
7-15-2008

The Hunter and the Queen of Heaven

Tim Callahan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mcircle>



Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Callahan, Tim (2008) "*The Hunter and the Queen of Heaven*," *The Mythic Circle*: Vol. 2008: Iss. 30, Article 8.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mcircle/vol2008/iss30/8>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Mythic Circle by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>



Online Summer Seminar 2023

August 5-6, 2023: Fantasy Goes to Hell: Depictions of Hell in Modern Fantasy Texts

<https://mythsoc.org/oms/oms-2023.htm>



The Hunter and the Queen of Heaven

The Hunter and the Queen of Heaven

by
Tim Callahan

First Invocation

Shudder, O Earth, at her fury; she who strides hip-deep in blood.	in the narrow glass channel, between one grain of sand and the next.
Fear, O Lands, her wrath; she who binds the heads of her foes to her naked waist.	Her lovers, like her enemies, fall before her, before her irresistible power,
Terror goes before her and dread follows after.	She who makes the lion her footstool, She who rides high in the heavens upon a bright and errant star.
Beautiful is she in her deadly passion. Glorious is she in her lust.	The Queen of Heaven: Who can withstand her radiance? As it said:
Peril flows from her, the spice of her desire. Deadly is she to her foes. Perilous is she to her lovers.	“Whose beauty is greater than Anath’s? Who is fairer than Ashtart?”
For her passions turn on a moment, changing from love to wrath	

Part I The Great Boar

All the youths of Canaan did say:
 “Let us prove our manliness and worth,
 upon the field of battle,
 or upon the wild lands in peace.
Upon the wild lands let us chase
 the great boar with yellowed tusks,
 the greatest of boars, with bloodstained tusks.”

He is the Father of boars, O youths of Canaan:
 The leopard fears him;

Wolves draw back at the scent of his musk.
Can you truly slay him, sons of Canaan?

Will he fall to your lances?
He counts as nothing the barbed and pitiless bronze.
Behold: He gnaws the spear that pierces him!
He charges the one who hurled it.
He plunges upon the one whose thrust impaled him.
He bears him down, though loyal hounds tear
at the hairy flanks.
He gores the hunter and tramples him
and counts the dogs as but gnats and flies.

Will you truly dare the wild lands, O sons of Canaan?
Stay instead in your cities of stone,
inlaid with onyx and jasper,
in the walled cities bright
with beryl and chrysolite,
O, youths of Canaan.
Sport with the maidens in lapis fountains
Court them, not death.
Drink the deep red wine to the dregs
and shun the red flowing blood,
your life-blood
the blood of your life let out by the tearing tusks.
Savor the wine and delight in the maidens' embraces,
in their bodies sleek with oils and spikenard.

Yet, see? One goes forth and dares the wild lands,
One of the sons of Canaan.
One dares the great boar with yellowed tusks,
the Father of Boars with bloodstained tusks;
Bears in his youth a brace of spears,
bears in his heart high courage.
With lean hounds white of tooth
goes he forth;
The baying hounds, lean of flank
with lolling tongues.
He goes forth alone, the handsome youth,
the fairest of youths,
His body is bared to danger,
Covered only with a linen tunic,
his feet shod with leather sandals.

His long hair strays from beneath his cap,
the thick loose curls spilling out
to lie upon his shoulders like clusters of dark grapes.

The maidens sigh to see him go forth.

The maids of the mighty city,
 sigh in melancholy passion
And desert the indolent youths at the lapis fountains,
 the languid sons of Canaan.
They watch the bold hunter with avid eyes.
 A breeze blows the scent of their spikenard to him;
 but he turns not at its fragrance.

The maids of the country pine for his beauty.
 They sigh as he passes,
 sigh at his comely thighs and broad shoulders.
 They sigh at his narrow waist girt with leather.
And milk maids and farm girls sigh to see him go forth.
 They sigh for Tammuz in his reckless youth.

Then the hounds took the scent.
 Their nostrils flared at the gamy musk.
They strained at their leashes,
 The baying hounds, the belling hounds
 with gaping mouths and lolling tongues.
Then Tammuz loosed them and followed after
 the coursing hounds with heaving flanks,
The panting hounds ran ahead
 and Tammuz, fleet of foot, followed after.

Over hills with boulders sown.
 the rocky soil,
 the dry earth of the wild lands,
the baying hounds, the eager hounds,
 followed the spoor, ever stronger.
And Tammuz followed close
 and followed after.
Across grassy glades they followed the spoor,
 the rank scent of the Father of Boars.
And bold Tammuz followed close and followed faster.
Beneath the cedars' spreading arms,
 the tall cedars who spread shade about them
 like the flowing trains of long robes,
the straining hounds, the panting hounds,
 ran down the scent, the cloying musk.
And eager Tammuz ran in the midst of the pack
 following closer and following faster.

The golden chariot of the flaming sun
 drove to the west, casting shadows back behind,
 long streamers of blue and purple,

and lay a blanket of gold on humble grasses,
a red gold coverlet on the grasses of the wild lands.
Behold! The chariot has approached the western gate of the sky,
and all that is not ruddy is a turmoil of blue and dusky violet,
a roiling chaos, a murky shadow.

And out of that gloaming rises the Father of Boars.
He rises from the shadows as though death itself
has risen from the earth.
His eyes are reddened with rage
as he sees the bold youth.
The sturtorous rumble of his fury shakes the earth
as his jaws gape, baring his great curving tusks,
foam-flecked tusks yellow with age.
His spittle stretches in tenuous ropes between his gaping jaws
as he tears the earth before him with sharp and deadly hooves.

The hounds close in, the eager hounds, the foolish hounds
Careless of the curving tusks, careless of death.
A murderous toss of the great shaggy head guts a hound,
Sends its lifeless body hurling through the thickening air,
the darkening air, the vanguard of night.
The others fasten on flank and foreleg,
the ravening hounds with lips curled back and flattened ears,
the worrying hounds, careless of death.

Then Tammuz drew back a spear, a slender javelin,
a hardened spear. tipped with bronze, thirsty for blood.
His muscles rippled as he hurled the spear.
Its head all smooth sank into the flesh,
pierced the hard hide where the great neck
met the shoulder, the slabbed shelf of hard muscle.

Bellowing in rage, the boar surged forth,
Shaking from flank and foreleg
the worrying hounds, the ravening dogs;
Shook them from him like bothersome flies,
like the noisome flies that swarm
from dung heaps and festering wounds,
eager to drink the moisture from our eyes.
Forward he surged on pointed hooves, his head low,
his tusked head low to the ground like a sharpened harrow,
like a bright scythe ready to harvest.

Tammuz grasped his second spear,
tipped with barbed and baleful bronze,

the ruddy bronze thirsty for blood,
the barbed bronze.
A full span back from the flaring head
stood the barbs,
a hand's breadth out stood the curving tines
the sturdy tines meant to hold the raging boar.

Tammuz aimed for the yawning maw,
the red mouth, the steaming mouth
framed in tearing tusks.
The hot breath, like a vent of hell, billowed forth
and spittle flew from the gaping cavern.
Then the boar, the great boar, the Father of Boars
impaled himself on the heartless bronze.
Deep it sank in the roof of his mouth
and burrowing deeper sought the base of his brain.

Then, with a jolt, the barbs caught hold,
tearing into the hot, wet flesh,
jarring the hunter with the sudden shock.
The great jaws snapped shut,
snapping the shaft of the hardened spear.
The maddened boar, the raging beast,
its brain burning
burning from the touch of the brazen head,
bore Tammuz down.
Its cloven hooves, its sharp, tearing hooves
sought the youth's tender flesh;
And the hot breath, spraying blood,
scalded the hunter's cheeks.
Tammuz fended the sharp hooves from him.
His stout arm held them back.

Then Tammuz drew from the leather that girded his loins
a bright blade, a baleful dagger, a full cubit in length.
He thrust up at the hairy hide, thrust to the hilt,
buried the blade in the creature's throat,
Then tore it in a slashing arc,
Shearing through muscle and sinew
Severing artery, vessel and vein.
Bright blood and dark blood sprayed out,
gushed forth in a scalding fountain,
bathed the youth in steaming gore.

The boar stiffened, standing rigid.
Then shuddered and toppled,

As a great cedar falls to the ax,
 groaning as it sways,
 then crashing down with snapping branches;
As a boulder, undercut by rain,
 topples and plunges down a cliff,
 shattering at its base in a thunderous roar.
So the great boar, the Father of Boars
 toppled over. So it fell.
Its shuddering limbs stretched out,
 its quivering limbs in dying spasm,
 its stiffening limbs.

Tammuz rose, drenched in blood, red with gore;
 Stood unscathed over the boar, the dying boar.
And the sun, on the rim of the sky,
 pausing at the western gate,
Painted him in crimson hues,
 red on red in the gathering dusk.

And as the life drained from the great brute,
 as it drained from the Father of Boars,
 As his eye, looking up at Tammuz --
 his baleful eye, brimming with hatred --
 began to glaze over,
The dying mind of the beast
 Swore anathema on the one he saw,
 the bold one who had let out his life,
 Swore his bane with a wordless curse.

Part II: The Lovers

Tammuz tore from his body the ruined tunic,
 the linen tunic soaked in blood.
The restless hounds worried the corpse,
 the stiffening corpse of the Father of Boars,
 lapped up the pool of the boar's red blood,
 lapped up the thick congealing gore.

A far sweeter drink Tammuz found,
 An upflowing spring that from a rock
 pulsed and spattered, spewing bright water
 spurting and splashing cool torrents.
Tammuz bent down to taste the sweet waters,

the cool waters sparkling in the dusk,
 the chill waters that filled a pool,
 then flowed away under sandy soil.

The lean hounds, the snarling hounds,
 fought over the corpse
 of the greatest of boars,
 mired themselves in its sticky blood
and rolled in the dust, rolled in the gore,
 fouling themselves with the scent of death,
 as buzzing flies, the noisome flies,
 the noxious servants of the demon of death,
 swarmed about them.

But Tammuz plunged into chill clear waters,
the spring-fed waters of the shimmering pool.
From him he washed the thick, dark blood,
the thickening blood of the Father of Boars.
the blood that billowed in polluting clouds
in swirling clouds that filled the pool
then were swiftly borne away,
away from the pool to stain the dry soil.

Naked in the gathering dusk, the hunter rose
from the spring fed pool,
His fair flesh cleansed of the blood of the hunt,
His disordered curls falling about
the column of his neck,
the stately column that held his head high.

Above him the bowl of the sky,
the upturned bowl, the red-rimmed bowl,
the deepening bowl that yet mourned
the passing of the sun
darkened to violet,
like a royal shroud laid upon the earth.

In the moonless night rose the Queen of Heaven,
and all the stars crowded about her,
filling the heavens,
as she cast soft shadows in the moonless night.
And all the stars, the myriad stars,
followed in her train.

And above Tammuz, above the valiant hunter,
the vast panoply of the sky followed in the train,
the flowing train of the Queen of Heaven.

And looking down from her errant star,
the brightest of stars
in the deepening dusk, from the sable vault,
The Queen of Heaven gazed down in wonder
stared in wonder at the beauty of Tammuz,
at the fair mortal form that stood up from the pool.
Her divine breath caught at the sight.
The high color rose in her cheek,
and her blood pulsed at what she beheld.
Her blood coursed as she looked down,
as she gazed upon the naked youth.

And from her bright and errant star
The Queen of Heaven looked down on him,
looked down on him in wonder.
The Queen of Heaven looked down on him
and loved him
and called him *Adonai*.
Then down she swept, putting off

the terror that cloaked her,
Divesting herself of all majesty,
leaving behind weapons of war.
She took from her head the royal crown.
The cape dropped, unclasped, from her shoulders.
As she stepped forward, as she approached
the dazzled youth,
her cape fell neglected to the sands.
The broad belt that circled her waist
the belt twined with gold and studded with sapphires
she loosed, and let fall.
The soft garment, the softest of garments,
slid from her shoulders,
whispering as it slithered down,
Caressing smooth skin as it slid down her body
to fall in a heap, piled 'round her ankles.

She stepped forth from it, naked now
But for the gold of her bangles
that circled her slender ankles;
But for her bracelets of red gold, set with carnelian
that circled her wrists;
But for the earrings,
the emerald earrings set in silver;
But for the pendant between her breasts:
the pendant of malachite set in lapis.
Naked she walked, but for her jewels,
The deep rich aureoles of her high breasts
charged with passion,
The dark eyes lustrous with desire,
The broad hips swaying with each step,
the wide womanly hips,
broad and voluptuous below the narrow waist,
The full lips slightly parted
as her breaths came, quick and shallow.
As with each step her comely thighs
brushed each other,
The twin sisters exchanging caresses,
the fair sisters long and full.

And with each step, with each fair step,
Her feet upon the earth,
upon the hard-packed earth,
the barren earth of the wild lands,
Brought forth life, rich and full,
Brought forth exotic flowers of the heavenly realm,
Flowers unseen on earth before,
Deeply hued and thick with fragrance,
with heady aromas heavy laden.

Spellbound, Tammuz stepped from the pool

Entranced by her beauty.
Dark were his eyes and wide with wonder.
Charged was his flesh with passion.
For she had taken the power of death,
the enchanted death, laden with fate and charged
with a curse,
charged with the fury of the Father of Boars;
She has taken its power and charged it with life.
She has turned fury to lust;
Has charged the killing ground with her power.

Come they now together, flesh against flesh,
As the buck and the doe in their season,
As the great lions in their time.
Pine for him, ye maids of the city.
Long for him in futile longings.
Pine for him, ye maids of the country
farm girls and milk maids,
Pine for Tammuz in the glory of his youth.
For he is lost to you.
The goddess Ashtart has chosen him.
The Queen of Heaven has claimed him
And has him in her thrall.

And she has given him her love:

Her limbs are loosened and powerless
His youth mounts up yet again
Yet again he mounts up,
after she is sated.
He rises renewed.
He lays her upon a carpet of flowers,
the very flowers that sprang from her feet,
that sprang from her touch,
the heavenly flowers heady with musk.
They couple again, and she is taken,
Taken by the vigor she engendered,
Taken by the fervor of his power and youth.

Tammuz looked down,
gazed in wonder at the goddess,
the goddess beneath him.
Her thighs held him yet in desire,
Twin sisters in passion, twin sisters in lust
Her thighs yet entwined him,
as she held him fast
held him to her in fearful longing,
lest he leave her for other passions.
The Queen of Heaven looked up at him in wonder
At his passion, at the power of his lust,
Looked up at him and loved him
And called him *Adonai*.

Second Invocation

The stars shine in the depths of heaven,
Burning in the Firmament,
Wheeling in their courses,
in the ebony vault of night
In the pool, the spring-fed pool,
Near where the lovers lie entwined,
The stars reflected shine out;
Shine out in burning glory
as though from far beneath the earth.

Yet far below the heavens,
Far beneath the earth,
The sun begins its eastward journey

And lights the land of the dead;
Where the twin of the Queen of Heaven,
The grim twin of the Heaven's sovereign,
rules the hordes of the dusty dead.
She is Sheol.
Her hunger cannot be sated.
Her dreaded realm bears her name.
Fear her O ye who inhabit the earth,
Ye who live under the sky.
Fear the dark queen of the dusty halls.
Dread her approach, O ye living,
The queen of deadly silence.
Offer her appeasement,
Lest she raise the lifeless,

the numberless hosts of the dead,
 rousing them from their slumber,
Lest she raise them up in fury
 Covetous again of life.
Lest she raise the dead in their hunger,
 Urging the ravenous dead
 to rise and devour the living.

She is austere in her pallid beauty
 and all will love her sooner or late.
Dreadful is she to her enemies,
 She who shrivels the flesh,
 She who polishes the skulls of the vanquished.

A terror is she to her lovers.
 Visiting them by night.
 Riding them in her passion.
Dangerous is she to all:
 For her passion is unchanging.
 Her hunger is never sated.
 Her passion devours all.

She is implacable in her frozen passion.
 She makes no bargains:
 All who breathe,
 Will be breathless before her,
 Kneeling in silence in her dusty hall



Part III: Covetous Envy

The sun stood at the eastern gate
Ready to enter the sky.

As shadows returned to the halls of Sheol,
As the sun prepared to mount the sky,
When the gates of her realm lay open,
Sheol looked out and saw the lovers.

She saw Ashtart rise naked, rising in the dawn to dress.
She saw the goddess, the Queen of Heaven,
clasp her belt,
her broad belt studded with sapphires.
She saw the goddess retrieve her cape,
Saw her clasp her cape about her;
Saw her don her golden crown,
her golden crown studded with diamonds.

Then Ashtart bent down,
Bent down to caress the sleeping form.
Tammuz stirred, opening his eyes,
Opened his eyes wide in wonder
Wide in wonder at her majestic glory.
And the Queen of Heaven smiled down on him
Fairest Ashtart looked down on him and loved him
and called him *Adonai*.

She gave to him a tunic
Finest linen, sewn with silver
Embroidered with gold.
She gave to him the tunic
and kissed him
and promised to return;
Said that she would come again
when night called forth her star.

And so the lovers parted
As the sun rose in its splendor,
as it mounted the vault of heaven.
And so Ashtart left him
As her star, the Morning Star
Faded from the brightening sky.

And looking out from the underworld,
The Queen of Nether Darkness
Saw Tammuz rising naked,

Saw him don the linen tunic
And measured his manly frame.

Sheol looked up from the underworld,
looked out from her grim domain,
the realm that bore her name.

Her implacable desire was kindled.
She looked upon fair Tammuz
And in her deadly way,
Dreaded Sheol loved him.
She looked on him and loved him
and called him *Adonai*.

Then the Queen of Nether Darkness,
of the darkness that has no stars,
Hated the world of the living
that barred her from his body
that kept her from his soul

Then her voice echoed
in the hollow halls of the dead
"All come to me soon or late.
All come to Sheol's hand.
All descend to the land of the dead
And I am mostly patient
as a spider at her web.
"But I will have fair Tammuz
in the flower of his youth.
"I will not have the flower faded.
I will not have it dry and sere.
"But Tammuz take I now
in the cold fire of my desire
to sit by me and reign with me
Underneath the earth.
"Ashtart would soon discard him
As is her fickle wont,
As age took his vigor
And took the fire
from his loins.
"But with me he will reign forever,
forever at my side,
His beauty will fade never.
frozen in his youth,
in this cold land preserved."

Then Sheol called forth a dreaded spirit,
The most restless of all her shades
called one seeking vengeance.
Fear him all ye shades of Sheol.
Draw back from him, O living souls
Fear the shade of the Father of Boars.

Sheol called him forth and with dread spells
Again with life she clothed him, saying,
"Bone to bone be knit again.
Come upon them sinew and flesh.
Upon the dry bones come flesh and blood.

"Assume once more thy living form.
By my power thy terror increase
"Let the blood of thy goring
flow forever.
"Assume the mantle of my awful terror,
upon the wild lands of fertile Canaan.
Encompass the cities. Bind them in fear.
"Draw out thy bane, even fair Tammuz.
Draw out the object of my dread desire.
"Gore him in thy fury.
Drive his soul from the land of the living.
Drive him to my dread embrace.
"Bring to me my love,
Bring to me *Adonai*."



Part 4: The Encompassed City

All the youths of Canaan did say.
“Let us emulate Tammuz,
thus upon the wild lands to tread
and upon the wild lands prove our worth.
“Let us desert the lapis fountains
and forsake the stone city,
the walls studded with onyx and jasper,
the walls bright with beryl and chrysolite.”

But the languid youths of Canaan
forsook not the lapis fountains
followed not the spoor of the wild lands
but followed the scent
of the maidens’ spikenard.
Nor did Tammuz seek again the wild lands.
The hounds, lean of flank and white of tooth,
grew sleek and fat,
And dozed in the sun.

And as night shrouded the earth,
As stars crowded the sky
the sable vault of the sky,
the Queen of Heaven came down to earth.
At night she walked the streets of the city,
In mortal guise sought her lover,
Pined for him in desolate desire,
until at last she found his door.
Then there was lust and love and laughter.
Then she looked on him and loved him
and in the throes of passion
called him *Adonai*.
And as the day faded her star
as her star paled in the brightness,
as her star fled from the sky,
Ashtart rose up and left her lover.
Anath parted from Tammuz,
Assumed her royal office,
and in deepest sorrow
bade farewell to *Adonai*.

Then a herdsman fled to the city,
wild with fear sought the gates.
Wild with fear he told his story,
babbled his tale wild with fear:
“Out of the cedars,
Out of the forests
Out of the darkness, the home of terror;
“A great boar with yellowed tusks
A thing of shadow,

Its horror spreading
Seeks death for all it meets.
“All the cattle have fled away.
All the sheep have fled their pastures.
“All the vineyards the boar has devoured.
Olive trees he has uprooted.
All the green fields he has trampled and fouled.
“Even the bees have deserted their hives,
Fleeing the beast’s rank smell of death.

“He has eluded armies of huntsmen.
Lone hunters has he slain.
“My master’s tents, pitched near his cattle,
The great boar ravaged,
Coming upon them at the edge of night.
“All died, torn by his tusks, struck by his hooves
And only am I left alive to tell thee.”

No sooner than the herdsman had told his tale
then a merchant fled into the city:
“A great boar, high as the withers of a horse of Egypt
came among us , spreading terror.
“Tore the asses with his curving tusks
or drove them off;
“Scattered the goods
tore and fouled them.
“It slew the traders
as they rose from their tents.
“Of all the caravan, of all the train,
only I am left alive,
only I to tell the tale.”

While the merchant yet was speaking
as he yet told his tale,
a cry came down from the highest tower.
The watchman saw the form of the fatal boar,
Round about the city coursing,
Driving off all who sought the gates.

Straight away the archers fired.
Then the boar faded from sight.
From the gates the army issued.
Then the boar appeared among them,
tearing and goring with his bloody tusks
Fled the soldiers into the city.
the disordered troops terror struck.

And thus the boar,
The greatest of boars,

The Father of Boars,
Clothed now with the terror of Sheol,
Encompassed the city,
Shut up the people within the walls.
Maids could not go out to draw water.
The city's cisterns dropped lower and lower.
Wheat and barley ran low in the city.
The stores were consumed
as if in siege.

But Tammuz by Ashtart enthralled,
By the goddess lost in a glamor,
Heard not the tales of terror.
Each day he slept.
Slept in his chamber,
Worn by the passion,
Consumed be the desire of the Queen of Heaven
Consumed by the ravenous lust of Ashtart.
Each night by her power
his vigor revived. His youth was renewed.
His youth was renewed to feed her passion,
To him was lost the world of men.

Then in council the Prince of the city
Called for the *Urim*,
Called for El's sacred stones.
He bid the priests, he bid the augers
Cast the stones to find what power
imperiled the city.
To find what god in righteous anger
punished the city,
To find what god or goddess
his people had wronged
To find what power he need appease.

Then the spirit of the Father of Boars.
Wrapped in the mantle of Sheol's power.
Shaped the fall of the sacred stones:
No answer gave he to the prince's entreaties.
Only a cryptic demand he gave.
By a demand he answered all pleadings
"Bring to me the one I came for.

Bring to me *Adonai*."

"Who is this one?" asked the Prince.
"Who is this lord you seek?"
Yet, though they cast the sacred stones
Or divined the flight of ravens
Or read the innards of hapless slaves
Or sought signs in the starry sky,
Though they begged which god or goddess
their impiety had wronged;
Only one answer came.
Only one demand:
"Bring to me the one I seek.
Bring to me him I came for.
Bring to me *Adonai*."

Then the prince called for sages
to plum the meaning of the ultimatum.
But none could tell him who this lord was.
None could fathom *Adonai*.
Then the prince in stern command
drew the youths from the lapis fountains
and demanded on pain of death
who was called *Adonai*.

The youths of Canaan all did say
the sons of the city gathered together,
"Let us seek out Tammuz.
From his slumber let us rouse him.
"Let us bid him once again
to go upon the wild lands,
To fight the wild boar
Or to seek for *Adonai*."

Then was Tammuz roused from slumber.
Then the sons of Canaan woke him.
Then was he shaken from the hold of the goddess.
Tammuz heard of the depredations,
Heard of the terror wrought by the boar.
Shaken was he by name they mentioned,
Knowing that he was *Adonai*.

Part 5: Jealousy and the Fatal Battle

In the night when the Queen of Heaven
came down to seek the bed of Tammuz,
When Ashtart consumed with longing
Put off her power and wandered the city,
 When she called for *Adonai*.
Tammuz she found, his spear points honing,
 girding himself to meet in battle
 the fatal boar that encompassed the city.

“Go not against this deadly creature,” she pleaded,
 “Go not against this beast of Sheol.
“Leave this city and live with me.
 In heavenly indolence live in my favor.”
“How can I leave my people in need?
 Why should I not bring down this boar?
“How did it know that thou had named me?
 That thou calleth me *Adonai*?”

Distressed was the goddess that another knew
 the name she called him.
Feared she then that Tammuz would leave her,
 leave her in sorrow for other passions.
 Jealous was she of the lure of the hunt.
And so she took his manly hand
 And pressed it to her breast.
The spear and the whetstone
 fell from his grip:
 All thoughts of the hunt were lost and forgotten.

All that night she drew out his vigor.
 All night she kindled his lust
 Putting forth the torch of her passion
 Snaring him in her desire.
Then in the dawn as he lay beneath her
 as he lay spent by sating her lust,
Ashtart, thinking that she had won,
 Had driven all other passions away,
 Caressed his cheek and whispered,
And called him *Adonai*.

At the sound of the name in haste he rose,
 Remembering the Boar’s demand:
“Bring to me the one I came for.
 Bring to me the one I seek.

Bring to me *Adonai*.”

In alarm the goddess clasped him.

Yet he thrust her away.

From her entreaties he turned in wrath.

Unsteady and weak, yet he grasped his spear.

Fury bloomed in the heart of the goddess.

Love turned to wrath in the breast of Ashtart:

“Go then, “ she shouted, “since thou prefer death,

Prefer death to my love, my love and caresses.

But go without my power about thee.”

Then flying up in hurt and rage

the Queen of Heaven deserted Tammuz.

The jealous goddess abandoned her lower,
the one she had called *Adonai*.

Behold! He goes forth, this noble son of Canaan.

He goes forth from the city

whose walls are set with onyx and jasper.

He leaves the walls of stone,

the walls bright with beryl and chrysolite.

He has set his feet on the wild lands.

His hounds have found the spoor.

Yet slowly they move,

the hounds fat and breathless,

the hunter weakened, of uncertain step.

Before him lay a hollow

Dark with shadow in the midst of day.

And out of that gloom rose the new-fleshed shade of the Father of Boars

He rose from the shadows: Death itself rising from Sheol.

His eyes gleamed with uncanny fire and cold rage

As he saw the bold youth.

His hollow roar, the horn of Sheol, scattered the hounds.

They ran in confusion

And left the way open

open to Tammuz where he gripped his spear

Then the beast, the phantom of Sheol, charged the lone hunter.

As his jaws gaped, baring his sharp and curving tusks,

Tammuz aimed for the maw, the cavernous darkness,

The hollow emptiness framed by great tusks.

Then the boar by Sheol’s craft,

swinging his head from side to side,

evaded the spear, the pitiless bronze,

the gleaming point framed by barbs.

Then a sweep of the massive head
Caught the lone hunter,
sweeping his feet from beneath him;
Caught the falling body of Tammuz
and tossed him high with the tearing tusks.
And as the youth's body fell back,
the boar caught it and tossed him again,
Let out his life's blood,
Let it out on the dusty ground.

The great boar, the Father of Boars,
The shade new-fleshed by Sheol's art
Gripped the corpse of the youthful hunter;
Clamped the bloody corpse of Tammuz
between the awful rending jaws;
Bore the body down to Sheol,
down to the welcome of the austere goddess.

In the hollow halls of the dead,
The great boar, The Father of Boars
his burning vengeance fully glutted,
dropped the body at the feet of Sheol.
Then the substance with which she had clothed him,
The phantom flesh that had sheathed his soul,
Faded now with the animal's fury,
Vanished as a mist dispelled.

Part 6: Tammuz in the Land of the Dead

Then Sheol pressed her lips to the lips of Tammuz,
and breathing out a cold vapor,
Brought him to a semblance of life.
"Arise, Tammuz," she commanded.
"Rise and reign at my side.
Rule with me and be my beloved.
"Rise and eat. Eat at my table, beloved of Sheol;
Take from my table the bread I have made thee.
"Sip the dark wine that I set before thee.
Drink deeply and feel thy wounds close and heal."

And Tammuz obeyed the words of the goddess.
She led him to her bed of darkness
Her cold passion constant and unchanging
drew from him a cold fire of lust.
And in her way the goddess loved him:
She looked on him in her desire

She drew him down in her bed darkness
and loved him
and called him *Adonai*.

And now as shadows cover the earth
And now as the sun has left the sky,
the Queen of Heaven has repented her fury
Divesting herself of her power,
she comes once more to the city.
She roams again the streets of the city
aflame with desire,
Calling for Tammuz,
calling aloud her lover's name.

The hounds of Tammuz have returned from the hunt.
Confused, they wander in search of their master.
The prince of the city fearing evil,

in dread of the power that encompassed the city
has decreed that no person shall utter the name,
The name of he who went forth
and never came back. . .
The prince has commanded that the name of Tammuz
never be uttered within the city,
Lest the great boar in its fury return.

And in the night the city watchmen
hear the voice of a woman calling,
a woman weeping in desolation.
They find a woman calling for Tammuz,
the distracted woman,
the love-sick female.
No sign bears she of her godly status,
No sign at all she is divine.
But a mere mortal is all they see.
They drive her forth in fear from the city.
They beat her with rods and drive her forth.
They bar her return at the city gate.

And without the city Ashtart called out
Called out in the night to the maids of the city
She turned and called out
to the maids of the country
to farm girls and milk maids
to shearers and gleaners.
“Charge my beloved to answer my call,
O maids I command you by love and desire.
“Pine with me O maids of Canaan,
Who sigh for Tammuz
in the flower of his youth.”

Yet no answer was she given
Only silence greeted her voice.
Then the goddess, assuming her power
Commanded the earth to yield up her lover,
Ordered the land to submit to her power
But silence alone greeted her voice,
Until a place in the wild lands answered
that spot of earth that swallowed his blood.
That place in the wild lands that drank his blood
answered in flowers, that sprang from his gore.
The anemone bright, with petals of scarlet
rose from the ground where Tammuz had died.

Then in wailing the Queen of Heaven
Rent the night in desolate sorrow.
“Weep with me O maidens,
Maids of the city,
Farm girls and milk maids,

Weep for Tammuz,
Slain in his youth.”

Then the goddess, her eyes red with weeping,
Battered at the black gates of Sheol
Struck the iron portals of Sheol
the resounding gates of the underworld;
Demanded that Sheol yield up her lover.
Raging, the goddess, The Queen of Heaven,
tried to break through the iron boundary,
the locked gates of the land of the dead.

Sheol then in answer to the fury,
the futile fury of the Queen of Heaven,
Taunted her sister, taunted Ashtart
from behind her gates,
the gates of iron that shut out the living.
“Rail away, inconstant sister
Fickle goddess, inconstant lover!
“Shriek in thy frenzy, thy deranged tumult.
Futile and foolish is thy rage.
“Tammuz is mine in his youth and his beauty
Forever mine in the land of the Dead.”

Then Ashtart, her fists bloody,
Her knuckles scraped raw by the iron door,
Her nails torn from clawing the gate,
Slumped against the metal barrier,
Sagged down weeping,
Weeping for Tammuz, lost in his youth.
And from behind the iron portal
Her sister's laughter mocked her sorrow.
Sheol mocked her in exultation.

Desolate, the goddess, the Queen of Heaven,
fled from the iron portal of Sheol
Desolate and remote, she kept to the heavens,
Remote from the world on her errant star.
The earth knew not the power of her passion.
The world knew not the quickening life,
the life that from her powers sprang.
No fruit came forth from date palm or olive.
Grapes withered on yellowing vines.
No seed would sprout in fields turned by the harrow.
No wheat came up, nor lentils, nor barely.
No bull mounted a cow, and rams knew not their ewes.
No calf was born, no sheep in the sheepfold.
No man had strength at all in his loins.

No maids of the city nor girls of the country
felt at all the pangs of desire.

No man knew a woman.

No woman conceived in all the earth.

All wombs were closed.

Libations poured out roused not Ashtart's favor.

Nor did the savor of fat burned on the altar.

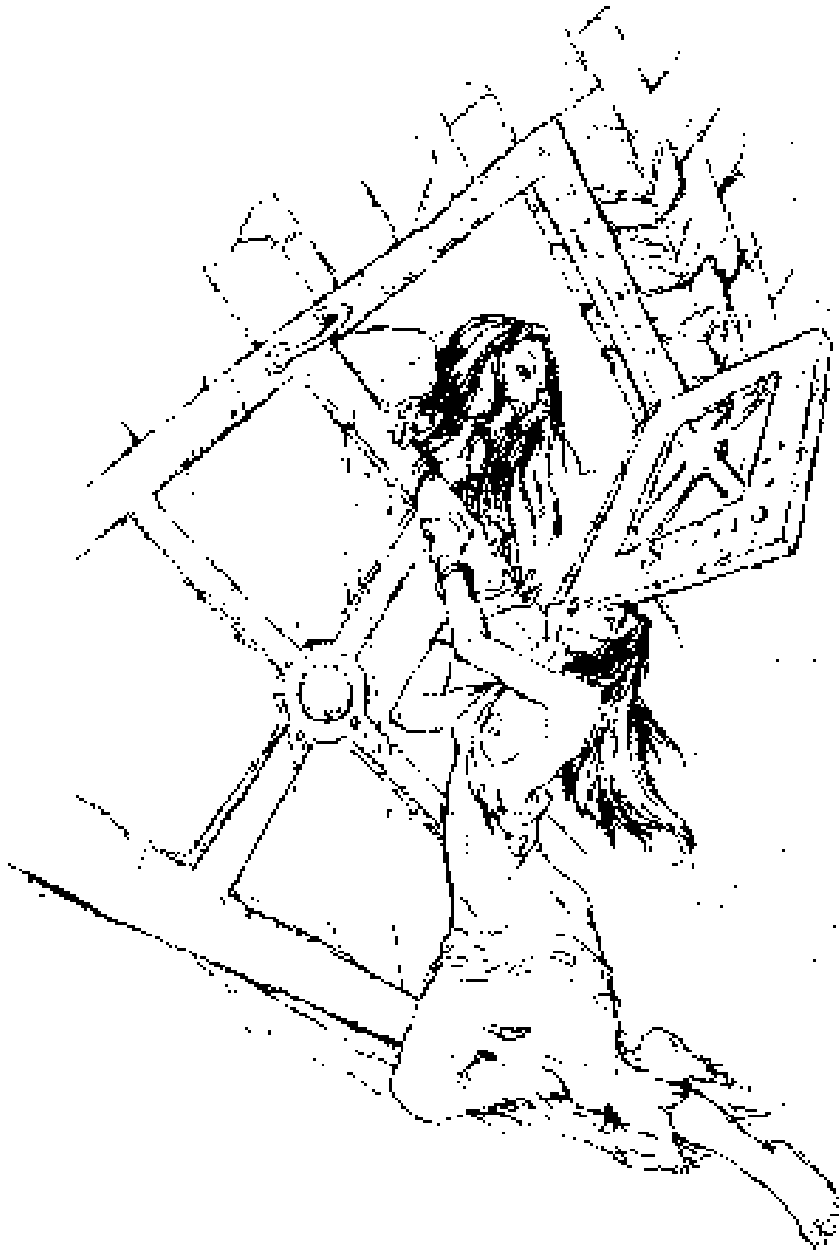
No entreaties were answered.

No burning of incense her countenance could turn.

No answer came from casting the *Urim*.

No answer came from reading the signs.

No answer came from the desolate goddess.



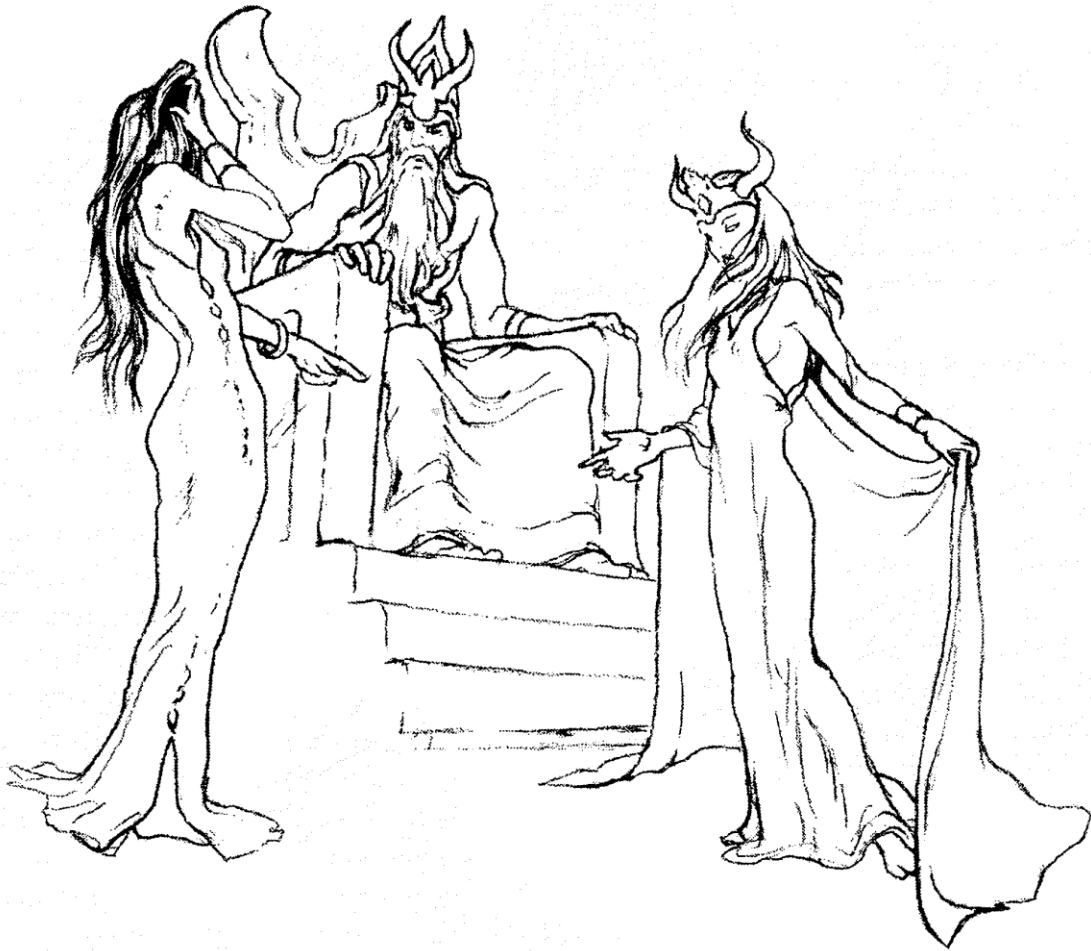
Third Invocation

Extol him, all who dwell in the earth
Praise him, all who dwell in the heavens.
Remote and ancient is he,
Enthroned on the firmament
His beard is gray; his eyes are wise,
Wise with the wisdom of his years.
Quiet is his realm.
Calm and sage he sits, astride the heavens.
Great El, father of all the gods,
Sits serene, aloof from the earth.
Unmoved is he by tears and raging.

Awful is he in his grandeur.
Blinding is his visage,
Bringing death to mortals who see his face.
Like a molten mask is his countenance,

His eyes like molten bronze.
The sound of his voice is like thunder
Like the roaring of the sea.
Fear him ye of unjust heart.
For he weighs all in his scales,
And the wanting are purged in the refiners furnace.

Hear us, great El!
The earth languishes.
Let the cry of our affliction rise up.
Forsake us not, lest we perish.
Will the Father of All let his children wane and wither?
Will not Asherah, divine mother,
intercede for us in our sufferings?
Shall not the Judge restore to us justice?



Part 7: The Judgment

Great El shifts on his golden throne,
Disturbed at the outcry that comes up from the earth.
With a thundering roar, a roar of command,
He dispatches a cherub to summon Ashtart.
The winged beast with the face of a man
Summons Ashtart to the court of El;
to stand before the glittering throne,
before El Shaddai,
before the awful Lord of Creation.

With a voice of great waters
Bull El demanded:
“Why hast thou deserted the earth,
Withholding from life thy vital power?
“The seedling sprouts not. Trees bear no fruit.
The vine withers before its time.
“The beasts mate not.
They know not their seasons
No beast gives birth.
“Men have no strength at all in their loins.
Women feel not the pangs of desire.
No woman conceives.
In all the earth no child is born.
In all the earth life is ebbing.
“Why has Ashtart shirked her office?
Why does she leave the earth to languish?”

Astride the great cherub
the unwilling goddess
rode through the waters above highest heaven
Up through a window,
through which rain poured down,
piercing the shell, the thin beaten shell
the shield of the firmament,
The cherub bore the underworld goddess
into the realm of mighty El,
the realm that lies above the stars.

Ashtart accused her dreaded sister,
Demanded that Sheol release her lover,
Swore to make Tammuz hers forever
Free and immortal in the realm of heaven,
hers forever among the stars.
Then El demanded that Sheol comply,

No answer gave the desolate goddess.
Still as stone she stood before him.
Her breast heaved as she choked back her grief.
Then suddenly, burst it forth from her,
As a flood escapes the river’s channel,
overflowing its banks in a raging tide.
“Tammuz, ah Tammuz, is lost to me!
Lost to me is *Adonai*!
Lost to me forever my Love!”

Then great El questioned her closely,
Heard how Tammuz died in his youth,
Taken by Sheol before his time.
In wrath sent he forth once more a cherub,
Sent it down to the gates of Sheol,
Sent it down to summon the goddess,
Dreaded Sheol, twin of Ashtart.

The winged cherub, with leonine forelegs,
Flanks of a bull and face of a man
Stood at the iron portal of Sheol,
Spake in a voice like the roar of great waters,
By the power of El the gates fell open,
The groaning gates, the iron portal.
By El’s command the mighty angel
brought forth Sheol, bade her ride;
bade her come to the court of El.
That Ashtart might give forth her power,
That the earth might regain its ardor;
That life again in vital power
might flow across the land.

Then Sheol spake; her cold lips were smiling:
“Not so, not so, my inconstant sister.
Tammuz is mine by the power of Chaos,
By mighty oaths from ancient days,
From the days before the world was formed.
“Not so, not so, Mighty Father, ruler of all.
Even thou are bound to the oath,
The oath thou swore at the world’s beginning,
When thou allotted us each our realms.
“Pledged thee to me that all who taste of the dead,
All who taste the fruits of Sheol,
Never again can stray from my keeping.

“Behold: Tammuz has eaten the bread of Sheol.
Tammuz has tasted the food of the dead.
“Tammuz has drunk the wine of the underworld.
He has drunk the draught of death.
He has tasted of the cup of Sheol.
Bound is he to Sheol’s realm.”

Mighty El bowed to Sheol.
The Lord of All was bound to his oath.
Mighty El bowed to Ashtart.
The Judge of All was bound to Justice.
Mighty El delivered his verdict:
Demanded that Sheol yield up fair Tammuz,
Once again to walk in the sun,
Once again to Ashtart’s caresses;

Demanded that Sheol’s claim be honored,
That Ashtart yield up Tammuz,
Once again to walk in Darkness,
Once again to Sheol’s embraces.
For half the year with the Queen of Heaven;
For half the year with the Queen of the Dead.

Thus upon earth came its seasons.
Thus the anemone blooms ever in springtime.
Thus half the year is dry and sere
and void of promise.
And Tammuz ever is loved by each goddess.
Each in her passion
Looks on him and Loves him
. . . and calls him *Adonai*.

VISION QUEST

by
David Sparenberg

Shekhinah
maiden of midnight
mothering side
of the God of life
descend now
to this troubled heart
this garden soul
lift me
as if on eagles’ wings
to wear the fiery
robes of lightning

let my thunder roll

let me sit
in luminal darkness
meditating prayers
in the shapes of light
let me dream
dream beneath the breathing
rainbow
of your love.

There is a place
that place is nowhere
and a time
pierced by eternity
known to pilgrims
as the rest of God.
There
the man of roads and
child of his returning
bow together
in everlasting peace.