

Spel Ola "The Master Player"

The following is a translation of several excerpts relating to Spel-Ola from the Årdal bygdebok written by Sigurd Eikeland.

For over 150 years the cottager class had plenty of room in our farms. About 1860 this class composed about half of the population in the surrounding country. Then, because of their numbers, relations began to break down between the cottagers and other classes. Whenever they would snatch a little from others, it was as a rule out of necessity and of painful need to keep liveliness in themselves and their households. They were cleaver enough that they could steel milk from the cows and cheese from the cheese nets, and that they could take grain sheafs from the field during harvest and meat from the old smoke house where it hung to dry. Some would stand and confess publicly in church after a sermon, while others would go to prison. The worst of these was Spel-Ola.¹⁶

Ola Torgilson Volden and Daniel Jonson Kyrkhus were not exceptionally good friends. In 1823 Daniel said that Ola Torgilson had attacked him, and Daniel called Ola a thief and a scoundrel. According to Daniel, Ola first hit him in the back, between the shoulders, and then he hit him in the head "which afterwards left a slow unpleasant result for my health. " Daniel had also said that Ola lived together (adulterously) with Guro Olsdatter from Lille Vadla (Ola Torgilson was Guro's step son. Guro had been widowed the year before by Torgils Halvorsen, Ola's father). Ola would moreover break himself into the mill house and grind illegally. Ola's wife, Gjertrud, was called a thief also.

Daniel Jonson came with a legal action and said: Ola had attacked him in his own house, he had ground illegally on the mill, and Gjertrud had stolen flour from his pile. Here there was no talk of reconciliation. 1825 was equally bad. Daniel brought another legal action against Ola and his step mother, Guro Olsdatter Lille Vadla -- and son to Guro -- Ola Iverson, because they had stolen 4 sheaves of grain from his field. They confessed and promised that it would never happen again. Daniel agreed under the condition that Guro and Ola pay 12 spd.¹⁷, and then Guro would also move her house away from Daniel and not display herself or her slender shape around his house after

16 Årdal, Frå istid til nåtid, Sigurd Eikeland, 1969, volume 1, pp. 210, 211.

17 spd. = spesiedalar. This was a coin which was worth about one dollar.

sunset. Both the accused and the complainant, Daniel Jonson, remained in agreement. Here shall one note that Ola Iverson above was the same who was called "Spel-Ola", the big thief. He had gone to a good school.¹⁸ In 1832 Ola Iverson Volden (Spel-Ola) brought a complaint against Iver Reiarson Vadla and Andreas Reiarson Østerhus because they had attacked him and "crunched" his fiddle. Afterwards he moved to Volden under Kyrkhus. (Formerly they lived on Volden under Midtre Sedberg).¹⁹

Ola Iverson was the last who lived on Volden before the place was sold to become the school's property.²⁰

Note: The following story of Spel-Ola was initially translated by Liv Meyers, and was revised into this side by side form afterwards. Some liberties have been taken in the translation, but this is mostly to try and preserve the flavor of the story. One can also use this version to compare the similarities and the differences between the Norwegian vs. English. The Norwegian version follows the original without deviation.²¹

18 Årdal, Gard og Folk, Sigurd Eikeland, 1971, volume 2, pp. 193,194. This note about his education is interesting because his father, Iver Lillemoe, was also presumably educated and worked as a vaccinator for Årdal, Hjelmeland and Fister. It is not yet known who taught Spel-Ola to play the fiddle.

19 Årdal, Gard og Folk, Sigurd Eikeland, 1971, volume 2, pp. 194.

20 Årdal, Gard og Folk, Sigurd Eikeland, 1971, volume 2, pp. 219. Ola Iversen and Siri Pedersdatter are listed with their children on the Volden farm in the 1855 census. Siri Pedersdatter Volden died 25 Dec. 1861. According to volume 1, the place was sold before 1864.

21 Årdal, Frå istid til nåtid, Sigurd Eikeland, 1969, volume 1, pp. 399, 400.

Spel - Ola

About middle of *the* 1800-century stood an old smoke-house with *a* turf-roof on *the* meadow between the oldest school-house and Lonn -- on property-belonging to Kyrkhus. That was *the* cotters-farm Vollen. The place was sold to *be* school-property in 1864, so the happenings which here are told took-place before that time, but it-is not so easy for exact-dates *to be* established. On *the* cotters-farm lived Ola Vold, or Spel-Ola which he was best known under.

Spel-Ola

Omkring midten av 1800-talet stod ei gammel røykstove med torvtak på vollen mellom det eldste skulehuset og Lonn -- på eiedommen til Kyrkhus. Det var husmannsplassen Vollen. Plassen blei selt til lærarjord i 1864, så dir hendingane som her blir fortalt skjedde før den tid, men er ikkje så lett å tidfeste nøvaktig. På husmannsplassen budde Ola Vold, eller Spel-Ola som han er best kjent under.

Johannes Vadla has called Spel-Ola for "Ola Person", but that can probably not be right. After this one can find out most *likely* name was Ola Ivarson. This Ola was born 1808, an illegitimate son to *the* married man Ivar Olson Lillemo, cottager under Walle, and Guro Olsdatter *from* Qvalshaug of Strand (living at Hundsnes), written thus in *the* churchbook. Ola was married 1830 with Siri Peders-daughter Hagen, probably from Segadal in Hjelmeland, born 1809.²² Ola was then called Ole Varden. Ola and Siri had many children, among others Ola born 1831 and Per (Peder) born 1836. *The* parents are called Vollen when *the* children became confirmed.

Johannes Vadla har kalla Spel-Ola for Ola Person, men dette kan truleg ikkje vere rett. Etter det ein kan finne ut må nammet vere Ola Ivarson. Denne Ola var født 1808, ein uekte son til gift mann Ivar Olson Lillemo, husmann under Walle, og Guro Olsdatter Qvalshaug av Strand, f. t. Hundsnes, står det i kyrkjeboka. Ola blei gift 1830 med Siri Pedersdatter Hagen, truleg frå Segadal i Hjelmeland, født 1809. (9) Ola er då kalla Ole Varden. Ola og Siri hadde fleire barn, mellom andre Ola født 1831 og Per født 1836. Foreldra er kalla Vollen då barna blei konfirmerte.

22 Ola's wife Siri Pedersdatter Hagen was actually born 5 October, 1807, and her christening is recorded in the Aardal church book. Siri Pedersdatter from Segadal in Hjelmeland, mentioned above, married a different man, and her unrelated family is found in the Hjelmeland bygdebok under the farm of Segadal.

Ola was *a* fiddler and *the* obvious-choice in weddings and other gatherings where they needed music. For he was master on *the* fiddle and became simply called "Spel-Ola", but other opinions *of* people that they well could call him "Stel-Ola". For steel that did he, many go so far that they called him a big-thief.

Where there were young-people -- there was Ola. And where there was liquor -- yes there was Ola always full.

Best-friend to Ola was Jonas Gjesfjell. There is just one Jonas to-be found among people who have lived on Gjesfjell, and that is Jonas Johannesson, born 1803, so that can agree good with times which were mentioned above. In behavior were they two alike, just then that Jonas not could play (*the fiddle*).

Ola var spelemann og skjølvskriven i bryllaup og andre samkomer der det trongst musikk. For han var meister på fela og blei bare kalla "Spel-Ola", men elles meinte folk at dei like godt kunne kalla han "Stel-Ola". For stal det gjorde han, mange går så langt at dei kallar han for stortjuv.

Der det var ungdom -- der var Ola. Og der det var brennevin -- ja der var Ola alltid full.

Bestevenn til Ola var Jonas Gjesfjell. Det er bare ein Jonas å finne mellom folk som har butt på Gjesfjell, og det er Jonas Johannesson, født 1830, så det kan rime godt med tida som er nemnt ovanfor. I åtferd var dei to like, bare det at Jonas ikkje kunne spele.

One day midst in
hay-making-season came
Spel-Ola and Jonas Gjesfjell
east *to* Bønardalen with
backpacks and fishingpoles.
To people who inquired,
replied they that they *were*
going east into *the* lake and
fish. *At* that time were there
people and cattle on all
summer-farms, and people who
came past were good
welcomed. So also with Ola
and Jonas. They stayed
themselves to a couple days on
Vasstøl, which in that time was
the farm of Øver Mæle.

But simultaneously with the
fishing-trip *it* happened that
away *went* three large kettles of
copper, one on Vasstøl, one on
Saupstøl and one on Onnestøl
(?).

Farm-folk became angry, they
must *come* up with new
cheese-kettles. Ola and Jonas
were blamed, but no-one had
proof on them. After / harvest
became stolen a bull in *its* stall
in a barn, and immediately
after had Ola gone on *a* boat to
town with meat. People were
mistrusting and inquired after.
Then came forth that Ola had
been in town with a
bull-carcass and a
hacked/asunder copper-kettle.

Ein dag midt i Slåtten for
Spel-Ola og Jonas Gjesfjell
aust Bønardalen med
ryggskrepper og fiskestenger.
Til folk som spurte, svara dei at
dei skulle aust i vatna og fiske.
Den tid var det folk og fe på
alle stølar, og folk som for
framom blei godt mottatt. Så
og med Ola og Jonas. Dei ga
seg til eit par dagar på Vasstøl,
som i den tid blei brukt av Øvre
Mæle.

Men samstundes med denne
fisketuren kom det bort tri store
primkjelar av kopar, ein på
Vasstøl, ein på Saupstøl og ein
på Onnestøl (?).

Bygdefolket blei arge, dei
mtteå opp med nye primkjelar.
Ola og Jonas fekk skulda, men
ingen hadde bevis på die.
Hausten etter blei stolen ein
stut på båsen i eit fjøs, og
straks etter hadde Ola fare på
båt til byen med kjøt. Folk
fekk mistru og spurte etter. Det
kom fram at Ola hadde vore i
byen med ein stutaskrott og ein
sundhakka koparkjel.

Then go they to Ola, and he must confess that he had done *it*. He had taken *the* bull, he / lead *it* to Gjeilå and slaughtered *it* there. Helps-man (*accomplicis*) named he not. *The* copper-kettles were they either not found. But Ola had also other things to answer for. One time had he stolen a ham on Ristingsvoll, *the* owner came over him with *it* as he crept out *the* smoke-vent in *the* cook-house, bearing *the* ham.

Ola was taken to prison in Kristiansand, and was sentenced to 5 years hard-labor.

Long was it not before Jonas came to *the* same place. That happened like this: He was in employment by Tore Johnsen Valheim. One evening came Dan Tengesdal inside with Tore, they were good pals. Dan had been in town with meat, and wanted *to* stay over/night on Valheim, and so travel up *the* lake *the* next day to Tengesdal.

Då gjekk dei på Ola, og han måtte vedgå det han hadde gjort. Han hadde tatt stuten, ført han til Gjeilå og slakta der. Hjelpesnamn nemnde han ikkje. Koparkjelane fekk dei heller ikkje greie på. Men Ola hadde og andre ting å svare for. Ein gong hadde han stole ei fleskeskinke på Ristingsvoll, eigaren kom over han med same han kraup ut røykgluggen i eldhuset, berande på skinka.

Ola blei ført til fengslet i Kristiansand, og fekk dom på 5 års tukthus.

Lenge varte det ikkje før Jonas kom på same staden. Dette bar slik til: Han var i arbeid hos Tore Johnsen Valheim. Ein kveld kom Dan Tengesdal innom hos Tore, dei ver gode bussar. Dan hadde vore i byen med kjøt, og ville bli natta over på Valheim, og så fare opp vatnet neste dag til Tengesdal.

Then Dan let himself (*be careless*), and saw Jonas that he laid *his* shirt with *his* pocket-book inside over *his* lunchbox. So as-soon-as Dan had fallen-asleep, tip-toed Jonas himself in and took *the* pocket-book and went out to Valheims-mountain and concealed it under a rock. But this came up, people had met Jonas in (stormy) weather on *the* way to *the* mountain. And then usefulness there *was* no longer to deny.

Spel-Ola and Jonas Gjesfjell came thus back / together -- but inside stone-walls. Ola became sick and *the* priest was with him often. One day confessed he all he could remember. Among other *things* said he that Jonas had been with *him* and slaughtered *the* bull, and *the* copper-kettles had they taken on the fishing-trip. *The* kettles had they carried up *the* moor and in Løyning to Gullster rock-pile and hid them there. Many other *incidents* came also forth during confession.

Prison-priest noted down all, comforted Ola and promised to bear this forward to people in Årdal. Day after, died Spel-Ola.

Då Dan la seg, såg Jonas at han la trøya med lommeboka i ovanpå matskrinet. Så snart Dan hadde sovna, stiltra Jonas seg inn og tok lommeboka og gjekk ut til Valheimsåsen og gøymde den under ein stein. Men dette kom opp, folk hadde møtt Jonas i uver på veg til åsen. Og då nytta det ikkje lenger å nekte.

Spel-Ola og Jonas Gjesfjell kom så saman att -- men innanfor murane. Ola blei sjuk og presten var hos han ofte. Ein dag skrifta han alt han kunne mennast. Mellom anna sa han at Jonas hadde vore med og slakta stuten, og koparkjelane hadde dei tatt på ein fisketur. Kjelane hadde dei bore ut heiane og inn Løyning til Gullsterrøysane og gøymt dei der. Mykje anna kom og fram under skriftemålet.

Fengselpresten noterte ned alt, trøysta Ola og lova å bere det fram til folk i Årdal. Dagen etter døydde Spel-Ola.

Copper-kettles in Gullster rock-pile then were looked-for long and well after, but no-one was able to find them.

Farm-folks thought rather that *the* priest had mistaken *the* same place and name, or that Ola had been confused when he confessed.

His / son, Per Olson, followed in father's footsteps. One time stole he wool on Skogarbø and Øvre Valheim. He was caught on *the* way/home from town and received imprisonment he also. Like *his* father died he in prison.

The two other sons to Spel-Ola, Anders and Ola emigrated to America, Ola in 1854. What time Anders emigrated is not known. One other child to Spel-Ola was Serina Mælshorten.

Koparkjelane i Gullsterøysane har det vore leita lenge og vel etter men ingen har klart å finne dei. Bygdefolket trudde helst at presten hadde rørt saman stad og namn, eller at Ola hadde vore uklår då han skrifta.

Sonen hans, Per Olson, gjekk i farens fotefar. Ein gong stal han ull på Skogarbø og Øvre Valheim. Han blei tatt på heimveg frå byen og fekk tukthusstraff han og. Lik faren døydde han i fengslet.

Dei to andre sønene til Spel-Ola Anders og Ola reiste til Amerika, Ola i 1854. Kva tid Anders reiste, er ikkje kjent. Eit anna barn til Spel-Ola var Serina Mælshorten.

Ole Iversen Volden, or "Spel-Ola" was born in 1808 and married Siri Pedersdatter Hagen in 1830. As we now know, Spel-Ola and Siri Pedersdatter had eight children altogether, five sons and three daughters. The couple were still living together with the younger children in 1855, and they were listed in the Årdal census of that year. Ole died in prison on 25 February, 1860, and Siri died shortly afterward, on Christmas day in 1861.

Spel-Ola's father, Iver Olsen Lillemoe, was never married to his mother Guro Olsdatter. Iver Lillemoe's legal wife was Siri Rasmusdatter Hia whom he married four years before the affair with Guro, and with whom he fathered a daughter, Anna, b. 1804. Despite the affair, Iver lived at Lillemoe with his wife Siri until she died in 1839. In

1842 Iver married again with Magla Olsdatter from Jørmeland, Hjelmeland. Iver lived to be eighty years old and died in 1854.