

Apostle Islands

by George Vukelich

Two billion years ago
the Laurentian Mountains stood here
and soared to altitudes higher
than any of the world's present peaks.
Before there was man
the great glaciers of the ancient past
moved back and forth across this land
like a man raking out a garden plot.
Long before Alexander wept
for worlds to conquer.
Long before Genghis Khan
swept over Asia.
Long before the pyramids
had been started.
This land was
as it is.

On these rocks
the Chippewa built their fires
and watched for their enemies
on the mainland.
On these rocks, the French
voyageurs rested
repairing their canoes
dreaming of riches
worth a queen's ransom.
On the rocks, the French
priests and soldiers
signed the treaties
in the name of
their Kings.
Now, they are gone.
Scattered and buried and blown away.
Only the rocks remain.
The rocks.
And the great inland seas.

The early settlers sleep here still.
The French and English and the Chippewa tribe.
The sons of the chiefs remember them all.
There is drum talk in the twentieth century
of the long dead days
and the peopled dreams.

There is a lesson to be learned here
in this land
of the blue heron and the bog lake.
Nature is building in this place
as a man would build a sea wall
a protected place.
Her work is not finished here.
It will not be finished soon.
We will be gone
and our children
will be gone
and the bog lake will remain
a-building.
that is the lesson
To be learned.