵⁰

It may nevertheless be objected that erecting a monument to Epicurus contravenes a fundamental tenet of Epicureanism, λάθε βιώσας.⁵¹ But while the principle undoubtedly

⁴⁸ Griffin (n. 5 [1995]), 333 n. 36.

⁴⁹ For further examples of the Roman élite building monuments in Athens, and of the difficulties sometimes faced by Romans who found themselves pitted against Athenian institutions and bureaucratic structures, see G.O. Hutchinson, *Greek to Latin: Frameworks and Contexts for Intertextuality* (Oxford, 2013), 88–90.

⁵⁰ Memmius' further travels are in this context intriguing, if no more than that. Cicero was unable to speak to him directly, and had to resort to a letter, because Memmius had left for Mytilene. The reasons for anyone to travel from Athens to Mytilene are mysterious, but perhaps less so if the traveller is an Epicurean, visiting the location where Epicurus first established an Epicurean school.

⁵¹ For a comprehensive discussion of the role and status of this maxim in Epicurean thought, see

has implications for Epicurean attitudes to memorialization, it should not be assumed that it entailed an unqualified rejection of monuments. On the one hand, we have Lucretius deploring men driven to death *statuarum et nominis ergo* (3.78),⁵² but, on the other, the evidence of Patro's own appeal to Memmius, as Cicero summarizes it, citing the respect owed to the *uestigia summorum hominum* (*Fam.* 13.1.4), the memory of Epicurus as embodied by the house in Melite.⁵³

The truth is that λάθε βιώσας, while clearly expressing a broad preference on Epicurus' part, was subordinate in any given moral decision by an Epicurean to the principle that our choices and avoidances should be determined by the hedonic calculus, as described at *Ep. Men.* 129–30. That this commitment to weighing each action on its unique merits with regard to pleasure and pain left Epicurean practice more nuanced (or, from an outsider's perspective, less consistent) is illustrated by Plutarch's criticism of Epicurus' hypocrisy in respect of his most famous maxim (*An Recte* 1128 F–1129A): the philosopher's advice to cultivate anonymity amounts to advising himself not to do the things to which he in fact devoted his life, proselytizing for his philosophy, publishing books, writing the praises of his fellow Epicureans and making elaborate provision (including his own ritual memorialization) for the continuation of the community after his death (cf. *Plut. Non Posse* 1100A–C). Roskam is able to dismiss Plutarch's broadside as 'a polemical and malicious misrepresentation', but also to allow, on the evidence of *Sententiae Vaticanae* 64 especially, that 'the Epicurean will gratefully accept the honours that are given to him'. To imagine otherwise is to understand λάθε βιώσας 'as absolute advice, which it is not'.

It is thus perfectly possible to read Cicero's letter to Memmius on the matter of Epicurus' house as evidence not of C. Memmius' antipathy to Epicureanism but of his enthusiasm for it; an enthusiasm sufficient for him to want to spend money not on building himself a comfortable residence but rather erecting a monument honouring Epicurus; an enthusiasm sufficient also to cause Memmius intense irritation when it was thwarted. Indeed, we believe that this represents a more satisfactory exegesis of *Fam.* 13.1 than the established one, better able to explain the roles played by both Atticus and the Areopagus, for example. Proponents of the traditional interpretation, according to which the letter provides clear evidence of Memmius' antipathy toward Epicureanism, rely on the principle that Cicero's abuse, in an item of correspondence, of a certain philosophical group precludes the possibility of his addressee harbouring sympathies towards that group. We have provided arguments to demonstrate that this principle is flawed. The existence of a Roman Epicurean like Atticus, who did not buy into the more cult-like features of Epicurean life, may serve as a mild counterweight to those accounts which place stress on the authoritarian quasi-religious features of Epicurean philosophical allegiance.⁵⁴ While this is indeed the model of allegiance we encounter in Philodemus and Lucretius (and, clearly, the model of allegiance that was

G. Roskam, *Live Unnoticed (Λάθε Βιώσας): On the Vicissitudes of an Epicurean Doctrine* (Leiden, 2007).

⁵² E.J. Kenney, *Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book III* (Cambridge, 2014²), ad loc. compares a scholiast on Epicurus, Κύρια Δόξα 29 (Usener [n. 32], 78).

⁵³ A potential point of comparison is the striking Epicurean commitment to portraiture, of Epicurus and other leading lights of the school: D. Clay, 'The philosophical inscription of Diogenes of Oenoanda: new discoveries 1969–1983', *ANRW* 2.36.4 (1990), 2446–559, at 2496; B. Frischer, *The Sculpted Word: Epicureanism and Philosophical Recruitment in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, 2006²), interpreting the portraits as a means to recruitment.

⁵⁴ M. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire. Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton,

encouraged by Patro), the case of Atticus (and perhaps, we suggest, the case of Memmius also) makes it clear that it was possible for a Roman intellectual publicly to sympathize with Epicureanism while simultaneously refusing to take seriously the centralized authoritarian strictures of its Athenian school.

But what has always fuelled interest in this and the other letters of Cicero concerned with Memmius' building project is of course the general assumption that this Memmius is the same as the addressee of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*. In the broadest terms our reading of the disagreement between Memmius and Patro as a dispute between Epicureans, albeit Epicureans who enacted their devotion to Epicurus in quite different and incompatible ways, resolves any difficulty there might have appeared to be in identifying the C. Memmius of Cicero's letter and the addressee of the *De Rerum Natura*: as a man who at some stage embraced Epicureanism, Memmius was an exceptionally well-chosen recipient for Lucretius' Latin exposition of Epicurean doctrine, and Lucretius was not, *pace* Shackleton Bailey (on *Fam.* 13.1.4), 'sadly mistaken in him'.

The precise role of Lucretius' poem in the philosophical development of C. Memmius is worth further consideration. The *De Rerum Natura* implies an addressee who is both an exemplary Roman and a man prepared *de rerum natura disputare* with Lucretius (*Vitr. De arch.* 9. *praef.* 17). It implies also a man who, while sufficiently sympathetic to Epicureanism to engage in discussion of it, still has a lot to learn about the fundamental doctrines of the school (1.411, 2.182), whether the speed with which atoms move (2.143), the true magnitude of Epicurus' achievement (5.8) or the nature of the Universe (1.1052, 5.93). This might hint at a formative role for Lucretius in Memmius' philosophical education, indeed an inversion of Fowler's suspicion that it was the *De Rerum Natura* that had made Memmius an inveterate opponent of Epicureanism.⁵⁵ Was it in actual fact the *De Rerum Natura* that first set Memmius on his path to the respect for Epicurus that his intentions regarding Epicurus' house appear to illustrate?

We enter speculative territory, but if that in turn supports the 'traditional' dating of the *De Rerum Natura*, mainly based on Cic. *QFr.* 2.10.3 from early 54, we do not share the doubts of Hutchinson⁵⁶ regarding the applicability of Lucretius' language at 1.29–49 to the circumstances of the mid fifties B.C. Lucretius' talk of *patriai tempore iniquo* (1.41), which is monopolizing Memmius' attention and energies, and the poet's wish that Venus' peace prevail over Mars' war, are felt to make a time of publication after the outbreak of Civil War in 49 more likely. But Rome in the mid fifties was indeed in turmoil; it was 'perhaps the most turbulent, chaotic and confused period of Republican politics'.⁵⁷ That is primarily an account of internal Roman politics, but agreement between Caesar, Pompey and Crassus at Luca in April 56 had facilitated military action that might reasonably seem 'global'. Caesar was able to continue his campaigns in Gaul: in 55 he defeated Germanic tribes in northern Gaul and crossed the Rhine; he later invaded Britain for the first time, but the action against the Usipetes and the Tencteri caused intense controversy in Rome (*Plut. Cat. Min.* 51; *Suet. Iul.* 24.3). Meanwhile, Crassus secured one of the consulships for 55, and left

1994), 102–39; D. Sedley, 'Philosophical allegiance in the Greco-Roman world', in M. Griffin and J. Barnes (edd.), *Philosophia Togata* (Oxford, 1989), 97–119.

⁵⁵ Fowler (n. 12), 122.

⁵⁶ Hutchinson (n. 2), 150–3.

⁵⁷ E.S. Gruen, 'Pompey, the Roman aristocracy, and the conference of Luca,' *Historia* 18 (1969), 71–108, at 72.

Rome even before the end of his term to assume control of the province of Syria, which from the very outset seemed to portend war against Parthia (Plut. *Crass.* 16.1–3). Such a general state of affairs could very readily be described, even without rhetorical license, in the terms used by Lucretius: Rome was in no sense at peace in the mid fifties B.C., and the impact of external warfare was strongly felt in the capital.⁵⁸ It is rash in any case to imagine that we can reconstruct how world events were perceived in Rome at any given time, but C. Memmius' energetic pursuit of the consulship with the backing of Pompey (Cic. *Att.* 4.15.7, 4.16.6), which would culminate in his candidacy for 53, and the corruption scandal that would ensure his exile, answers much more neatly to Lucretius' picture of a Roman politician deeply engaged in his country's crisis than would the much diminished Memmius of 49 or later, whether or not he was ever recalled from exile (and there is no evidence that he was).

If the *De Rerum Natura* did indeed help to shape Memmius' thinking, Lucretius perhaps took his addressee some but not all of the way towards the poet's hyperbolic assessment of Epicurus, if events in Athens four or five years later are any guide: certainly it is hard to see much daylight between Lucretius (*deus ille fuit, deus, inclute Memmi*, 5.8) and the kind of 'fundamentalist' Epicureanism espoused by Patro and his συμφιλοσοφοῦντες in Athens. But, however we reconstruct the dynamic between Memmius and Lucretius that lies at the heart of the *De Rerum Natura*, *Fam.* 13.1 should not be considered evidence of a failure of communication between poet and dedicatee. On the contrary, if Memmius' real plan in Melite was to express his respect for Epicurus in monumental form, then Lucretius was addressing a senior Roman figure who would become, in his own way, a passionate devotee of the Master.

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⁵⁸ By way of another example: in early 55, amid the violence and intimidation that ensured the election of Pompey and Crassus to the consulship, Caesar dispatched some of his troops to Rome (Dio 39.31.2).