

Self-Portrait as a Pope and Young Trophy

I'm the buck gutted out in the halogen glow
of the flashlight positioned so as to show me—
and my use as trophy—fully deconstructed.

Each hoof hacked off and tossed down—
a silly dog treat—I am taken apart.
Glassy-eyed and useless, I will be

finally their absurd centerpiece—hung
high on the mantle. But I was wiser
than any of them in my day—more

important, far more courageous—
when I killed mountain lions whose teeth
threatened me with their sharp insistence—

impaling each of them to the rotting oak trees
in my territory. You haven't understood
your life and the point of its daily consequence

until you defend it. Once, when a pack of ten
coyotes tried to eat me, I stabbed all of them
with my twelve-point antlers—which are somehow

in hunters' hands more valuable than gold bullion,
even. Am I the new world record? Yes. Am I
the largest white tail of all time? Most assuredly.

Still, these two men who slice me don't know
my persistence—how I survived after my teeth
rotted (living twenty-five years) eating water-

crust pulled from the spring nearby here—where,
legend has it, Apache braves knelt down and wept
when white men burned their ancestral lands,

and their tears grew flowers. It was a time
when the whole landscape wept—and the deer
grew afraid to graze by day at all. Now,

the highway's our fear. Those of us caught near it
get struck down—crushed—daily. My wife was
killed about two years ago. I loved one doe—

another detail they will miss—as opposed to several.
We do not have names—no—instead we rely
on our scents, which encode fragrant languages

secret to us. Every deer's distinctive. She smelled
of cedar trees, sweet corn, and was so beautiful to see—
before the accident took her—leaping over fences.