The monstrous Satan languishing in Dante’s Ninth Circle of Hell and Milton’s disgraced rebel angel may be among the most familiar forms given to Lucifer in Western culture, but from the eighteenth century onwards, a more Promethean figure emerged, whom many Romantic poets, artists and authors sought to redeem. The phenomenon of “Literary” or “Romantic Satanism” was the product of sociocultural ferment throughout the “long eighteenth century” and the cultural impact of the French revolution.

This Promethean Lucifer lay at the heart of much of the thought of visionary occult author Joséphin Péladan (1858-1918), who reinterpreted Scripture, conflating it with Platonic thought and ancient theogonies to produce his own syncretic cosmology in which it is the task of humanity to redeem and liberate a slandered and misunderstood Light-bringer along with his offspring.

While very much in the spirit of his time, Péladan’s perspective clearly diverges from the Romantic Satanism and the heroic, revolutionary Lucifer of many of his contemporaries. He acknowledges that Lucifer and his angels sinned, but considers it to have been an error “made out of love,” going so far as to deny the existence of evil itself. He could fathom neither the concept of original sin as an immutable curse, nor the eternal condemnation of Satan or mankind. This preoccupation is central to his work, resting on his conviction that the true cause of the Fall was the misguided love of the creator-angels for their human creations. Believing that the great thinkers and artists of history were descendants of the fallen angels, Péladan’s approach is one of heartfelt Christian compassion and faith in liberation through repentance, drawing on diverse sources including apocryphal Scripture and Aeschylean drama to flesh out his theory.

This paper untangles the complex, and often misperceived web of Péladan’s complex reimagining of a Promethean Lucifer as forefather of the arts and, by extension, his influence on the artists of the Salons de la Rose + Croix as well as other authors and occultists of his time.

Joséphin Péladan (1858-1918) is known for his vast, yet obscure oeuvre of novels and esoteric tracts, as well as for masterminding the recently rediscovered Salons de la Rose+Croix that by turns bemused and delighted art aficionados of
the Parisian Belle Epoque. Péladan’s efforts were part of a grand plan that, for all of its peculiarities, possesses a cohesiveness and coherence that has been hitherto poorly understood. It rests on a expansive, but cogent cosmology that draws heavily on the intellectual legacy of Illuminism, the notion of philosophical history, and a re-examination of Scripture, Greek and Near Eastern mythology, Orphism, Gnosticism, and ancient Greek drama. From this myriad complex emerges a surprisingly consistent Promethean outlook according to which reintegration with the divine is possible within the mortal lifespan, and must be achieved by human creativity alone. In this paper, I examine some key examples of these influences and their manifestation in Péladan’s thought, to demonstrate the cohesive nature of his cosmology. While by no means exhaustive, this discussion rests on more extensive research, and is intended to clarify aspects of his worldview, output, and legacy. The methodology applied derives primarily from the field of comparative literature and myth studies, while incorporating intellectual and historical context on an as-needed basis.

Péladan’s motivations stem from a preoccupation with the philosophical and theological problem of theodicy, also known as “the problem of evil.” Codified within early Christian and later scholastic thought, it is a paradox that has concerned thinkers since the pre-Socratics: if God is omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent, then evil cannot exist without negating one or other of these divine qualities. Doing so calls God’s divine nature into question. In his manifesto on the philosophy of art, *L’Art idéaliste et mystique*, Péladan is clear as to its significance:

[There are] three quests for God, three religious modes. [...You should p]erceive ‘religion’ as [that which] connects the creature to the Creator: Science, which seeks

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1 Between 1892 and 1897 Péladan masterminded the organisation of six Salons de la Rose + Croix in Paris, specialising in Symbolist art, with the express aim of inspiring and rejuvenating society through art.


The Theodicy of Art: Joséphin Péladan’s Promethean Lucifer

God through Reality. Art, which seeks God through Beauty. Theodicy, which seeks God through Thought.⁵

Of these three paths, Péladan considered the last to be superior, and the resolution of the problem of theodicy to be paramount for understanding the nature of being: “all the categories of understanding [are] subdivisions of a unique science: theodicy.”⁶ By resolving this theological conundrum, Péladan believed he could unlock the power of the human spirit to reach reintegration with the divine. To achieve this, he reinterpreted Scripture, the bedrock of faith, through two main lenses: allegorical readings, and using ancient Greek thought as the ultimate validation of his interpretations. This led him to recast the figures of Genesis and the events of the Fall. To get around the existence of evil, Péladan’s solution was to redeem the devil himself. I have discussed Péladan’s theological and ontological reasoning elsewhere;⁷ therefore in this discussion I shall focus on the character and sources upon which he drew in his reconceptualisation of Lucifer and demonstrate the development of Péladan’s worldview.

Redeeming the devil

The monstrous Satan languishing in Dante’s (1265-1321) Ninth Circle of Hell and Milton’s (1608-1674) disgraced rebel angel may be significant touchstones for the visualisation of Lucifer in Western culture, but from the eighteenth century onwards, a more Promethean figure emerged, whom many Romantic poets, artists and authors sought to redeem. The phenomenon of “Literary” or “Romantic Satanism” was the product of sociocultural ferment throughout the “long eighteenth century” and the cultural impact of the French revolution. Literary Satanism has been described as a process of rehabilitation and justification of Lucifer, recasting him as a figure of relevance following the Enlightenment dismissal of religion. This reappraisal affected the use and character of the myth whose evolution may be traced through art and literature throughout the nineteenth century⁸. This literary trend carried over into France where Satanism became a stock feature of the French occult milieu as well as of Decadent literature.⁹

⁹ Observant readers will note that one of the most recent and acclaimed studies of this topic, Per
Unlike his Decadent contemporaries, Péladan was concerned with the ontological makeup and theological implications of the devil, as he could fathom neither the concept of original sin as an immutable curse, nor the eternal condemnation of Satan or mankind. This preoccupation is central to his work, resting on his conviction that the true cause of the Fall was misguided love:

I once believed that Satan, [...] privy to the mysteries in relation to humanity, was moved by senseless ambition: to intervene in mortal evolution and thus deprive the second divine personage [Jesus] of the unspeakable effort of mediation. May Satan forgive me for having attributed to him such a blasphemous plan, so unworthy of his sublime spirit. This prince of intelligence could never be obscured on this point. [...] No, Satan and his angels fell because of the mirage of their work; these artists of creation were seduced by their own handiwork. [...] Aeschylus has revealed their sublime guilt and damnation.10

The reference to Aeschylus (523 BC – 426 BC) is significant, and I shall return to it presently. However, first it is worth exploring the most overt expressions of Péladan’s “sympathy for the devil”. He supported his Luciferian perspective with theological sources, and a key example is found in a prefatory note entitled “To the Devil,” in the front matter of Comment on devient artiste. Though lengthy, I reproduce a large excerpt here as it provides significant insight into Péladan’s thought and impassioned tone:

Satan, Lucifer – Demon, Devil, I salute you with my pity. [...] our crime [...] is not one that man can judge. [...] our damnation [...] is not something man can conceive. [...] ou were the most perfect of created spirits: and that is enough for me [...] to approach you with compassion. [...] I have [...] dreamed of clearing the mountain of calumny that humanity has heaped on your name; and three lines from the Areopagite have sufficed to render you guilty, moving me to pity without frightening me. [...] Poor Lucifer, man has attributed to you [...] all his stupidity. [...] When Christianity was founded on pagan ruins, there was such a habit of pantheist thought, and a conception of spiritomorphism of nature, that the first Fathers [...] attributed to devilry every superstition that was too hard to explain, and you inherited a discredited paganism; the lyricism and comedy of the middle ages drew you into a caricature. [...] Now you are forgotten: science, little by little, is discovering illness where for four hundred years they saw your claws. [...] And I, a lucid Platonist and fervent Catholic, I visit you in my thoughts, as it is said in the works...
of mercy, imprisoned spirit, punished spirit; and as I feel the daemonic blood palpitate within me, I try to clean your face of the mud that human wickedness has thrown there. [...] If you are, as I believe, a great sinner, but lucid in your atonement, then receive the consolation of my thought and the refreshment of my charity. [...] I respect you in your misfortune, as I admire the splendour of your origins. The Bené-Oelohim were the sons of your will and I would like to believe that I am descended from them, I, the confused élan of the most humble, to the grandest, and to the most unlucky of the same race.11

Péladan’s perspective clearly diverges from the Romantic Satanism of contemporary poets and the heroic, revolutionary Lucifer. He acknowledges that Lucifer and his angels sinned, but his approach is one of heartfelt Christian compassion and faith in liberation through repentance. Hence they were condemned, literally to enact the role of the eternal Light-Bringers of mankind: “Their crime surpasses our understanding, but it was committed out of love for us, they are lost, but they are in the light. We should pity them, and even love them a little, but never seek them out.” 12 Péladan explains this further in an interlude entitled “Arcanum of Lucifer, or of Birth” [emphasis mine]:

I deny demonology as it is taught in the seminaries [...] based on my faith in a Greek, and an Orthodox too: my authority, oh naïve curates, is His Majesty Saint Dionysius the Areopagite.13 ‘Absolute evil does not exist; evil is an accident of goodness.’ Demons are not essentially evil, they have lost angelic goodness, but they maintain their natural forces. [...] Evil is not among the demons in the form of evil, but as a defect and lack of perfection in their attributes. St. Thomas Aquinas [says]: ‘The demon wants to obtain this similarity with God that comes from grace by virtue of its nature, and not with divine help.’ Onto this serious and healthy notion of demons [as] obscured angels, I have grafted the occult idea of involution and evolution; there are here below two series: beings who, born of the earth, tend to rise, and others, born of the spirit, for whom earthly life is a fall and an expiation of some mysterious crime of the beyond.14

Péladan’s thinking in these passages reflects a variety of influences deriving from Neoplatonic thought, pseudo-Dionysius (late 5th-early 6th century BC) and St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) on the nature of evil, whereby it is

11 Péladan, Comment on devient artiste, xi – xiii; cf. Istar, 41-46. Compare to Lévi: “Let us affirm categorically, [...] that as a superior personality and power Satan does not exist. He is the personification of all errors, perversities, and consequently of all weaknesses. If God may be defined as He Who exists of necessity, may we not define His antagonist and enemy as necessarily he who does not exist at all? [...] Erring spirits are good to the extent of their participation in being and in truth.” Lévi, Transcendental Magic, trans. A.E. Waite (London: Redway, 1896; Rider & Co.,1972), 310.
12 Péladan, Istar, 44, 257, 261-262.
14 Péladan, Comment on devient artiste, 41.
distinguished from the notion of “not-good,” or accidental error. It furthermore reflects a Platonic concept that “no one does wrong voluntarily (or knowingly, or intentionally)” – echoed in Péladan’s perspective of evil as inadvertent error. He distinguishes between purely malevolent forces as depicted by the medieval imagination and the Platonic conception of daemons as mediators between the divine and natural realms.

The children of Satan

A further influence on Péladan is the apocryphal Book of Enoch (1 Enoch); a key source for the story of the angelic fall into matter and subsequent instruction of humanity in all manner of arts and sciences. Though the corrupting influence of the fallen angels and their procreation with human women is echoed in Genesis 6:1-5 and the Book of Jubilees, the instruction motif is limited to 1 Enoch and other rabbinical sources. However, neither Biblical nor Enochian sources make explicit reference to the survival of the entities known as the Nephilim, progeny of the fallen angels with human women, also known as the Bené Elohim, or Sons of God, after Noah’s Flood; yet the survival of the fallen and their offspring is of critical importance within what I have termed Péladan’s legendarium. This concept appears to originate in the Zohar, a foundational thirteenth century text of the Jewish Kabbalistic tradition.

Péladan avidly studied both the Zohar and other related material, having been introduced to it at a young age by his brother Adrien Péladan (1844-1885). He

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19 Chaitow, Redemption through the Arts, 51.
had no interest in reading Hebrew, being more interested in principles and ideas than permutations of letters or exegetical techniques. It is however, possible to trace the aspects of Talmudic lore that he appears to have cherry-picked to flesh out his cosmology.\(^{22}\)

Although it has been suggested that Philo (c.25 BC – c. 50 CE),\(^{23}\) or possibly Valentinian Gnosticism were key influences on Pédalan’s recasting of fallen angels, my research findings have suggested that despite the undoubted effect of multiple sources on his thinking, Pédalan’s primary influence derives directly from Plato (c. 426-c.347 BC) and to a lesser degree, Aeschylus.\(^{24}\) Pédalan confirms this in his 1888 novel *Istar*, where he carefully correlates the concordances between Plato’s *Symposium* and the *Book of Enoch* to validate his theories on the Fall, the androgyn, and the nature of daemons, concluding: “Aristophanes and Enoch are saying the same thing,” while noting his own previous references to the same topic.

Further cross-referencing across Pédalan’s oeuvre leaves little doubt as to this conclusion,\(^ {25}\) and one prime example is found in his use of ideas from Plato’s *Cratylus* (early 4\(^{th}\) century BC):

> nian Talmud, Taanit 20a; Midrash Numbers Rabbah 20:14.


[Hesiod] says of [the golden race]: ‘But since Fate has covered up this race. They are called holy spirits under the earth, [...] averters of evil, guardians of mortal men.’ [...] The golden race was [...] good and beautiful. [...] He further says we are the iron race. [...] Because they were wise and knowing (δαήμονες) he called them spirits (δαήμονες) and in the old form of our language the two words are the same.26

Socrates (470 BC – 399 BC) later explains the origins of the word “hero,” from eros, or love: “they were all born because a god fell in love with a mortal woman, or a mortal man with a goddess, [...] it is either for this reason they are called heroes, or because they were wise and clever ...”27 Péladan’s description of Lucifer’s progeny reflects these characteristics, as beautiful, compassionate, and wise teachers– and importantly, lovers of humanity.

Other scholars have also noted Péladan’s preoccupation with the nature of daemons, angels, and human ontology. As noted by French scholar Nelly Emont:

The spirits of those beings survived the deluge, and … they would intervene in men’s affairs [...] until the end of time. These beings that Péladan named ‘daimons,’ [...] intermediaries between God and man, are the ‘obscure offspring of angelic descent.’ [...] Péladan acted and spoke as if [...] he himself were one of those daimons who [...] intervene among men.28

These observations are borne out in Péladan’s “Arcanum of Lucifer,” a typical example of the tight cross-referencing between his theoretical and fictional work:

True to the Bereschit [Genesis] and to the sepher of Enoch, in the genius of a Plato, of a Dante, of a Wagner, I see a daimonic descent. [...] This is] the conflict of angelic nature enclosed within the human condition. I believe, along with Pythagoras and Plato, that the genius is never a man, but a demon, [...] an intermediary being between the spiritual and the earthly hierarchy: and it would take a papal bull, ex cathedra, to change my opinion.

‘The enchanters, the egregores of all times, of all lands, mages, saints, artists, poets, aristes, mystagogues, are all the obscured or shining offspring of angelic descent.’29

In this excerpt Péladan clearly states his sources, appearing to reflect the earlier Platonic reference on the “golden race” that guides humanity. This is not mere conjecture; there are many instances across the breadth of Péladan’s oeuvre where he openly states that mythical deities and significant historical thinkers and

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26 Plato, Cratylius, 397e – 398a, citing Hesiod, Works and Days, 122 ff.
27 Plato, Cratylius, 398b – 398e.
29 Sepher’ means book. Péladan frequently uses the word ‘ariste,’ from the Greek ἀριστός, meaning excellent or outstanding. Péladan, Comment on devient artiste, xiii, citing Istar, 41.
teachers are self-aware incarnations of the Oelohites—his term for the offspring of Lucifer. They are charged with guarding and leading humanity towards self-knowledge and spiritual awakening by discovering their own divine nature. To wit, he uses the names of ancient deities, heroes, and angels interchangeably, openly identifying them as avatars of the Oelohites. Thus, according to Péladan’s reinterpretation of ancient narratives, the myths and symbols of ancient civilisations represented timeless vessels of this ancient knowledge, placed by the Oelohites or their avatars, and holding the power to transform human consciousness across the centuries because they were the purest, most archetypal representations of the World of Ideas. By contemplating and deciphering their content, humanity could discover its true origins and potential, and thus ascend the spiritual ladder towards reintegration. This reflects the Platonic notion that true art (in the form of complex symbols) should impart knowledge of the immutable, mind-independent world of ideas beyond the physical world.30

These points are summarised in another of Péladan’s forewords, entitled “to the Grandmothers:”

I have manifested your glory, oh Ereckian; by virtue of my art. [...] Oh Daemons, I have proclaimed and defended your precedence, I have thought of it night and day. [...] As a poet, I have spoken of the night of love when two hundred angels fell into the ecstatic mortal bosom. I have shone the light upon you, Satan, great and guilty one. That your heart—daemonic race, race of the tiara and the lyre, will support my effort for it to beat faithfully. That your heart—filled with such temerity—should counsel, comfort, and enlighten me. The church has pronounced upon you, daemons, words of nothingness, words that kill and bury you. But [...] by the name and the sign that will save the world: in the name of the Grail, you condemned angel, you spirit weeping with repentance, rise up and march, convert or confound mortals who are stuck in reality. I have done the work of restoration, [...] through me several spirits will see God—so that he is forgiven by my race.31

“The Ereckian” refers to a woman from the city of Uruk. Péladan identifies her as “the first woman,” created at the moment of the rending of the primordial androgyne, which according to Péladan was the creation of the angels at God’s behest. The “tiara” may well be a reference to Oannes and the fish-headed headdress worn by priests in ancient Assyria,32 while the “lyre” is a direct

30 Since antiquity, Platonic scholars, aestheticians and philosophers have made much of Plato’s open criticism of imitative art, which he considered a poor copy of already imperfect reflections from the World of Ideas. Though he never openly stated a positive view of art “based on the intuitive grasp of forms supposedly available only to philosophers, [...] philosophical art,” such a position has been inferred by many Platonic scholars, and it is clear that this was also Péladan’s interpretation. For a discussion of this issue, see Tom Rockmore, Art and Truth After Plato (Chicago; London: Chicago University Press, 2013), 2-5.

31 Péladan, Fée, 2-3; idem., Istar, 315-6.

reference to Orpheus. Both figures are significant in Péladan’s cosmology, as I have discussed elsewhere. Péladan reiterates his contempt for the official Church doctrine regarding the fallen angels, citing the Grail, rather than the cross, as the sign of salvation, while startlingly, in the final lines, he appears to be directing a veiled accusation toward God himself.

The explanation for this lies in Péladan’s revision of Genesis. According to Péladan, the Fall was caused by a misguided act of love, as the creator-angels sought to share the divine mysteries with their human creations. This led to the rending of the androgyne, and the two new, incomplete beings were placed within matter. Péladan offers a complex, but coherent ontological explanation on the nature of angelic and material hypostasis in relation to temporality as part of his reasoning. Man and woman each received part of the soul of the original androgyne, and spiritual ascension could only be achieved through self-realisation and awakening to their divine legacy, followed by reunification with each other. The creator-angels were eternally bound to their creations, charged with leading them to this awakening – and the angels would only achieve their own reintegration with the divine when humanity had fully evolved. Thus, angels and humans became each other’s saviours. This is the core narrative within Istar, which relates the story of how the Oelobites came to be given this mission: they must mate with and be absorbed within the new human race so as to imbue it with self-knowledge. Thus, the “original sin” – the angelic desire to raise the primordial androgyne to the level of the angels – is transmuted into a divine duty in a cruelly ironic twist which nonetheless allows for liberation and reintegration. Thus, Péladan explains, the intermixing of angels and humans led to the evolution of those “daemons” in human form who inherited divine genius, and became the “race of heroes,” the “mages and mystagogues and artists” who, as descendants of angels, would lead humanity back to heaven.

**Sympathy for the devil**

Péladan’s addresses to Lucifer are coloured by an intense combination of righteous indignation and compassion. Nowhere does he challenge the perception that the archangel erred, or the divine judgement leading to Lucifer’s downfall. Yet Péladan neither idealised nor idolised Lucifer. He pitied him.

Péladan’s strong Catholic faith and disdain for what he perceived as a corrupt and weakened church are significant here; he chose to interpret the spirit, and not the letter of Catholic doctrine. In “To the Devil” where he refers to himself as “a lucid Platonist and a fervent Catholic,” he speaks of “the works of mercy,” and offers Lucifer “the consolation of [his] thought and the refreshment of [his] charity.” Deriving from the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas, the “Works of

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33 Chaitow, “Mages and Fairies,” 205.
34 _op. cit._ n. 10.
Mercy” are a central Catholic duty, consisting of a series of “Corporal” and “Spiritual” works that include the admonitions “To counsel, reprove, console, to pardon, forbear, and to pray.”35 Péladan confirms this interpretation: “St. Dionysus and St. Thomas, [...t]hese Fathers of the Church authorise me.”36 The rules of his Rosicrucian order further reflect these principles of charity.37 Hence, the compassionate dedications and constant efforts to restore Lucifer’s “glory” appear to result from Péladan’s sense of Catholic duty towards an entity that he believed responsible for the presence of beauty in the world. He appears to confirm this directly:

A contemporary mystic [...] had the idea of saying an ‘Ave’ for Satan morning and night. [...] In a moment when the troubled mystic believed himself to have sinned, he consulted Pere Alta: ‘Go in peace,’ said the Dominican, ‘your only sin was to think yourself capable of what even God cannot do.’38

We have ascertained that Péladan believed himself a descendant of this “daemonic” race, and identified with the suffering of the Oelohites. In his elegy to Lucifer he compares himself directly with the fallen archangel,39 and it is not inconceivable that his apparent grievance against God relates to his bitterness towards a society that relentlessly ridiculed him while he believed that he was working for its salvation.

Hence, Péladan’s line about forgiving God in the earlier excerpt may reflect the suffering that he experienced and imagined for all kindred “daemonic” souls moving through mortal existence in never-ending cycles of death and rebirth, with the sole purpose of raising the consciousness of mankind so that they themselves might be liberated. This appears to be the nucleus of Péladan’s own theodicy. It reflects the Neoplatonic soteriological concept of epistrophe, or reversion of the soul to its origins.40 Péladan went so far as to develop methods for this process, as I have discussed in other studies.41 The phrase “convert or confound mortals who are stuck in reality” may reflect a further allusion to Plato’s Theory of Forms, according to which material reality is a poor, illusory and inconstant

35 “[W]e reckon seven spiritual alms, namely, to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to comfort the sorrowful, to reprove the sinner, to forgive injuries, to bear with those who trouble and annoy us, and to pray for all, which are all contained in the following verse: ‘To counsel, reprove, console, to pardon, forbear, and to pray,’ yet so that counsel includes both advice and instruction.” Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 2nd edn (N.p.: New Advent, 1920), Web version. Accessed 27 Oct. 2013. II – II, Q. 31, A 2.
36 Péladan, *Comment on devient artiste*, 41.
39 Péladan, *Comment on devient artiste*, xi.
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imitation of pure, immutable reality which lies beyond the sensory world. For Péladan, only carefully designed symbols can offer a glimpse of the World of Ideas, and in his aesthetic manifesto he offers detailed explanations of how such symbolism works.42

The Prométhéide

Aspects of the preceding excerpts demonstrate Péladan’s advocacy of sacrifice and martyrdom as the path to ascension. This should come as no surprise given his Catholic background, but Péladan did not subscribe to the idea that pain on earth would be rewarded in the afterlife. Crucially, he saw suffering as an inevitable part of the evolutionary process with spiritual rewards that could be reaped during the mortal lifespan, making sacrifice an ultimately idealistic act. This is further clarified in Péladan’s Promethean trilogy of plays. In an excerpt cited earlier, Péladan refers to Aeschylus as having “revealed [the] sublime guilt and damnation” of Satan and his angels, in direct reference to the lost Promethean trilogy of Aeschylus which Péladan rewrote, partially based on the fragments of Prometheus Unbound.43

Mimicking the form of Grecian tragedy, the trilogy opens with a conflict between the Olympian gods and Prometheus, as Zeus has decided to destroy humanity, perceived by the Olympians as an ‘ephemeral’ abomination. Only Prometheus insists on their salvation. Following the classical myth, when Zeus refuses to relent, Prometheus steals the sacred fire, and gives humanity knowledge of the sciences and the arts. In punishment, Zeus has Prometheus chained to the summit of the Caucasus, where for a millenium he endures the daily agony of an eagle ripping out his liver.44

For Péladan the play becomes a vehicle for his theological and philosophical ideology. He overtly conflates the Christian God and Zeus, though the latter is neither wise nor benevolent. Prometheus is clearly an avatar of Lucifer, while Athena’s initial demeanour and tone reflects the Archangel Michael from Istar.45 Prometheus openly disputes Zeus’ omnipotence, insisting that Fate and “the true God” (uncreated Being) are the sources of life and the mysteries. In the opening

42 Péladan, L’art idéaliste et mystique, passim.
43 Péladan, La Prométhéeide (Paris: Chamuel, 1895). Written for his Theatre de la Rose+Croix, it was never performed. See Léonce Comte De Larmandie, L’entr’acte idéale: Histoire de la Rose-Croix (Paris: Chacornac, 1903), 85. On the Aeschylean Prometheia and their reconstruction see Alan Sommerstein, Aeschylean Tragedy (Bari: Levante, 1996; London: Duckworth, 2010).
45 Péladan confirms these concordances in Istar, 42.
The scene, Prometheus laments, wondering what became of humanity during his bondage:

I know nothing of men, of their new generations
A thousand years ago, the arts were born
Temples were raised; an army of statues must have appeared
and the lyre vibrated in the hands of the Ephemerals,
creators in their own right, similar to the Gods!46

Hermes appears with an offer of liberation if Prometheus repents before Zeus. Human beings have evolved so much that the Olympians no longer intend to destroy them, but the humans now need guidance since Prometheus revealed the forbidden mysteries. Prometheus angrily replies that he will only assist if Zeus asks his forgiveness—possibly reflecting Péladan’s curious line regarding “forgiving God” cited earlier.

In the next scene Hercules expresses his compassion and admiration for Prometheus, naming him “God of Spirit.”47 He blackmarks Zeus into freeing Prometheus, and Athena reveals that Zeus and the other Olympians concede their error after observing the wondrous evolution and creativity of mankind:

Olympus pales before the temples [they have built...]. My statues are more beautiful than I am! [...] I love only my people and my city [...] now I understand the affection of mankind.48

In the final scene, Zeus, Athena, and Hermes beg Prometheus’ forgiveness, promising him immortality and a place on Olympus in recompense. He refuses, stating that in the eyes of gods and men he is still seen as a rebel and a transgressor (reflecting Péladan’s perception of the mistreatment of Lucifer):

PROMETHEUS: Go, tell the priests in all the temples:
When a man of the spirit should appear,
with audacity, genius, goodness,
creative or heroic, faithful or cultured,
he belongs to Prometheus!
I have revealed the beautiful mystery to all
but I will teach none but the most exceptional of humans [...] There is but one mystery [...] that of pain!
Through it, man and Daemon may ascend
higher than Zeus, higher than Fate,
to that One God who created us all [...] Two Fates rule the universe:
One is called Order;

47 Péladan, *Prométhéide*, 131,
she preserves, moderates, utilises, 
and rules the present, 
the other is called Progress, 
she dares, she advances, she discovers, she commands the future. 
Your father [Zeus] incarnates the first, I manifest the other. 
I am the individual, I am motion; 
He is the crowd, he is the repose within power. 
I surpassed my rights, I advanced too far. 
Zeus punished me, but he punished me too much; 
and today he had to repent [...] 
SUFFER FOR JUSTICE!49

The reference to the Fates governing the gods probably derives from Hesiod via Plato, given Péladan’s many references to Platonic thought.50 Throughout the play, Zeus and Prometheus, respectively representing order and progress, are adversarial forces that reach an uncomfortable mutual understanding at the end. Péladan depicts divine creation and human creativity as a result of the conflict between them, encompassing the metaphysical question of stasis versus life-giving motion.51 The reference to Prometheus as “God of Spirit” echoes Péladan’s designation of Lucifer as “Prince of Intelligence” noted earlier and reflected in his focus on the cultivation of intelligence in his theoretical treatises. Prometheus’ patronage of the arts reflects Hesiod, Aeschylus, the Enochian attribution of the arts to angelic intervention, and Péladan’s theory of gifted individuals as daemonic progeny.

In sum, Péladan’s cosmology is an agglomeration of a broad spectrum of influences, synthesised to satisfy both his metaphysical concerns and his Catholic faith by overlaying elements of Luciferian mythology onto Platonic and Neoplatonic metaphysics, affording apocryphal scripture and Classical philosophy equal weight within his cosmological theorem.

The language of myth and symbol that he uses, formed the main conceptual palette through which Péladan and the artists he inspired sought to stimulate a new awakening among their contemporaries. It seems that his cosmology in its entirety reflects the Platonic theory of ideas and forms, as can be demonstrated by a comparative reading of his treatises on the philosophy of art alongside the material presented here. The dynamics of that framework are based on the relationship between the “World of Ideas” and the intelligible world, respectively corresponding to the macrocosm and the world that Péladan saw refracted through his intricate conceptual matrix, built on an interpretation of

49 Péladan, Prométhéide, 140-141.
51 On the unmoved mover (οὐ κινούμενον κίνην) and Aristotelian metaphysics see Michael Frede & David Charles (eds.), Aristotle’s Metaphysics (Lambda: Symposium Aristotelicum; Oxford: Clarendon, 2000).
Platonic thought that he believed could somehow redeem the devil, and with him, angels, humans, and God himself.

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