

John Lennon

By Mary Jo Salter

The music was already turning sad,
those fresh-faced voices singing in a round
the lie that time could set its needle back
and play from the beginning. Had you lived
to eighty, as you'd wished, who knows?—you might
have broken from the circle of that past
more ours than yours. Never even sure
which was the truest color for your hair
(it changed with each photographer), we claimed
you for ourselves; called you John and named
the day you left us (spun out like a reel—
the last broadcast to prove you'd lived at all)
an end to hope itself. It isn't true,
and worse, does you no justice if we call
your death the death of anything but you.

II

It put you in the headlines once again:
years after you'd left the band, you joined
another—of those whose lives, in breaking, link
all memory with their end. The studio
of history can tamper with you now,
as if there'd always been a single track
chance traveled on, and your discordant voice
had led us to the final violence.
Yet like the times when I, a star-crossed fan,
had catalogued your favorite foods, your views
on monarchy and war, and gaily clipped
your quips and daily antics from the news,
I keep a loving record of your death.
All the evidence is in—of what,
and to what end, it's hard to figure out,
riddles you might have beat into a song.
A younger face of yours, a cover shot,
peered from all the newsstands as if proof
of some noteworthy thing you'd newly done.

Mary Jo Salter, "John Lennon" from *Henry Purcell in Japan* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984).
Copyright © 1984 by Mary Jo Salter. Reprinted with the permission of the author.

Source: Henry Purcell in Japan (1984)



Mary Jo Salter was one of the prominent poets of the New Formalist movement, which revived traditional technique in a modern voice during the eighties. Born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Salter has spent much time traveling and living abroad, which is evident in such collections as *Henry Purcell in Japan*.