

English Abstract

Islanders: Everyday Life and Parenthood in a Country Skipper's Family Correspondence

At a time when an estimated five percent of all Finns were able to write, from 1858 to 1887, country skipper Simon Jansson and his wife Wilhelmina from the south-western archipelago carried out an extensive correspondence with their three sons. They wrote almost 150 letters which document the daily life of the family and the everyday events of the seafaring community in great detail. The letters offer insight into the motivations of the self-taught parents who struggled to give their sons a university education, as well as into the conflicts arising from the growing social and cultural divide between the two generations. They also reflect the many expedients resorted to by a family of limited means to raise money for their sons' education.

The bilingual (Finnish and Swedish) letters of Simon and Wilhelmina Jansson are read as egodocuments, historical sources in which the authors write about their own acts, thoughts and feelings, as defined by Rudolf Dekker. Using French and Dutch theoretical discussion as a framework, *Islanders* seeks to demonstrate how these private and quotidian writings can contribute to our understanding of the worldview of 'ordinary' 19th-century people.

A close reading of the Jansson letters highlights the role of women as transmitters of social and cultural capital in the process of upward social mobility, which has traditionally been analyzed through the occupation of fathers. They also indicate that in seafarers' families the domestic gender division of labor could be very flexible.

Nineteenth-century Finnish peasant families, often looked at through texts written by contemporary university educated gentry, have been seen as emotionally reserved and even harsh with their children. The Jansson letters challenge this view: although direct verbal expressions of affection may be scarce, the overall tone and the practical care for the sons' wellbeing testify to warm family relations.