

HORACE, *EPISTLES* 1. 19. 37–40

non ego ventosae plebis suffragia venor
impensis cenarum et tritae munere vestis;
non ego nobilium scriptorum auditor et ultor
grammaticas ambire tribus et pulpita dignor:

The explanation of the vexed phrase 'auditor et ultor' (39) given by Professor E. Fraenkel on p. 349 of his *Horace* marks a great improvement on previous interpretations.¹ *Auditor* he translates as 'pupil' and *ultor* he explains as 'rescuer' (i.e. from oblivion). However I very much doubt whether *ultor* can in fact bear this meaning. Whatever may be the case with *vindex* and *vindico*, I have found no instance of *ultor* meaning anything but 'avenger' or 'punisher'. Fraenkel takes 'nobilium scriptorum' as the Greek poets 'whose form and spirit he attempted to renew in a different tongue'.² Why should Horace see himself as 'avenging' or 'punishing' these poets? And how would his doing so be relevant to the central theme of this epistle, his originality as a poet?

Throughout these four lines runs the metaphor of electoral canvassing. This includes *nobilium* (39) which here contrasts with *ventosae plebis* (37) and anticipates *dignor* in 40. The idea behind it is that 'nobiles' do not deign to employ the usual vote-winning tricks.³ Now instead of 'auditor' the inferior manuscripts have 'adiutor'.⁴ In my opinion, this gives a far better meaning and also, with its cognate verb *adiuvo*, is practically a technical term of electioneering.⁵ I would translate 'nobilium scriptorum adiutor et ultor' as 'supporter and avenger of noble writings', taking *scriptorum* as the genitive, not of *scriptores* but of *scripta*.⁶ Horace means that if he were to 'grammaticas ambire tribus et pulpita' etc., he would thus become the 'adiutor et ultor' of his own poems. 'Ultor' is not an electioneering term but its meaning is elucidated by lines 47–8, which refer to the effects of arguments about poetry.⁷ For Horace, to be an 'ultor' would be to reply to criticism of his poems in kind.

27 Mason Road, Kidderminster

C. D. GILBERT

¹ See Fraenkel, 348, n. 4, for a discussion of these.

² Fraenkel, 348.

³ Cf. Q. Cicero (?), *Comm. Pet.* 7, where it is implied that *eximia gloria* and *dignitas* need no *suffragatio*.

⁴ The two are often confused in manuscripts. See e.g. Juv. 3. 322, Ter. *H.T.* 872.

⁵ See e.g. Cic. *Mur.* 8 and 76, *Mil.* 68;

Pliny, *N.H.* 8. 23. 2, Suet. *D.J.* 23.

⁶ For *scriptorum* as the gen. of *scripta* cf. *Sat.* 2. 3. 2 'scriptorum quaeque retexens'. The undoubted ambiguity in *Ep.* 1. 19. 39 is eased by *scripta* in line 42.

⁷ Its 'mock-heroic' tone is in keeping with that of 45–9 with their sustained wrestling metaphor and exaggerated language. See D.A. West, *Reading Horace*, 49–51.