

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 brought 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, descendant 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.

One of the poets in our workshop wrote this fantastic poem concerning her Scandinavian ancestry. The following week Jim shared two poems "I Am a Finn" and "I Am Still a Finn." This wasn't something Jim normally did, but it was so right and the poems were so wonderful the room joyously erupted.

- William Waltz