

*ag synthesizer*

cocooned in his combine cab

headphones tuned to Bach  
windshield tinted cool-ray  
air filtered and conditioned

he moves  
through the milo field

free of the dust and itch  
of the harvest

crops and livestock completely computerized

still called  
“just a farmer”

by big city folks

*Behind Every Ranch House in Texas*

porches  
perch  
on top  
of sandstone steps  
wait  
with their cistern pumps  
white enameled sinks  
and bars of Lava  
to pumice cotton planting  
from calloused skin  
five gallon buckets full  
of sweet well water  
ask to be sipped  
from tin  
dippers  
to wash down  
filed dust  
overalls  
and flannel shirts  
back the doors  
beg for tired  
bodies  
to settle in  
waiting  
for the chance  
to smooth the edge  
of ranch  
life

*4th of July*

there is something  
in the day  
spent at

the Fort Worth  
tractor pull

watching the fireworks  
at Sweetwater Lake

or eating watermelon  
at the Mitchell family reunion  
in China Spring, Texas

there is something  
in the day  
in the way  
of life  
we

have here  
in Texas

it just feels  
good

## *Chicken Canning Time in West Texas*

Momma always said,  
"Russell I need twenty-five chickens today"

I'd get  
a coat hanger  
from the closet

go behind the barn  
sprinkle some corn  
in the dirt  
and hook

those chickens  
one by  
one

as they trotted around  
the corner

I'd wrap their legs  
with bailing wire

and drape them  
over the clothesline

Momma snipped  
each one down

whipped the  
head off

and turned them loose  
my old dog, Tuffy

would go berserk

chasing that flock

of bloody

headless chickens

*Blue Heron*

Sweetwater Lake is  
evaporating fast

now it is nothing  
but a mud bay

knobby  
with cedar stumps

and out in the middle  
a blue heron dabbles

stalks  
on stilts

slices out a whiskered bullhead

then bobs  
the lump

down

## *Meteorite Showers*

like a poked  
pine log

burning in the fireplace

the glistened spatter  
of shattered  
moons

ripples across the black  
velvet of

Texas  
sky

## *Heat Waves*

August sun  
ricochets

up  
from

fresh asphalt

radiates  
into blue sky

evaporates clouds  
before

they  
are



## *Icicle Radishes*

Gramps would pull a fist  
full of white  
radishes  
long and fat  
covered with  
black loam  
he'd wash them  
behind the garage  
with the green garden hose  
massaging their plumpness  
until the dirt  
was gone  
then take them in  
to the north porch  
where we'd sit  
munching into pithed  
coolness  
of icicle radishes  
dipped in  
salt

*Aunt Emma Collected Teeth*

at night  
when the senile  
were contained by  
their roll-bars  
and tie-downs  
she would flit out  
shadow down the halls  
with her sewing  
basket  
collect their unmouthed  
dentures from the  
bedside water  
glasses  
like some pearls being shucked  
those bare gums knew  
tried to tattle  
but all the nurses ever did  
was confiscate her basket in the morning  
and shuffle out  
the teeth  
to those minus them  
never did get all  
the bites right  
they said  
even after Emma died

## *East Texas Root Hog*

we could always tell  
when the hounds trapped  
another armadillo  
under the  
house  
because it  
would go to jumping  
and thumping up  
against  
the floorboards  
knocking  
and knocking  
until we couldn't stand it  
no more  
and we'd all have to  
go out there  
no matter what time  
and get a  
hold of all  
them dogs  
and Grandma would crawl  
under the house  
with her broom  
and whisk it  
until the darn thing  
waddled out  
so cool

*Great Cormorant*

black  
wings whisper

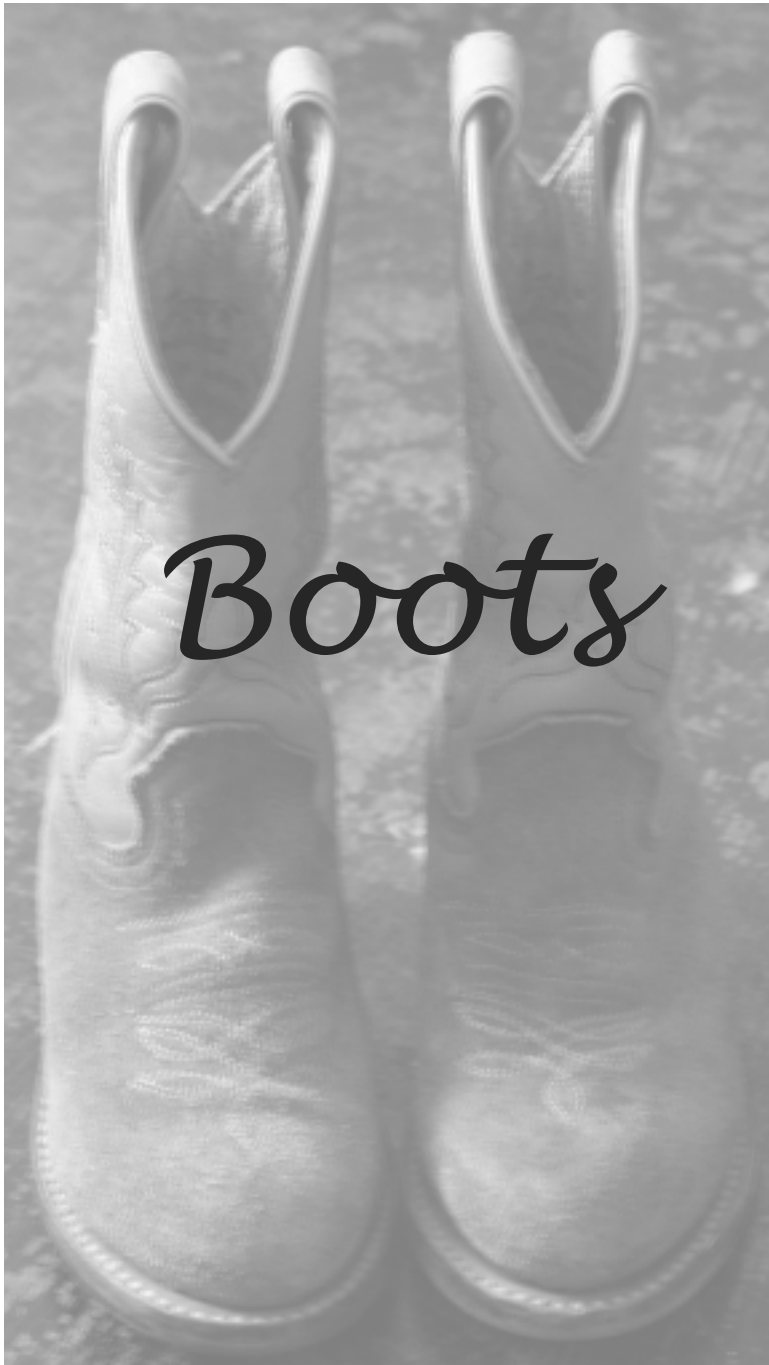
fervent as  
a prayer

into  
blue sky

circle  
Clyde Lake

swoop in  
to

land



*City Life*

at dawn  
when Mercury  
still hangs  
in the west  
and scattered  
night clouds  
begin to turn pink  
around the edges  
  
and street lights  
down across Trinity Valley  
sparkle  
bright  
through the rising  
river mist  
  
and a row  
of crows  
lifts off  
out of the cottonwoods  
along the water  
  
to become black  
silhouettes  
in the morning sun  
  
city life doesn't seem so bad

## *Those Crows*

floating close  
to the ground

zig zagging across the park

up over  
the water sprinklers

they laugh  
to each other  
as they fly

like a bunch  
of teenagers  
testing

the limits

## *Real Cowboy*

“Them rodeo  
cowboys  
are just  
another kind  
of pro athlete  
  
just a fine tuned machine  
  
now you take  
an old boy  
that’s been out  
there brush  
poppin  
them cows  
outa mesquite thorns  
  
now there’s a real  
cowboy  
  
but he probably  
wouldn’t do  
no good  
in pro rodeo  
he’d be too  
damn slow  
  
he’s just a hard working  
good old boy”



## *Bull Fighter*

he glides me around  
the dance floor  
in delicate  
four four  
steps

I marvel at the moves

of his  
stubby body

a balloon  
blown

to the precise point  
before it pops

full black beard

balding head  
covered with

a straw Stetson

he's the  
third clown  
in every rodeo

the one they  
call the

barrel man

## *Rodeo Circuit Cowboy*

you seen one  
you seen  
them  
all

every one is  
the same

a rodeo here  
or on down  
the road

Mesquite or Abilene or Stamford

the bulls  
broncs  
cowboys  
and the girls

it's all happened before

I don't watch  
anymore

just get a grip  
and ride

## The Brazos River

smart weed and nettles droop out over the water  
a shadow tunnel  
of limbs hangs  
over a slow boil  
of mudded water  
that roils around  
limestone boulders  
behind a dam of flood debris  
a cottonmouth floats  
limp  
then instantly the  
snake swizzles  
cross current  
and disappears  
under the riverbank  
silver dorsal fins  
of spawning carp  
poke up  
in the shallows  
of a gravel bar  
a fish ring ripples  
in the current  
then another  
further downstream  
but they're gone before they grow

*Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, Female*

she emerges slowly  
jerking, resting, jerking

long black legs  
out first

tentative testing, then clutch  
pulling the crimped wings along

a final spastic jerk  
and the plump  
black velvet abdomen is free

wrinkled little wad of  
crinkled yellow tissue paper

resting, pumping, resting  
she clings tenaciously to  
the empty green chrysalis

pumping unfolds  
brilliant velvet hues

yellow, black and cobalt blue