

## Shakespeare and Lawn Bowls

Frequent allusions occur to this game, which seems to have been a popular pastime in olden times. The small ball, now called the jack, at which the players aim, was sometimes termed the "*mistress*."

In "Troilus and Cressida" (iii. 2), Pandarus says: "*So, so; rub on, and kiss the mistress*." A bowl that kisses the jack, or mistress, is in the most advantageous position; hence "to kiss the jack" served to denote a state of great advantage.

### PANDARUS

Come, come, what need you blush? shame's a baby.  
Here she is now: swear the oaths now to her that  
you have sworn to me. What, are you gone again?  
you must be watched ere you be made tame, must you?  
Come your ways, come your ways; an you draw backward,  
we'll put you i' the fills. Why do you not speak to  
her? Come, draw this curtain, and let's see your  
picture. Alas the day, how loath you are to offend  
daylight! an 'twere dark, you'd close sooner.  
So, so; rub on, and kiss the mistress. How now!  
a kiss in fee-farm! build there, carpenter; the air  
is sweet. Nay, you shall fight your hearts out ere  
I part you. The falcon as the tercel, for all the  
ducks i' the river: go to, go to.

In "Cymbeline" (ii. i), Cloten exclaims, "*Was there ever man had such luck! when I kissed the jack, upon an up-cast to be hit away! I had a hundred pound on't.*"

### CLOTEN

Was there ever man had such luck! when I kissed the  
jack, upon an up-cast to be hit away! I had a  
hundred pound on't: and then a whoreson jackanapes  
must take me up for swearing; as if I borrowed mine  
oaths of him and might not spend them at my pleasure.

### First Lord

What got he by that? You have broke his pate with  
your bowl.

### Second Lord

*Aside:* If his wit had been like him that broke it,  
it would have run all out.

**CLOTEN**

When a gentleman is disposed to swear, it is not for any standers-by to curtail his oaths, ha?

**Second Lord**

No my lord;

There is another allusion to this game in "King John" (ii. i): "*on the outward eye of fickle France*" — the aperture on one side which contains the bias or weight that inclines the bowl in running from a direct course, being sometimes called the eye.

King John Act 2 — "Clapp'd on the outward eye of fickle France... From a resolved and honourable war, to a most base and vile-concluded peace."

A further reference to this game occurs in the following dialogue in "Richard II" (iii. 4):

**QUEEN**

What sport shall we devise here in this garden,  
To drive away the heavy thought of care.

**FIRST LADY**

Madam, we'll play at bowls.

**QUEEN**

'Twill make me think the world is full of rubs,  
And that my fortune runs against the bias.

The *bias*, as stated above, being a weight inserted in one side of a bowl, in order to give it a particular inclination in bowling. "To run against the bias," therefore, became a proverb.

To quote another instance, in the "Taming of the Shrew" (iv. 5):

**PETRUCHIO**

Well, forward, forward! thus the bowl should run,  
And not unluckily against the bias.

**KATHARINA**

Then, God be bless'd, it is the blessed sun: But sun it is not, when you say it is not;  
And the moon changes even as your mind. What you will have it named, even that it is;  
And so it shall be so for Katharina.

**HORTENSIO**

Petruchio, go thy ways; the field is won.

**PETRUCHIO**

Well, forward, forward! thus the bowl should run, And not unluckily against the bias. But, soft! company is coming here.

And in "Troilus and Cressida" (iv. 5), the term "*bias-cheek*" is used to denote a cheek swelling out like the bias of a bowl:

**AJAX**

Thou, trumpet, there's my purse.  
Now crack thy lungs, and split thy brazen pipe:  
Blow, villain, till thy sphered bias cheek  
Outswell the colic of puff'd Aquilon:  
Come, stretch thy chest and let thy eyes spout blood;  
Thou blow'st for Hector.