1990

I Am Still a Finn

James Tate

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview
Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.3893
But I should be studying for my exam. I wonder if Dean will celebrate with me tonight, assuming I pass. Finnish literature really came alive in the 1860s. Here, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, no one cares that I am a Finn.

They’ve never even heard of Frans Eemil Sillanpää, winner of the 1939 Nobel Prize in Literature. As a Finn, this infuriates me.

I AM STILL A FINN

I failed my exam, which is difficult for me to understand because I am a Finn. We are a bright, if slightly depressed, people.

Pertti Palmroth is the strongest name in Finnish footwear design; his shoes and boots are exported to seventeen countries.

Dean bought champagne to celebrate my failure. He says I was just nervous. Between 1908 and 1950, 33 volumes of *The Ancient Poetry of the Finnish People* were issued, the largest work of its kind ever published in any language.

So why should I be nervous? Aren’t I a Finn, descendent of Johan Ludvig Runeberg (1804–1877), Finnish national poet?

I know he wrote in Swedish, and this depresses me still. Harvard Square is never “empty.” There is no chance
that I will ever be able to state honestly that "Harvard Square is empty tonight."
A man from Nigeria will be opening his umbrella, and a girl from Wyoming will be closing hers. A Zulu warrior is running to catch a bus and an over-painted harlot from Buenos Aires will be fainting on schedule. And I, a Finn, will long for the dwarf birches of the north I have never seen. For 73 days the sun never sinks below the horizon. O darkness, mine! I shall always be a Finn.