

The New Criterion

Poems

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In the guesthouse

by [Mary Jo Salter](#)

1. Long exposure, 1892

All of them dead by now, and posed
so stiffly, in their sepia Sunday
best, they seem half-dead already.
Father and Eldest Son, each dressed
in high-cut jacket and floppy tie,
never get to sit in the sitting room.
They stand to face a firing squad
behind Mother and the little girls—
themselves bolt upright on the sofa,
hands at their sides, their center-parted
hair pulled back, two rows of rickrack
flanking the twenty buttons down
the plumb line of their bodices.

And here, discovered alone downstage
and slightly to the left, the boy—
such a beautiful boy. Although
they've tried to make him a little man,
upholstering him in herringbone,
you can see him itching to run out
with his hoop and stick, happy because
even at this moment, ...

Mary Jo Salter's upcoming book is *Open Shutters: Poems* (Knopf).

[more from this author](#)

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