What does it mean to be a scholar? An examination of a first-century BCE polymath and poet, Marcus Terentius Varro, who was, by the common judgment of antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, the most learned man Rome ever produced, this talk argues that despite Varro’s efforts to produce self-conscious monuments of creative scholarship, both his work and his persona fell victim to a narrow view of scholars and their role. Nonetheless, his fragmentary remains can serve as a distant mirror, however cracked, to reflect upon our own scholarly practices and other possibilities.

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