

Samba Summer

Fort Valley, Georgia, 1966

Broke-leg cakewalk of the drunken uncles
entertaining the ladies at the family picnic:
one arm akimbo in a humpback strut,
the other stretched high in witness—*yes, Lord, yes!*—
palm outspread against a late summer sky.

*That skirt's too yellow
and far too tight
for any Christian child.
I'd walk a mile
if the gal was right
but those hips could kill a fellow!*

One straight leg, too, that the crooked one dragged
through a grassy rut edging the petunias.
The women clucked the children away
from the charred hibachi, rolled their eyes,
and set out the coconut cream pies.

*You may as well
go on and shoot me,
tie my heart in a knot.
Wait: judging from
this limp here,
my leg's already shot!*

High-butt shenanigans! Uncles did it best,
pot-gutted, hitching their trousers up—
a holy grunting executed to the bleat and hiss

of Mitzi's sea-foam green transistor,
comic signature of the tribe:

*We're only joking: we know
we're just the world's
custodians, full-time lovers
on half pay. C'mon, girl,
let's dance—before this song is over,
show me what I've been working for.*