AILANTHUS: TREE OF HEAVEN

The pretense is what really redeems. When birds fly, it’s the body dumping the soul, or a dive bar opening like a portable mattress, only less theatrical, less than what we hear about girl in a tree or a feather falling. The pretense is the bar where he held so many bottles and so few women to his lips; topaz, citrine, buried treasure, lost like feathers of rainforest trees. The blue shadow, her eyes, open, blue and clear against lashes, her head lying on a pillow, frightful to remember when the sun shows up, uninvited, rising over the trees. He would reminisce about neon lights and the parking lot where girls would lie about their age. The parking lot remembers only cars left until morning. Remember the girl he saw, bloodshot in brake lights, who he heard crawling in gravel. From his bed he listens to a mattress on which a girl is jumping. Pillows can kill, feathers, and only trees can stop them: Ailanthus, planted for its beauty but whose flowers smell bad, is the hated of whom is crawling the parking lot like bar feather birds. It could never be drunk on rainwater or blue as she could be to those who spoke to her or lie beside her on an inflatable mattress,
even now with leaves about to fall and trees dying.   
Pretense is never what he needs in times like these,   
because it works below the surface, requires digging,   
and shovels make him tired, even if he hasn't been drinking. Death is no bar, bird, or bed to rest in.

Remembering sounds of the parking lot, he hears her again, listens to an argument against something but is not persuaded; he didn’t lie about his age. The pretense, she said, would redeem him, feathers around a bed, a tree for a man who crawls

across gravel and likes to drink
and sing until the sun’s up. What he sings is that he no longer listens. Shovels remember:
the shadow, what is so blue on lids of closed eyes.