2
On Mythographic Reading

Since all forms of spirituality have dried up, modern artists are discovering their true role.

Bram Van Velde

The fall of a leaf and the fall of Lucifer are the same thing... It's marvelous, isn't it? The same thing. But the problem is, how to express that.

Beckett

Mythographic representation

The term mythography is not used here in the ordinary sense of the encyclopaedic study of myths. Rather it indicates a graph or display of the action of mythic capacity, which is an intermediary communicator or isthmus between the cerebral and the emotional; between philosophy and creativity; between the discipline of analysis and the effects of art. A mythograph is a chart of the world of soul, the nearest thing to a chart, because soul, emotion, mood and affective colour are resistant to quantification and yet they record messages to the highest degree significant for our culture. Cultural commentary comes not only from theorists, but from artists and other seismographs of the soul world. Indeed, if a critic and an artist talk to one another, it is only in the world of the mythograph that they can do so. Otherwise their worlds are almost closed one to the other. On the subject of myth, and its closely related 'hieroglyphic' mode of thinking, William Irwin Thompson writes:

Myth in the Platonic tradition [is] a hieroglyphic mode of thought whereby the Archetypal forms and the sensations of the physical
plane come together in a mode of consciousness in which the ego becomes empty to be filled with the Daimon. Since the root-ideas of myth are at a deep and basic level of consciousness, they are not always expressed in day-to-day casual descriptions, but when a person sinks into an imaginative reverie to write a book, or to synthesize the factual results of research, then he or she is likely to move into a more mythopoeic form of narrative, for even science can be a form of storytelling.¹

I would go further and say even the mythic narrative is only one step towards the cessation of linear social coding; the narrative of soul being the last of the great illusions, it persists after literalism is already long abandoned; but in the end even soul, daimon, will not do. It is this extreme which Beckett’s works seek to address: occupying the soul world, they nevertheless constantly press on its outer limits. For as long as the mythic plane is in operation, soul is the denizen, the identifiable witnessing consciousness. The ego takes second place to the daimonic self or soul, and from this apparent distinction in the mythic mode, there arises what Thompson calls the relationship with the spiritual twin:

each one ‘lives the other’s death, dies by the other’s life’, in the esoteric words of Heracleitus. […] Like the twin souls of Gnostic mythology, when one half of the soul is incarnate, the other half remains above. […] What is going on in all this religious mumbo-jumbo that is so foreign to the positivism of contemporary scholarship is a re-enactment of the history of the soul before the beginning of terrestrial evolution. The ritual of initiation in the bardo realm is just such a re-enactment which seeks to awaken the deeper memory of the soul and thus enable the initiate to become enlightened to the truth of existence. To remember, [he] must overcome the racial amnesia, the illusory history which locks him into a local time and place.²

This condition in which the witness feels locked in a local time and place is the ‘hypnosis of positivism’ identified by the Verticalist Manifesto³; and alike the locked-in state of Beckett’s jar/cylinder/pile of earth/urn. It is experienced mythically as immolation of soul. The entire humanities is an immolation edifice in which the soul is trapped. Beckett illustrated this situation on all levels: mind/self, immolated in skull; soul immolated in body weight and limits; collective soul immolated in the dark difficulty of a hypnotic but illusion-ridden world-picture that