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.
