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The scholar and the book-collector:
Pietro Bembo's dialogue
De Virgilii Culice et Terentii fabulis

The subject of this paper is a minor Latin work by the humanist Pietro Bembo, namely the dialogue *De Virgilii Culice et Terentii fabulis*, printed at Venice in 1530. There Bembo provides abundant readings from two manuscripts in his own possession, a Carolingian Virgil with poems of the *appendix* (now Città del Vaticano, BAV Vat. lat. 3252), and a late-antique Terence (now *ibid.* Vat. lat. 3226). On their basis he improves the two texts in question and refines notions of spelling and expression, particularly with regard to Terence.

Discussion will center on certain readings *reported inaccurately* by Bembo. There are many such, the most interesting being: *Culex* 407, where Bembo claims wrongly that his manuscript is illegible; line 921 of Terence's *Andria*, where he attributes to his manuscript a hybrid text of his own creation; lines 346-348 of the same play, where he appears to cite from a leaf of his manuscript that has since been lost. In the first case, his motive will have been to avoid attributing to his manuscript a vulgate reading of which he disapproved. In the second he was trying to disguise his manuscript's incomplete state. The same goes for the last case, *Andria* 346-348. This has drawn much attention, scholarly consensus holding that Bembo really did have leaves of the codex not now extant. It will be demonstrated, however, that the citation is fraudulent, having been taken from a different Terence-manuscript in Bembo's collection (now Oxford, Brasenose College 18) and doctored by the addition of a pseudo-archaism.

Now scholarly fraud was common in Renaissance Italy and by no means limited to the creation of documents from whole cloth: editors of genuine inscriptions and classical texts frequently "planted carrots" among them, as the saying went. These particular instances of it, however, are unusual and instructive. They show Bembo caught between the interests of the scholar and antiquarian on the one hand and those of the book-collector on the other. His aim in the dialogue was not just to advance philology; it was also to publicize two manuscripts in his own collection (and in that it proved successful). His misrepresentations gave the impression that his prize pieces were completer than they were and less fallible. Bembo's attitude owes much to exaggerated estimates of the age and worth of the best classical manuscripts: these were sometimes imagined to be authors' autographs or in any case near-inerrant, and Bembo, it would seem, wished his Virgil and his Terence to be so considered.