

= Robin Starveling =

Robin Starveling is a character in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1596) , one of the Rude Mechanicals of Athens who plays the part of Moonshine in their performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* . His part is often considered one of the more humorous in the play , as he uses a lantern in a failed attempt to portray Moonshine and is wittily derided by his audience . Scholars have argued that his amateur performance communicates many of the problems Shakespeare would have been familiar with in the theatre : heckling , lack of adequate props , and amateur acting abilities .

= = Role in the play = =

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* , Theseus , the Duke of Athens , is preparing to marry Hippolyta . Peter Quince decides to entertain her and hires a group of actors nicknamed the Rude Mechanicals to perform *Pyramus and Thisbe* , a love story . Robin is one of the Rude Mechanicals , the tailor , who gathers with his colleagues to prepare their production . Robin at first is told to play the part of Thisbe's mother , but Peter Quince points out that a love story needs moonlight shining on the lovers to have any real effect on the audience . After Nick Bottom suggests looking in the almanac for a time when the Moon might shine on their performance , the players apparently decide that they will just have Robin act as Moonshine . Robin's role as Moonshine in The Mechanical's performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* before Theseus' court is often highlighted by scholars as among the funnier parts of the play . Although the court makes fun of all the players , Starveling is mocked the most by Hippolyta , who is very vocal in her opinion that his attempt to be moonshine is a ridiculous failure , although very humorous . He is also the only mechanical to be cut off in his monologue as opposed to being mocked afterwards , causing him to fluster and summarize his lines rather than giving them . This summary is usually played angrily or irritably , but has also been performed as the climax of Starveling's potential stage fright . Starveling is the member of the group that seems to be afraid of just about anything . Starveling is the most ambiguous in taking sides in the power struggle between Bottom and Quince . While Snout affirms whatever Quince says and Flute always looks to Bottom for the final word on something (Snug is too slow to be bothered) , Starveling seems to try to agree completely with both , as impossible as it is to do so .

= = Context = =

" Starveling " is a word for a thin or poor person lacking food . " Robin " may have connections to two of Queen Elizabeth's suitors , Robert Dudley , Earl of Leicester , and Robert Devereux , 2nd Earl of Essex . Elizabeth's pet name for both of these men was " Robin " , leading scholars to believe that Robin Starveling may be a satiric creation of Shakespeare's in their honour (or dishonour) . Another suitor , Duke François (" Francis ") Hercule Alençon , may have similar connections with Francis Flute . It may also be a nod to the fact that tailors of the time were usually poor and skinny . Ironically in the 1935 Max Reinhardt film , he was played by the chubby , jovial Otis Harlan .

= = Analysis = =

Shakespeare constantly reflects on the problem of synecdoche in his plays , a rhetorical term meaning " the part representing the whole " . For example , in *Henry V* , Shakespeare's has the Prologue beg forgiveness of the audience for attempting to portray an entire army with a few men , and for portraying so great a man as the King with a feeble actor . Shakespeare explores these same problems through Robin Starveling . The Mechanicals' decision to use Robin as moonlight in place of actual moonlight delves into the problem of synecdoche , of trying to represent something greater than yourself . Robin's standing there , attempting to be moonshine , does not make him so , even if he is holding a lantern to represent at least a part of the Moon . Similarly , Shakespeare

seems to be arguing that no representation of anything in a play can really be completely real or truthful , no matter how hard its players may try . Rather than begging forgiveness of the viewer , he is exaggerating the problem for their entertainment .

The deriding reactions of the members of the upper class watching Robin and his colleagues ' performance would have been familiar to even the more professional actors in Shakespeare 's day . Some scholars have seen in Theseus ' words about the performance a note of sympathy and pleading the cause of the actor : " For never anything can be amiss / when simpleness and duty tender it ... "