POTC and ME

Any great work of art, especially a purported epic, connects with the universal human psyche, evoking primal feelings along with a release of libidinous energy. I feel labeling the "Pirates of the Caribbean" series as an epic morally obligates me to disclose how it resonates with my life story. "Epic" connotes a long heroic tale. I connect the five movies to stages of my life with each movie installment highlighting a significant challenge of one particular stage from childhood to end of life. My resonance with the characters and dramatic action occurs within the structure of five life phases.

As a preface to POTC and my life's phases, I make a distinction between fate and destiny. Fate is what you are given by the universe: the time you are born, where, to which parents, with what resources, a physical biology, and the psychic configuration of your innate personality. Destiny is what you become. It is a product of your fated gifts and the choices you make.

For the POTC protagonists, Elizabeth is born in the early 18th century, is moderately well to do, and lives in a culture whose family would have her be a lady of the court. But she opts for a different life that becomes her destiny of personal freedom through good piracy. Will must elect to journey into a life beyond apprentice blacksmith. The fate of the crew of the Black Pearl was poor sailors. Upon stealing the Aztec gold their destiny becomes a curse demanding atonement.

Movie 1, "Curse of the Black Pearl," LIFE PHASE 1: ENTERING ADULTHOOD

Elizabeth Swann and Will Turner are in transition from childhood to adult life. I identify with Elizabeth's yearnings, her desires for a life beyond her childhood prescription of court lady and governor's daughter. My fate was a socioeconomic antithesis to hers. I was born post WWII to a farmer/factory worker and a mother whose lives were consumed in survival of themselves and their seven children. My childhood was one of deprivation of material goods, opportunities, arts, activities, and social interaction. My Compass of Desire pointed toward outer world yearnings.

Isolation was the second most compelling fate of my childhood. I wanted to have friends, but we lived on a farm, miles from school mates. The family had only one car and my father worked nights at the factory, thus playing sports or activities after school was impossible. We had no record players, music, art supplies, or children's books. Charity stores provided our clothing. We played cards and a few board games. TV provided a glimpse of another reality: nicely furnished homes, restaurants, vacations, adventures, and human interactions toward which my compass pointed.

Elizabeth and Will likely would have lived unfulfilled lives had not Jack Sparrow's arrival rescued them. My Jack Sparrow, the unconscious libido for change, like in Elizabeth's life surfaced at perilous times. At age 7 in hospital for 3 months for severe leg burns, I had a life defining dream one night. I dreamt that my hospital bed was wheeled onto a roof patio and I was left there to die. This horrific image made me realize that no one was going to care for me or my life and my fate was to either lay in bed and die or help myself. My destiny is that I chose the latter. Over sixty four

years later I can actually appreciate that at age seven I learned self-reliance and the harsh reality that one is ultimately alone in the world. Although I craved more social interaction I learned early in life how to be content with my own company.

I dabbled in piracy during childhood and adolescence by trying on personae that were foreign to my essential soul. Like Jack Sparrow I wasn't up to the task of crime and full blown pirating. When a subdivision was built near our farm, the kids that arrived were mostly pirates who never grew up and cursed themselves to miserable lives. They stole, vandalized, cheated, smoked cigarettes, told huge lies, and progressed through life to end up in prison (a majority) or die from addictions. I simply didn't connect with them and chose to remain isolated rather than follow their example. Sure I did some shoplifting under their tutelage but always felt guilty. It was fortunate I did not have a bicycle because by age 12 the neighborhood no-good-niks roved in crime and ignored me as I was not mobile. I spent my childhood in isolation hitting rocks with a baseball bat fantasizing I would be the next Mickey Mantle.

My piracy also included trying to steal false gold. I tried most sports as young boys do in hopes of power and recognition, but never had the talent to gender any self esteem at those endeavors. My favorite fantasy was pole vaulting. I chopped down willow starts to use as poles for vaulting. I think I once cleared 8 feet: not enough to win any track meets. As a teen I studied and played guitar despite a near tone-deaf musical inadequacy along with a total vocal inability to carry a tune. I wanted to be an astronaut during the John Glenn/Apollo era, but soon had to accept that military pilots need perfect eyesight and that excluded me. The Fates had precluded any of those paths as my destiny.

The second great personal spiritual event of my childhood was a near death drowning at age 11. I was fishing in a river with my older brother and waded into the river. Whether blind bad luck or Jack Sparrow's hand to push me under, I got swept deep into the river, tumbling and descending rapidly in the current. At the point that I realized I was drowning and undergoing death, my world became completely calm and I was encased in a bubble filled with pastel green light. My thought was that this was death and I was ecstatic. Then a voice (I interpret from my Self nearly 60 years later) told me to swim in a direction it somehow conveyed because "it was not my time to die." Darn, I was really enjoying such a pleasant death. It was forty years before I told anyone about this experience. But like my abandonment dream in the hospital, my Self had clearly instructed me that quitting was not an option; and reminding me that I had to do life on my own. I resonate with this aspect of Elizabeth Swann.

The one talent the Fates did grant me for my journey was a capable analytic ability. School was my only lifeline to adventure, but in an ironic way it also increased my isolation. In honors classes my school colleagues were from the upper classes and socially unavailable to me for after school interaction. My working class neighborhood peers thought I was an uncool nerd. Finding peers was difficult.

Trickster Jack Sparrow arrived in high school and got me into college. In March of my senior year in high school, I acquiesced to the truant tendencies of my neighborhood peers and skipped school for the day engaging our hedonistic pirates with alcohol and porn shows in Chicago. One "friend"'s mother reported us to the school counselor.

Upon arriving at school the following day, I was summoned to the counselor's office for sentencing. The gruff counselor immediately accused me of being a stupid and arrogant hooligan.

I responded, "Just suspend me. I skipped school, I admit it. One day of missed school isn't a big deal. I'll make up the work."

He said, "You really think that you're that smart?" Then he opened my academic file and totally changed his tone. My high school was large with over 600 students per class. My "counselor" didn't know who I was, he had never talked to me, and I doubt he had the time or interest to care. In awe he said (more talking to himself than to me), "Do you know you're at the top 1 percent of your class? Where are you going to college next year?"

I explained that I didn't have the money to go to college, but could get a full time job at the grocery store where I was working. The counselor knew others from my honors chemistry class were to attend Princeton, Brown, M.I.T., and Dartmouth. Whether out of embarrassment for failing at his job or caring for my future, the next day I received financial aid contacts from colleges I had applied to with offers of scholarship aid. Thank you, Jack Sparrow! My destiny took a good turn. College afforded me new experiences to placate my desires. It also brought me out of isolation with many friends who didn't care how wealthy or nerdy I was. I hadn't thought of this until this writing, but at senior convocation honor day, the faculty named me the class student who demonstrated the most personal growth over the four years. From where I started I didn't have to achieve a great deal. Modesty aside, I did arrive as a science and math nerd, who embraced the liberal arts experience. By graduation I had acted in plays, was a dorm RA, and served in student government, and befriended history and literature professors. I've never regretted not trimming meat at the Jewel food store.

Fast forward four years after high school and I am still penniless but accepted to medical school, my Black Pearl. Like Jack Sparrow indenturing himself to Davy Jones, I signed a contract with the Air Force that would pay for my medical school in lieu of four years servitude upon graduation. I was no Norrington that cared for a military career, but I did fulfill my obligation to the Air Force.

In medical school, I met and married my wife. By the end of my Air Force tour I had two young daughters, and moved to Indiana for my life career. I had somehow survived and lifted my curse of penury and isolation with a successful transition from childhood to early adult. But like Elizabeth and Will, though my life looked great on paper, much soul and life work awaited in the next phases of life.

Movie 2, "Dead Man's Chest," LIFE PHASE 2: FIRST HALF OF ADULTHOOD

The first phase of adulthood entails career, child raising, homemaking, and engagement with the outer world. It ends at midlife passage, the characters and events to be discussed in Movie 3. Life's first half is imaged in Movie 2 with adults attending to their family life while constellating their value in the world. Elizabeth and Will struggle to find each other and unite. Will meets his father. Jack is forced to deal with his contract with Davy Jones. Norrington is desperate to regain his command. It seems each character's world becomes a heartless wasteland. Such is the common conclusion when the first phase of adulthood hits the wall at midlife. The two huge resonances of Movie 2 for me are the father-complex issues and the universal problem of the absent masculine heart. For me both resonate and are intertwined as I had a deeply disturbed father without access to his heart.

Boring childhood in the fifties involved much TV watching. I hated the anger, grouchiness, and gruffness of the male characters. Most fathers in my childhood neighborhood were angry. I wondered what made the rare kind ones nice. My father was angry most of the time but occasionally would manically lose his anger and vacillate between despair and episodes of play and frivolity. He demanded to be treated as "the king of his castle" and let us know that children were an imposing herd of "mouths to feed." He never gave a Christmas or birthday present and begrudgingly allowed my mother to do so. He had many selfish habits like buying Spanish peanuts to eat while watching television and refusing to share any with his children. He was obsessed with money and frugality which was understandable with seven children. No whining was allowed. Whining included asking for anything. Needs were not to be expressed or discussed in my boyhood home.

My father was much nicer than his father. My grandfather had me visit one weekend. As with most of the men I knew, he was unfeeling and gruff. He was also sadistic. He took me to his part-time job as an odd-job caretaker at a grocery store. He instructed me to stand near a fence only feet from a large dog that growled viciously. I was terrified to my grandfather's delight. He demanded I stay on that spot. Later that afternoon, I was watching a baseball game and he had a hidden remote and kept turning on and off the TV to torment me. He explained that the TV just did that on its own.

What a horrible childhood my father must have had. I learned there was no kindness, no presents, no feelings, no appreciation of art, or social gathering in my grandfather's household. This was the script my dad learned about being a man that he practiced. His chest was empty in the sense that his childhood has cut out access to his heart. My grandfather would have made a good Davy Jones. I have no idea how many generations of heartless men predated my father.

Despite the enmity (likely unconscious) my dad must have felt for him, my father was the only child of six that regularly visited my grandfather or helped him with home tasks. I could feel the love-hate he felt toward his father; and never felt that my grandfather loved or appreciated my father's care for him. My father's mother died of cancer during my dad's teen years. Three years after my grandfather died, my father committed suicide.

Unlike Will, I had no delusions that my father was normal. Like Will I emphasized my father's good points of honesty, hard work, and his value of truth. As an early phase adult I tried to parent like my mother and the opposite of my father. No matter how awkward I was, I gave my girls time, and presents, and a sincere sense that I valued them. Thankfully they had a mother who was adept at the many things about which I was clueless: like coloring, organizing, attending activities, and understanding little girls.

At the end of Movie 2, life seems not too bad. Elizabeth and Will can return to Port Royale to get married. Governor Swann gets his daughter back home. Norrington is successful in capturing Jack Sparrow. Similarly for me by age 35 I had a blossoming career, nice family, and a country club house and lifestyle. But......I was miserable. My marriage was on the rocks and life felt boring, unfulfilling, and meaningless. I needed some help. So like Elizabeth, Will, and Gibbs, who sought out the spiritual help of Tia Dalma, I began therapy in the throes of mid-life transition: That is Movie 3.

Movie 3: "At World's End," LIFE PHASE 3: MIDDLE LIFE PASSAGE

In psychological terms "world's end" is the point of death of the previous life and birth of a new one. Like Barbossa's crew, mid-life travelers confront personal crises where everything is upside-down and there is no guarantee of a safe return. The Jungian interpretation of what dies is the ego-driven life that must transition to a life with the ego consciously in service to the totality of the Self. In Christian mythology Jesus dies as a human and is reborn as a god in service to God, his father. In POTC the willingness of Will, Elizabeth, and Gibbs to search World's End for the return of Jack signals their passage from the first phase of adulthood to the second. They do so because without connection to Jack, their agent of libidinous change, they feel empty in life's wasteland.

Of note Barbossa becomes their guide, one who has undergone the journey. Jack in contrast died unwillingly with his ego persona of pirate captain intact. Today those who journey to World's End most often have a therapist as their Barbossa guide. A useful therapist is one who has undergone that journey through mid-life's world end.

My World's End at midlife bottomed out when I lay in my closest crying in despair and hopelessness. I had worked so hard to become successful, but had no meaning in life. I was sure I was genetically fated to commit suicide like my father. Fortunately my therapist helped me realize that I did have the inner resources to discriminate between my inner compass of desire and the introjects from my lineage of fathers. I had to choose my destiny. A major important realization in my process was learning that I was not responsible for my father, and could not rescue him by perpetuating his legacy.

All schools of therapy work for some individuals. Jungian analysis worked for me. During my initial therapy I discovered Jungian books and sought out a nationally prominent Jungian therapist in Chicago to work with me. When the Black Pearl protagonists return from world's end a green light flashes to signify completion of the journey. While in therapy, I had many underwater dreams starting with murky deep water, sometimes feces filled, other times a cluttered messy basement. Eventually the water got clearer and the basement tiles looked like a mandala (image of the self). When I was well along to individuation I dreamt of a silver brick shining in the water of my basement. I knew enough by then to recognize it as an alchemical symbol of my Self. My analyst nodded his head and suggested I commission a replica be made. I did. (See Figure 1.)

POTC has multiple story lines of difficult father-complexes. Elizabeth must reject her father's culture. Will, like myself, had a family of men who were cursed to live miserable lives. Will tried unsuccessfully to rescue his father and it cost him his life. He succumbed to piracy. My similar father-complex issues to overcome included feeling comfortable and manly wearing a tie to work as a physician. It sounds silly but my father's world disparaged men who were not blue collar. Eventually I became trusting of my compass of desire including finding the disconnected parts of my heart.

Like Will and Elizabeth my wife and I took our marriage to World's End and avoided divorce with a new relationship. Post midlife passage I became spiritually involved with the Indianapolis Friends of Jung, serving as officer and president. This was my sense of Will's collective spiritual work of taking responsibility to ferry souls.

But life is ever evolving, after the middle life passage comes the second adulthood which challenges the interface of the individual and the collective. Such is the grist of Movie 4.

Movie 4, "On Stranger Tides," LIFE PHASE 4: SECOND HALF OF ADULTHOOD

The middle passage brought me a successful return from World's End and my conscious authenticity of the totality of my Self with an ego in reverent service to it. But successful therapy never eliminates the challenges of the world or provides a map for the future. Elizabeth runs the lighthouse and now has a son, Henry Turner. Will is doing the soul work of ferrying those dead at sea to the next world. Jack has lost the Black Pearl to Barbossa and he is still ego-possessed, hence lost in the second half of life because he hasn't done his inner work. Movie 4 features the nefarious Blackbeard who also is lost from a failed mid-life. He fears his mortality and seeks to control the Fountain of Youth for himself only.

For me the transition post midlife crisis entailed dabbling in the lost chances of youth such as joining a softball team, buying a sports car, and taking piano lessons, and coloring the gray in my hair. Luckily I didn't succumb to more hurtful common adventures such as divorce, trophy wife acquisition, cosmetic surgeries, motorcycling, or extreme sports. My lost sense of adventure was placated as I quickly learned I was no longer young and those adventures were for an earlier stage of life. I did seriously engage my artistic side with play writing and publishing a fiction novel. I cut back on work to half time to concentrate on writing, playing golf, and working with Jungian groups .

My deepest resonance with Movie 4 is with the character of Syrena, the mermaid. She represents the unconscious abused and undervalued feminine. My inner feminine suffered the masculine patriarchal abuse of my father-complex and culture. I feel Syrena's suffering when I view the atrocities of women such as is occurring in Afghanistan. Syrena takes the spiritually misguided Phillip back to the sea with her for unknown purpose: romance, as food for the other mermaids, or for his spiritual enlightenment, who knows. Angelica in contrast is a horrific feminine image of patriarchal collusion. Her character deepens my sensitivity to the denigration of the feminine in our world. I must have an inner Angelica because the Ann Coulters, Marjorie Taylor Greenes, and Laura Ingrahams of the world make me seethe. As a note about my "silver brick Self," Silver is the color of the moon.I am a man with a dominant feminine sense of interconnection and feeling. My astrology friends say that is because my natal chart moon eclipses my kingly Leo (gold): who knows why, but it describes me.

Our culture's obsession with youth and denial of death is nefariously imaged in Blackbeard. At age 62 I had an intestinal cancer surgery that forced me to confront my mortality. I found accepting my mortality rather easy as a pathologist who worked every day in the milieu of death and disease. Like my 7 year old left to die or fend for himself, my mortal adult is little affected by thoughts of dying. How to live remains the issue. Plus most people who have had near-death experiences don't seem to fear death.

Dealing with the forces of capitalism's domination of the poor is my association with Triton's sword, a pain delivering force, imaged in the power wielded by Blackbeard. A related image of capitalistic exploitation is Barbosa's insinuation into British legal standing by becoming a privateer. He ranks with commercial predators like mortgage hucksters, financial asset managers, and telephone scammers.

The most endearing character for me is Joshua Gibbs who is an unassuming assistant. He represents the part of me who doesn't want power or control and acts to help others. I love to cook and host dinner parties probably from my childhood lack of restaurants or social functions. As a scientist at heart, I'm skeptical of the mystical, such as past lives. That having been said, the only past life I can remotely identify with is being a medieval page boy to a benevolent king, thus my resonating affinity for Joshua Gibbs, the helpful servant.

I've always feared becoming poor again, but I hold no aspirations for being super-wealthy. I seriously contemplated retirement as soon as I had ample savings to do so. My process is that more money than I need is available to others. I have enjoyed funding vacations, real estate, and automobiles to family and friends. My inner boy projects his pining for what is unaffordable onto others, and my inner Joshua Gibbs pitches in.

My second half of adult life has been comfortable financially, socially, and with family relationships. I have had my share of the typical age related wear and tear infirmities. From age 60 to 70 however, I felt unsettled. I did not have a goal or purpose; my compass of desire failed to direct me; and I felt like a nursing home resident waiting around to die.

I have entered the final phase of life that Eric Erickson described as challenged with the task of generativity versus despair. I can connect my life needs in old age with the drama of Movie 5. The title requires me to answer the question: Will I tell a tale, or die silent?

Movie 5, "Dead Men Tell No Tales," LIFE PHASE 5: GENERATIVITY vs. DESPAIR

Salazar's self appellation is death. He dedicated himself to avenging the woes of his fathers and got trapped in the Devil's Triangle of destruction, darkness, and death, becoming an immortal divine agent of annihilation. Grumpy old men, apocalyptic evangelists, neo-nazi insurrectionists, and health care workers committing involuntary euthanasia on patients are just a few of the examples of people who get trapped in the death pull of the Devil's Triangle.

The young couple, Carina and Henry, are like superheroes who save the human race and lead us into the next stage of human evolution. I'm too old to identify with them. I love the image of them as they reignite my boyhood love of superman. Superheroes are a mainstay of characters delivering goodness libido that energizers hope.

My resonance as an adult hero of Movie 5 is Barbossa. Like Barbossa, I have done pirating that I wished I had not. Buying a large house on a lake and a golf course tops the list. I succumbed to the cultural greed of the 1980's. I found little to no

happiness there and was surrounded by materialistic people with invisible hearts and souls. After 22 years in that house, we barely have one couple that we call good friends.

Barbossa succeeded in indulging himself with fine food, wine, and music from the largesse after securing and utilizing Triton's sword. When Salazar strikes and his power is in peril, he turns to Sansa the sea witch and fights back. Barbossa refuses retirement, which so often for men is a transition from commercial piracy to a walk down the retirement plank of stagnation before falling into the sea of eternal death. Barbossa learned from his early pursuit of Poseidon's Trident, and study of Galileo's astronomy that he carried a deep spiritual agenda that never left him. He calls it his quest for treasure.

My Sansa consultation and divine download occurred serendipitously when I gave a talk to the local Friends of Jung organization on Jung's book, "The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature." The book is a collection of essays in which one idea is that artistic creations are downloads from the collective unconscious. The basis of our mythic appellation of POTC movies is that they are downloads of the collective psyche. Prior to the lecture, as a tactic of personal engagement, I asked the audience to submit any recent dreams of a collective nature they had experienced. Janice warns me to be careful, for when the gods are called, they answer. I had a soul moving dream that left me with awe and goose flesh. So personally affected was I by this dream that I commissioned an artist, Karen S Seltzer to paint it. (Figure 2 below.)

For me the painting/dream shows a pleroma-like background akin to Van Gogh's "Starry Night." There are twinkling bodies in a dark swirling ether of the PleromaVerse as glistening galaxies and souls. My Self or spirit is represented by the green tinged sphere on the mid left reminiscent of my green light bubble during my near-death experience. My spherical Self is the largest body in my neighborhood of the twinkling PleromaVerse, but a speck compared to the galaxies and stars and souls of the background. My feeling in the dream is that the PleromaVerse background is like a basement (unconscious metaphor) with cellar doors opening to a new dawn. Floating in the center is the earth attached to an umbilical cord that morphs into a rope attached to a bucket. The bucket is about to empty its contents into the ocean above. I interpret this to represent that the new embryonic Mother Earth, dependent upon human collective consciousness, symbolized by the water bucket delivering water, is in the process of being born into a new era of Cosmos (just order). This is the Aquarian water-bearing function of bringing unconscious contents into the light of consciousness for a new beginning. The painter added the two wavy lines on the bucket, the astrological symbol of Aquarius, unknowingly from a photograph of a bucket.

In the dream I sense that I am like a midwife, an attentive participant. The new Cosmos vision is one of feminine parity to the masculine and maturing the fetal Mother Earth to the mature mother Gaia. Synchronistically I visited a friend in Florida. On his lanai was a hanging terrarium pictured in the upper left corner of the painting. It was also in my dream as I had seen it many times before. Rather inert for many months this plant seemed barely alive, but after my dream it burst out a growth of leaves toward the sun as pictured in the painting. This image is perhaps my soul sprouting a new life along with the birthing of this new Aquarian image of Cosmos of the future, perhaps an afterlife. That's a lot of woo-woo for a rationalistic

atheist like myself, but it certainly gives me hope and purpose in my waning years.

Movie 5 is a tale of following the stars to birth a new world with breaking of Poseidon's Trident, the depotentiation of the toxic patriarchal curses held within the unconscious. Barbossa reaches this point when he lets go of his life rope to save Carina by killing Salazar. Barbossa sacrifices his life in an act of individual and collective generativity. My dream has given me the treasure of a generative purpose in the final phase of my life. It is providing energy to midwife the new Cosmic image along with masculine-feminine parity, and a sustainable biosphere on the earth. Like Jung and Edinger before me, I am content with my final purpose of midwifing the new god-image.

Figure 1 SILVER BLOCK DREAM SYMBOL OF THE SELF

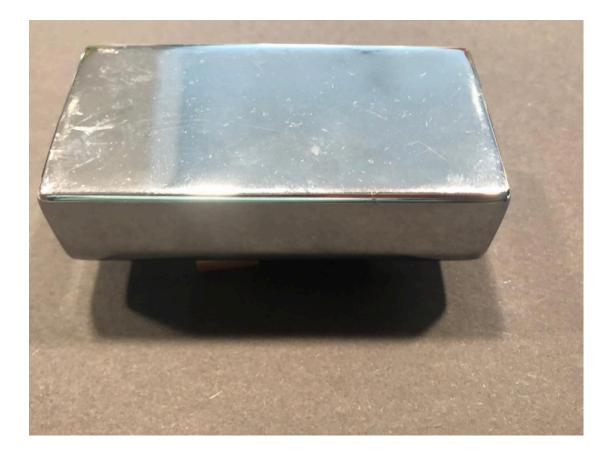


Figure 2 DREAM IMAGE INTERPRETED AND NAMED AS "BIRTHING THE AQUARIAN AGE"

