

Rebecca Lehmann

Westward Expansion

In the saw-toothed western
days we manipulated the land,
drove ore and timber into mud.
The darkness was a tea
we brewed each morning,
the morning a rash of fever-pink
clouds at the horizon. There came
wasps, plastering nests
in the canvas folds of tents,
and coyotes slinking through
weathered garbage heaps.
A motor is one thing, a human
hand another. We tried to hide
our black-stained lips with
quaking fingers. Don't tell me
how you learned your letters.
In the kingdom of god each man
is illiterate. The militancy
of progress is many handed
and travels in a penetrating line,
ever star-ward. Land spreads
like a whore's legs, and the insem-
inating force dwells in each of us,
danger-blown like a fire. We
caravanned through surveyed land.
We followed the whims of the map.
A whale made of grass breached
the horizon. It dared us to recollect
the thousand bones choking the mother-
mouth of the sea, that fecund other.
We ran from the private hairs
of her waves, across muscled days,
into the bowels of the continent,
the wind tonguing our faces,
the rain offering no eco-baptism.