

# 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** is the author of *Open Shutters: Poems* (Knopf).

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