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PROMETHEUS UNWOUND



by Miles Mathis

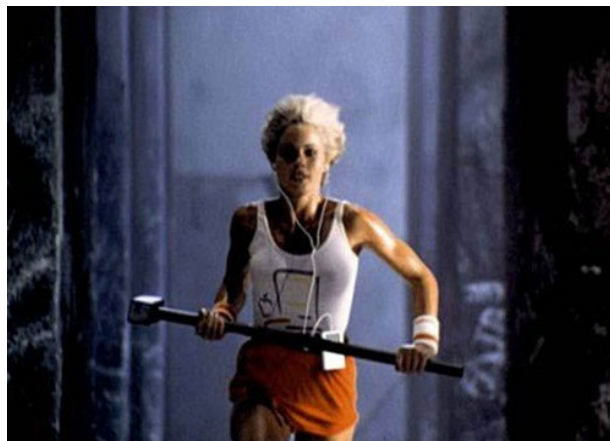
I'll start this critique of the movie *Prometheus* with some history: a bit of classical mythology, and my own history of watching films. As many know, Prometheus is a character in Hesiod's *Theogony*, a very old collection of Greek myths from before 700 BC. That's roughly in the same period as Homer, who is thought to have lived near the end of the first millennium before Christ. In other words, the *Odyssey* is thought to have been written a couple of hundred years before the *Theogony*, and both about 3,000 years ago.

Prometheus was a Titan of the second generation, which means he was a major god, older—though, as it turns out, less powerful—than the Olympians like Zeus and Apollo. The name Prometheus means “forethinker,” and Prometheus was famed for his ability to see farther, figuratively, than others. He is most famous for giving fire to man, despite being banned from doing so by the Olympians. In this way, the Titans can be seen as less jealous and less controlling of mortals than the Olympians, who wished to keep us down. I should also point out that in this the Olympians were like Christian, Islamic, and other contemporary gods, who also wished to withhold science and technology from us. Just as Zeus forbade fire to us, Yahweh forbade the apple on the tree of knowledge—both of which could be interpreted as science.



As punishment for stealing fire and giving it to us, Prometheus was sentenced by Zeus to be chained to a high rock, where a great eagle would come daily to feed upon his liver. In some versions of the myth, he is at last rescued by Hercules.

Now for my own history. I have no prejudice against Ridley Scott or against sci-fi movies, although some might think I would. I liked *Alien* and *Blade Runner*, and have seen them both many times. I liked the first three *Star Wars*, and I even liked the *Alien* sequels. I am not a big fan of James Cameron, but I think *Aliens* is his least obnoxious movie, and I have seen it several times. Likewise for *Alien3* and *Alien Resurrection*: not as good as *Alien*, but entertaining. In fact, it was these positive experiences that led me to agree to see *Prometheus* today. So you could say I had a lingering **positive** prejudice, if anything. I wanted this film to be good, and thought there was a slim chance it might be.



I say slim chance because I am not completely naïve. I also have a memory. For a start, I remember that Scott did the Apple Macintosh ad (above) in 1984, *after* becoming an A-list director. What sort of “artist” sells out so blatantly and so early, when he doesn't even need the money? Of course my distaste for this may be colored by later events, where Steve Jobs joined Bill Gates as a pusher of spy technology for the CIA (see the iPad and iPhone's secret GPS data storing). But I don't think so. I have always had a strong distaste for advertising, and the more high-profile it is, the more I hate it.

I also remember *Legend*, which despite some pretty unicorns, a very pretty Mia Sara, and an amazing Satan played by Tim Curry, was mainly a mess. I remember *Gladiator*, a highly overrated movie with a bad script which would have crumbled without Russell Crowe. I remember *Robin Hood*, a movie with an even worse script that not even Crowe could prop up. And I remember the debacle which was *Tristan and Isolde*, which Scott worked on for years before unloading it on director Kevin Reynolds.

All these recent films of Scott pointed directly at the trainwreck that is *Prometheus*, but I chose to ignore the signs. I say trainwreck, but it is actually much worse than that. I struggle to pin down the right adjective. Watching *Prometheus* is like having an eagle eat your liver for 124 minutes, but without knowing which god's justice is being done by your pain. If Zeus had just let me know why I was being so punished, it might have made it easier to bear.

Prometheus is very much worse than Scott's previous worst movie (which is probably *Tristan*), but that awfulness cannot really be conveyed with stars or rotten tomatoes. It has now gone past ratable quantities or qualities like script, casting, plot, direction, acting, editing, score, and so on. To be honest, I think the adjective I want here is "evil," though I know that will seem too strong for almost everyone. It will shock many and offend others. But those who tend to be shocked or offended by my use of such an adjective for a blockbuster film should be reminded immediately of two things: 1) Scott uses the crucifix in very obvious ways in this film, opening himself up to a moral critique; 2) as I showed above, the title "Prometheus" also allows for a moral interpretation. I would say it almost begs a moral critique. Not only do Scott and 21st Century Fox stoop to selling this film as an answer to eternal questions—which is enough to justify any kind of moral critique—but Scott's use of the Prometheus myth almost requires that any serious critique of the movie must address good and evil. If that is true, and we admit the existence of good and evil, then the movie itself is not outside those categories. If there is good and evil, then the film must be good or evil or somewhere in between.

Let me clarify that. I am not a Christian, and I have no intention of analyzing the movie in those terms. But Christianity did not invent good and evil. Genesis simply codified once again a dichotomy that had been felt by humans from the beginning. This is implicit in every scene in the film, and so there is no reason to step around it. In fact, one of my main problems with the film is that it *does* step around it in every scene. Again and again, Scott poses the question and then sidesteps it in the most transparent and annoying manner possible. His previews and PR pushes pose the big questions, his opening scenes pose them, and they come up about every ten minutes. But rather than face them and give us some answer, good or bad (good or evil), he cuts to a beheading or disembowelment.

It is for this reason that some other reviewers have called the movie shallow. It is certainly that. It is a script by a shallow man with no interesting ideas or answers to anything. But because it attempts to force a teleology on the audience, by a sort of backhanded and dishonest suggestion, it subtends the shallow. While pretending not to sermonize, it nonetheless delivers an incredibly empty and nihilistic sermon, in low tones and surreptitious whispers.

Which is why I am here. I don't have the time or inclination to critique most films, but *Prometheus* seems to me the perfect encapsulation of the current sorry zeitgeist. Ridley Scott, like George Lucas before him, has creatively imploded over the past 30 years, taking the entire culture down with him. Or, perhaps it is the culture that has taken the directors down with it. In any case, creativity of all kinds has dissipated, deconstructed, and devolved, to the point now where it is little more than a nasty annoyance. In areas like conceptual art, it has totally evaporated, leaving nothing but a fetid mist. The artists and critics now admit this and strive to outdo one another in creative evaporation. But in

Hollywood, they still try to tart up this evaporation with a manufactured crusting of faux-relevance. Conceptual art gave up on relevance many decades ago. Relevance is the outdated shibboleth, and only the oldest artists and critics still mouth the word. But in Hollywood, they still try to create meaning, by hook or crook.

In visual art, the audience is completely corrupt and doesn't demand even a fake bow to meaning, relevance, morality, or the future. But the audience of film is not so "civilized." They like to see fights—with swords or lightsabers—and fights require something worth fighting for. Gender equity disallows damsels in distress to fight over, so the script requires a papermaché code of ethics instead. A code of ethics requires an underlying religion or pseudo-religion, and since promoting existing religions is considered to be even worse than rescuing damsels, the screenwriters are forced to invent an entire new mythology every time they want a fight scene.

George Lucas brilliantly solved this problem in the early 70's by actually creating a new mythology. It was just a piecing together and tweaking of existing mythologies, as Joseph Campbell reminded us, but it was the right complexity, depth, and novelty for a summer blockbuster. Even Lucas admitted that he was striving for little more than Buck Rogers, and that is what he got: a little more than Buck Rogers. A better script and better special effects. The special effects were better because it was 1976, not 1928, and because the huge talented crews spent countless hours building sets. The script was better because Lucas spent years writing it, and because he took it very seriously. He was also young and the world was a different place in the early 1970's than it is now. His brain hadn't been fried by GMO's, wireless, statins, ritalin, viagra, prozac, growth hormones, aspartame, and high fructose corn syrup. Also, the fluoride in his brain may not have reached toxic levels by that point, and he grew up in a time of far fewer vaccinations and x-rays. Young people these days don't have a chance.

For the same reasons, Ridley Scott found some early success. His forte was visualization and cinematography, and even *Prometheus* scores high on those charts. With *Blade Runner* and *Alien*, he was dealing with pre-existing stories, and didn't have to provide story or script himself—a thing we now know to be very grateful for. And so, with the help of Giger's horrifying drawings, Scott was able to build a very convincing first movie in the *Alien* franchise.

At first glance, that might explain why *Prometheus* is such a disaster. Scott, fooled by thirty years of accolades into thinking he had talents he simply does not have, got too involved in the script. He thought he was capable of storytelling on the level of young Lucas, or at least on the level of recent Cameron (with *Avatar*) and wished to compete with them *mano a mano*. But it must be more than that, because the failures of *Prometheus* aren't limited to story or script. The casting is also a disaster, unlike *Alien* or *Blade Runner*. In *Alien*, the casting, acting, pacing, direction, and editing are all good. The movie is extremely tight. In *Prometheus*, none of that is true. It is sloppy across the board. Only Fassbender is well-cast, and the rest are either adequate or awful. In the awful category go all the other top actors: Noomi Rapace, Charlize Theron, Logan Marshall-Green, and Guy Pearce. Surely the worst is Marshall-Green, who stinks up the place from the very first scene in the cave. I audibly groaned the moment I saw him and Rapace trying and failing to manufacture interest in the cave paintings. With her fake hair and doctored face, Rapace looks and acts like a Swedish newsanchor trying to play a short Scottish supermodel trying to play an American archaeologist; and Marshall-Green just looks like an idiot soccer player or the bassist for NSync. When he said, "All you need these days to create life is a strand of DNA and half a brain," I leaned into my partner and said, "That's leaves *him* out." Another male lead chosen to take his shirt off, I thought, and sure enough, the scene after his shirt came off, they killed him. Unless they were going to get his pants off, his usefulness was over.

And poor Charlize, a beautiful woman forced into a skinsuit that accentuated all her flaws: her skinny legs, knock knees, flat and squishy ass, and terrible muscle tone. I normally wouldn't mention these, especially the last, except that she is presented to us from her first scene as some sort of Amazon. We see her jump out of life support into a series of pushups. Unfortunately, she can't do even one pushup all the way down. In real life I wouldn't hold it against her, but I have to hold it against her as an actress. Couldn't she go to the gym for a couple of months, for her part? I don't expect her to go on Nitrix or Steroids like the rest of the women in Hollywood, but there are now hundreds of thousands of fit women in yoga classes across the country who can do ten or twenty real pushups without straining. Charlize didn't have to go into weight training, all she had to do is take a couple of yoga classes a week. And I have to hold it against the director, who let this slide. Didn't he think we would notice her straining to do half a pushup? Didn't he think that might undercut our belief in her swagger? And didn't he notice that none of her other "tough" scenes worked either? Didn't he notice that she looked completely out of place and lost in every single scene she was in?

Finally, why put Guy Pearce in old make-up? If you need an old guy for the movie, why not hire an old guy? I will never understand this sort of thing. If they need a gay guy, they don't hire a gay guy, they hire Tom Hanks to play a gay guy. If they need an ugly woman, they hire Nicole Kidman to play an ugly woman. You will say it is called acting, but it is also called bad casting. It is called giving money to people you like instead of to people who are actually best for the part. Old make-up is for when you need to age an already existing younger character, and you don't want to switch actors. But Pearce is never young in the movie. As it is, he ruins every scene he is in, because you can't quit thinking "That is just Guy Pearce in old make-up, and he doesn't really look like an old man."

Every scene fails for one reason or another. Either the casting is bad, the script is bad, the acting is bad, or the direction is bad, and usually it is all four. Even old *Star Trek* episodes from the 60's are more seamless and believable than this film. Honestly, I am not exaggerating for effect. *Star Trek* usually works and this doesn't, it is that simple. Why? Because *Star Trek* was fairly well cast, the pacing was good, and the acting was good enough to sell the story. None of that is true here. Except for Fassbender, none of these people are as interesting to watch as Spock. None of them are even as watchable as Kirk. Shatner isn't a great actor, or even a good actor, but he has a certain charm. He is likable and therefore able to create an emotional response from the audience. No one in this film can do that, even Fassbender. Fassbender does a great job, but he is playing an android and you aren't supposed to feel much for him. You don't care when he is beheaded and you don't care what happens to him at the end. You are left with no desire for a sequel, only a dread that you may have to watch it someday when you are in a nursing home and can't get up to change the channel.



But to get to “evil,” I need more than bad acting and bad casting and bad scripts. Lots of bad movies are just bad, and aren’t thereby evil. To take you where this movie took me, we need the full experience, and that started before I even entered the theater. While waiting in line, I took in the coming attraction posters, two of which leapt out at me. One was for *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter*. I still suspect that this is some sort of joke or test by the gods, either upon me or all mankind, to see what we will believe. There simply *can’t* be a movie with that title that made it to the big screen. That poster was inserted into my mind virtually, and no one else saw it, right? After this, there is no “what next?” Several years ago, you could see an ad for an ahistorical film that was completely and utterly asinine and respond, “What next, *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter*?” But you don’t have that anymore. It has been done and absolutely nothing can undercut it. Try it. Try to come up with a movie title that is more ridiculous and more offensive to any possible human sensibility. It can’t be done. Worse movies can and no doubt will be made, but as *ideas* for movies go, the bottom of the barrel has been hit. Even *Jesus versus Godzilla* is no worse. *Mohammad and Pauline at the Beach*. *Mary Magdalene does Dallas*. *Einstein: Pet Detective*.



The other poster was for *Seeking a Friend for the End of the World*, which is sort of in the same category. That category being movie posters that are disturbing for reasons other than the ones intended. Any mention of the end of the world is of course disturbing, for obvious reasons, and this movie is simply trying to defuse that with humor and romance. No problem with that, and who knows, the movie may actually succeed. But in the context of the other posters and *Prometheus*, the poster for *Seeking a Friend for the End of the World* took on a different aspect. It wasn't just another movie trying to make money off current fears—which is bad enough—it was another clue to the zeitgeist, and perhaps a driver of it. What I mean is that all these movies are not only a sign of the current dissolution, but a **cause** of it. To put it baldly, what if the apocalyptic tone of so many current movies were not an accident? What if it were not the natural response to current hard times? We know from Operation Mockingbird and the Church Committee hearings in the late 1970's that the CIA has been in control of the mainstream media since the 1950's. They have admitted that, in Congressional testimony. If so, then why should we assume that Hollywood is independent? In fact, we know that it isn't. You may have asked yourself how so many directors get access to big expensive military equipment in movies like *Blackhawk Down* or *Ironman*. The answer: the government is a willing partner in the creation of propaganda it approves of, and a larger and larger part of Hollywood is propaganda. And it isn't just the Department of Defense that is a partner in movie production. It is also the CIA (see the glorification of black ops in *Ironman*—SHIELD), the White House, the Justice Department, and especially the Department of Homeland Security, which now has its tentacles everywhere.

What does this possibly have to do with *Seeking a Friend for the End of the World*? It has to do with creating fear, and playing on that fear. While the producers of the movie are playing on that fear to get your ticket money for a comic romance, the government is playing on that fear to get higher taxes for “defense” and Homeland Security. We must assume that the government also approves of *Abraham Lincoln*, *Vampire Hunter*; which not only creates irrational fear, but which rewrites history, and in so doing destroys any residual recognition of reality. Young people already don't know who Homer was, unless it is Homer Simpson; and in a few years, they won't know who Abraham Lincoln was either, other than a vampire slayer like Buffy. If they don't know history, they won't be able to learn from it, and will be quieter slaves.

Prometheus is even less subtle in its propaganda than these absurd movies, since it takes itself so seriously. The propaganda in *Seeking a Friend for the End of the World* is hiding behind Steve Carrell's silly face and Keira Knightley's gorgeous one, and in *Abraham Lincoln*, *Vampire Hunter* it is hiding behind Tim Burton's kitschy camp and the rampant absurdity of the whole concept. But in *Prometheus*, it has nowhere to hide. First we have the insertion of Global Warming propaganda, by having CO2 levels very high on the alien moon. But that is just a passing plug, like having Bill Murray drink a Coke in *Ghostbusters* or ET eat Reese's Pieces. The real propaganda in *Prometheus* comes in the form of a crushing nihilism, meant to undercut any hope or belief you may have in something beyond your government or your President. In an early scene, we find religion reduced to “whatever you want to believe.” In a dream sequence, Rapace's character as a little girl is being taught non-religion by her father, who tells her that other people don't want his help because they are in a different religion. When she asks where people go when they die, he tells her they go to any beautiful place she likes. That's worse than humanism or atheism, since it reads as a fault-free religion, with no consequences and no responsibility. It is just a “shut the child up” religion. It has now been replaced with a “put the child in front of the TV” religion.

About halfway through the movie, we find Rapace wearing a crucifix, but like everything else in the movie, that turns out to be gratuitous. It turns out to be little more than another product placement,

since the questions it raises are never fully raised, much less answered. I seriously doubt the spooks requested that product placement. It is much more likely an insertion by Scott for his own purposes, and possibly it was toned way down by other screenwriters or by the government overseers. As it stands, it is only another annoying oddity. It should have been expanded into something actually significant and interesting, or ditched altogether.

I personally couldn't make heads or tails of that minor plot line, since it is implied that Rapace's father was a Christian. We are told that she wears the crucifix in memory of her father. But in the dream sequence, her father isn't acting like a Christian, he is acting like the squishiest of humanists or non-believers. He doesn't have the time to actually teach his child anything, good bad or otherwise, he just leaves her to her own wishes and demands. She may turn out to be a face-eating Satanist, but as long as it fulfills her inmost desires, he can't complain.

But what makes the film really disturbing as a piece of agitprop is its major thesis, which is much more than a passing suggestion. That thesis is that we are monsters because our creators are little more than monsters themselves. Scott takes us halfway across the galaxy to meet our maker, and he turns out to be a bald giant with hypertrophied muscles, who won't even answer a single question. As an "answer" to the big questions posed on the movie posters, we get an immediate beheading and the beating deaths of several crew members. God turns out to be a Ray Harryhausen cyclops of advanced technology, mute as a fish and compassionless as a worm. It quickly becomes apparent that Scott and the scriptboys created this god only as another CGI toy, one they could have fight the giant squid alien in the final scene, a la *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad*.



In this way, the movie is beneath empty. "Empty" would score near zero on the religion meter, but this hits big negative numbers *on purpose*. This isn't a beautiful universe, where questions are answered and there is always a plan. Nor is this a meaningless universe, a collection of random collisions, as we are now taught by science. This is a horror movie universe, where even god is a psychopath on the level of Freddy Krueger or Michael Myers.

Does that make the movie evil? I would say so. I wouldn't allow my child to watch it, and I wouldn't have watched it myself had I known what it contained. As an artist, I know that the creations of one person can and do affect other people, so the argument that this is just meaningless entertainment doesn't fly. Scott can't claim to be an artist and deny that art is effective at the same time.

This movie is evil because it undercuts *any possible morality*. I am not promoting any specific morality or religion, but I think it has become clear that culture cannot survive without some moral or ethical basis, some standard of conduct. A horror movie mythology obviously cannot provide that standard. You will say that Scott has no intention of providing a standard: he is only trying to continue his franchise. But that doesn't fly either. This movie is being sold as neo-philosophy if not neo-religion. Critics across the country are repeating to audiences the “big question” content of the film, and many gullible people will go to this movie as they would go to church or temple or college, with mouth and mind agape. That is dangerous, and may be doubly dangerous if Scott really thinks this is just entertainment. It is bad enough to create a negative pseudo-religion, even worse to sell it as mindless entertainment, making no distinction between the two. Bad enough to create a false story when you think it is true, even worse to sell that false story, knowing it is false and not caring that it is false.

We should all find it disturbing that our most influential “artists” can't seem to find any sort of wisdom as they grow older. They don't attain any depth. They don't even discover more interesting things to say, or more interesting ways to say them. Instead, they dissolve into a fog of self-plagiarizing and mindless quoting, creating a series of bloated but dilapidated sequels. The cause of this is of course debatable, but I would suggest that these “artists” are victims of previous “art” and “artists.” Just as we are being corrupted by their sorry creations, they have been corrupted by the creations of their predecessors and contemporaries. Just as we are having the life sucked out of us by their movies and other artifacts, they have had the life sucked out of them by other movies and artifacts. Culture as a whole no longer supports creativity, it dries it up. The older these directors become, the more desiccated they become.

It doesn't have to be this way. Some will think I am blaming old people for being old. But Scott is a healthy 74, not a decrepit 94. Lucas is only 68. And both these guys have been empty since they hit 45. Lucas was 54 when he made *The Phantom Menace*, so we can't blame that on Alzheimer's. Besides, wisdom was once an attribute of the aged. Lucas points to the fact himself, with the aged Obi-wan Kenobi and Yoda. So why do our artists hit semi-senility in middle age? I have already suggested several possible answers. The middle aged are semi-senile for the same reason the young are now semi-retarded: their brains are swimming in a constant stew of chemicals and they cannot maintain full consciousness. The entire culture is literally brain-damaged. If we add to that a government that is quite happy to see its citizens brain-damaged, and that is willing to promote and enhance that damage, we have a simple recipe for our current malaise.

But again, it doesn't have to be that way. The fluoride doesn't have to be in the water, the babies don't have to be vaccinated until they are half-dead, the soda doesn't have to be spiked with the neurotoxin aspartame, the toiletries don't have to be filled with poisons, every food product doesn't need to contain corn syrup, the major crops don't need to be genetically modified, and the lawn doesn't have to be nuked with Roundup. Beyond that, you don't have to watch the TV programs and movies, you don't have to subscribe to the magazines and newspapers, you don't have to vote on hacked computers, and you don't have to put up with a corrupt government. Even in your induced semi-catatonic state, there is something you could do about all these things, and it is [often something quite simple and risk-free](#). I suggest you do it before you are beyond help.

Which brings me to my summation. These “heavy hitters” of the cinema like to brag about addressing the big questions, but they never do. They pepper their monster movies with a few scientific and historical references and think they have achieved profundity, but they have only achieved sub-philistinism. They sit around in their extended versions, blowing smoke about this and that, but it is all a puffed-up vanity with absolutely no content. They have manufactured a stock tempest, begot of

nothing but vain fantasy, as thin of substance as the air and more inconstant than the wind.* But it is even worse than that, as I have shown, because their references are all inverted. As with everything else now in the media, all truths are standing on their heads. Ridley Scott has not created a Prometheus here, he has created an anti-Prometheus. Prometheus was the ally of man against more controlling gods, but Scott's bald giant is worse than any Zeus or Yahweh. Remember, Zeus did not behead Prometheus without a word, he *punished* him. Punishment, although painful, implies an order and a meaning. Punishment comes with an explanation, since it follows a judgment and sentencing. In Scott's universe, there is none of that. Scott's god is returning to Earth to unleash upon us a million xenomorphs: no punishment in a Purgatory or Hell, just a snake down the throat and an explosion from the chest. And it is worth noting that our current Earthly engineers are also anti-Prometheuses, likewise worse than any Zeus or Yahweh, since they wish to deny us both power and knowledge, while threatening us with thunderbolts. The cloaked governmental powers feed us a constant stream of falsehoods on purpose, and then wipe us out without either a judgment or a sentencing. This has always been true, but it has now become painfully obvious with drone strikes and assassinations based on nothing but a Presidential whim. The human engineers have become so bold and reckless that they no longer feel the need to hide it in unwritten law and custom: they now publish it Congressional legislation, signed by a sitting President and posted on Thomas.gov (see NDAA2011 and NDAA2012).

In this way, Scott seems to be prepping us for the near future, a future where the anti-Prometheus gets us one way or the other. Which makes his 1984 ad for Apple a horrible irony. If you remember, his Amazon lady in that one smashes the Big Brother screen with a sledgehammer thrown from the middle aisle. But in 2012, Scott is now allied with the Ministry of Truth, weeding out or inverting the last vestiges of religion so that the State can assume absolute control. It also makes *Blade Runner* sadly ironic, since that future—at least as envisioned by Philip K. Dick in 1968—was another 1984-like dystopia of control and squalor and hopelessness, a dystopia no one thought Scott was promoting at the time. Has Scott made this alliance consciously, or is he simply following the trend? Is it a contract or just kool-aid? Someone may know the answer to that, but I don't. I don't hack emails or see through walls, I only deduce. It is logic, not a sixth sense, that tells me that *Prometheus*—like many other contemporary films—is exhibiting signs of more than just bad film making. It is exhibiting clear signs of State propaganda.†

*thanks to Shakespeare

†Now that I think of it, this may provide another explanation of the bad editing, the continuity problems, and much else. I have shown [elsewhere](#) that when the spooks come in and rewrite things after the fact, we see final versions that look pieced together and very unprofessional. It may be that the original writers refuse to clean up the copy for the spooks, hoping that the mess will alert the audience to what is going on. This reading of the facts would clear Scott of some of the responsibility here, although I doubt that the CIA was involved in things like original casting or overall story development.