

Author Ilmari Kianto



Ilmari Kianto was born on May 7th 1874 in the vicarage of Pulkkila. When he was four years old, the family moved to the Karhula vicarage in Suomussalmi.

Ilmari Kianto (up to 1906 his surname was Calamnius) passed his matriculation examination at the Oulu Grammar School. At first he wanted to become a clergyman like many of his ancestors. But as he loved to read Puskin's and Lermontov's heroic poems, a military career began to attract him more and more, and he started a military school in Oulu. His first book *A Wrong Career* (1896) deals with this period of his life. After this he began to study Finnish, Russian and Latin at the university of Helsinki and got the degree of Master of Arts in 1898.

He won a scholarship and studied at the university of Moscow in 1901-1903. He also wrote poems during his student years, and his first collection of poems was called *Songs of a Rower*.

In the early nineteen hundred he worked in Kajaani as a teacher of the Russian language and literature and also as a journalist.

His chief work was published in 1909. It is called *The Red Line* and it deals with the first general election in Finland. The title of the book can be understood on two levels. First, in the election one had to draw a red line under the person's name one wanted to vote for. Secondly, the principal character of the novel is torn by a bear and blood flows from his throat in a red line.

In 1909 Kianto moved back to Suomussalmi and built his house in the backwoods. He called the house Turjanlinna (=Castle of Turja; Turja = a Lapp witch). He travelled as far as Russian Karelia using a reindeer and some kind of a sleigh, pulkka.

He got married three times and had twelve children. He used to tell his children fairy tales, which were later published in a book called Fairy Tales from Turjanlinna (1915).

In the civil war (1918) he wrote poems for the glory of the white army. The old Vicarage (1922) tells about the Karhula vicarage where he lived as a child and young man. It is considered one of the most beautiful descriptions of vicarage life in the history of Finnish literature.

One of his best novels Jooseppi from Ryysyranta was published in 1924. It is a description of people living in poverty and how they try to earn their living using sometimes illegal ways.

The Factory Owner's Daughter is a book that people living at Ämmänsaari can undoubtedly call their own book. It tells about the Ironworks of Ämmä (Ämmän Ruukki) which was situated in Ämmänsaari and Puolanka in the 19th century.

Also his next book, The Old Postmistress (1935), has its roots in Suomussalmi. His eldest sister worked here as a postmistress, and they did not get along very well.

On December 7th 1939 (the Winter War 30.11.1939 – 13.3.1940) Kianto wrote a message in Russian on the cover of his cigar box: "Russian comrades! Please leave the poor author's home untouched! Over there is an uninhabited island, and east of this place a summer cottage and some minor buildings. Mark that I have lived in Moscow in 1901-1903!" The summer cottage belonged to his sister, and the island he mentioned was his own Niettussaari.

A group of Finnish soldiers found the cigar box, and Kianto was sent to prison for treachery. He tells about this in his book called My Own Dogs Bit Me. A film has also been made on this episode.

When he was set free after few months, he found that his home Turjanlinna had been burnt down in the war. He had it rebuilt, but fire destroyed this building, too. Finally, he had to settle for a small temporary building called Abel's Church or Iki's (Kianto's pet name) Cottage.

The rest of his life he spent in Helsinki, but every summer he returned to his beloved Turjanlinna. He died on April 27th 1970, at the age of ninety-five in Helsinki and was buried in Niettussaari, where his father had had a fisherman's cottage.

Ilmari Kianto has written a total of sixty-seven books, the best of which are The Red Line and Jooseppi from Ryysyranta.

Turjanlinna can be visited on a guided cruise.

[The official homepage of Ilmari Kianto](#)