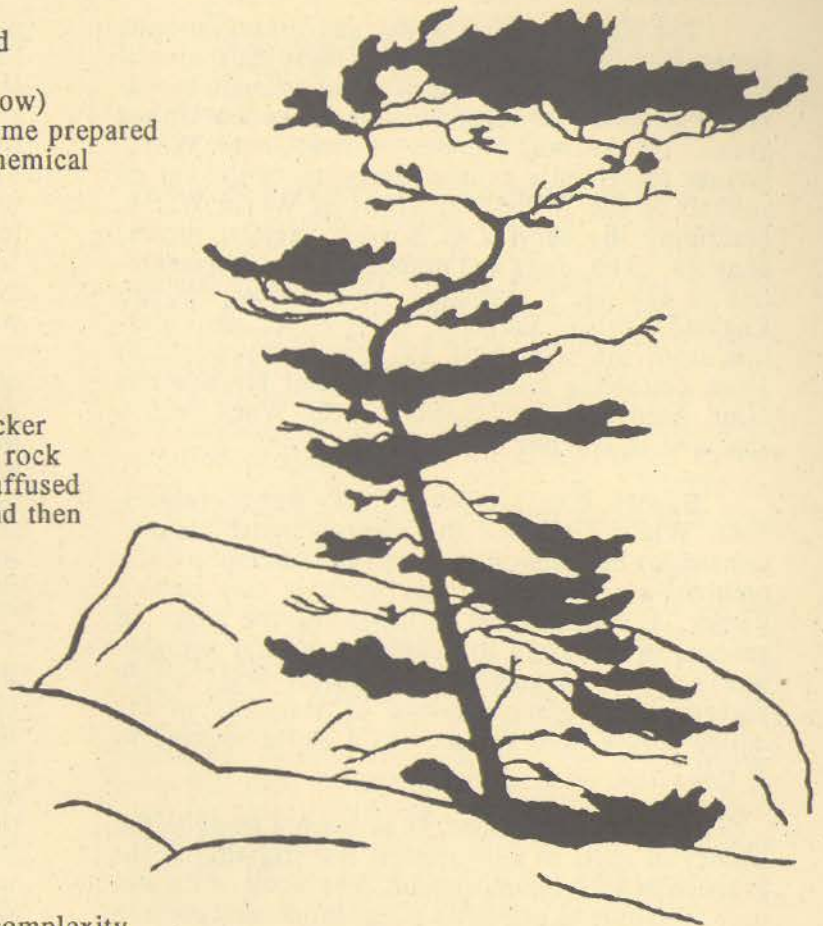


Lichens

for
Christopher Dewdney

- I. A glacier-
etched round of granite: exposed
Canadian Shield; on this are spread
the truest pioneers:
(sea-green, lime-green, black, mustard-yellow)
lichens. No soil, no welcome prepared
for those who lack roots to seek; a chemical
fondness hugs them to the rock, flattened
in a prudent sort of intimacy,
yet proud, timeless - the fossil remains
of water drops
tumbled from rainbows.
- II. To be first-
how venerated, then ignored are they
who invade dead atom clusters with the flicker
of DNA, its quest: to pass the beacon. A rock
will become soil, will become alive - as suffused
with protoplasm as with dust and water, and then
it can all be recognized
as a miracle.
- III. Early, alone, yet
not alone, the stark stains of life
are mutual dependencies,
of the dark-loving and the dark-fearing:
SYMBIOSIS -
a team that redefines the unit.
The individual organism is a question
of names and origins.
It is the oldest story and the one
most recently understood: cooperation
is the crux of complexity, and complexity
the stamp of the divine.
- IV. Tucked away from wind and sun,
another secret: protection will yield
a bold reach for the third dimension.
A bleached-bone lichen filaments into a forest
several centimetres high, a panic of reticulation,
a dried-out mass of brain tissue.
In this dendritic huddle of interlock,
a dream forms.
The lichens are willing an entire ecosystem
into premature self awareness.



Louise Fabiani