

GATE 3 Dara Marks

It's a pleasure and an honor to participate in this year's GATE 3 event. I'm an ardent fan of GATE founders John Raatz, Eckhart Tolle, Jim Carrey and the amazing band of visionaries they have brought together to deliver an important and clear message to the international media complex. That message is simply, "Come on, folks, we can do better." We can create media content that not only dazzles and excites, but can make meaning of our existence and elevate human consciousness. Quality and marketability are not mutually exclusive. In fact, their alliance makes success and profitability a much greater probability.

The important fact we need to recognize in forming this Global Alliance for Transformational Media is that, by its very nature, all media is transformative. The primary function of narrative content is to serve as a delivery system, carrying information to us about who we are and how we are to live. So the central question isn't, "Will our media content be transformative?", but "Into what will we be transformed?"

More than ever, the recent tragic shootings at Newtown and elsewhere are urgently demanding that we ask ourselves this question. Unfortunately, too many only want to center the issue on who is to blame: gun dealers, the mental health system, or, of course, the media.

It's likely we all share in this blame, and the sooner we acknowledge it, the sooner we can deal with the real task at hand—which is introspection. *Are we willing to do better?* If so, do we really understand what better media content means?

The good news here is that it doesn't mean censorship. Nor does it mean that we have to strip the essence of our creative inspiration down to nothing but sweetness and light. In fact, we must be careful and vigilant *not* to idealize the human drama because in so doing, we marginalize real human experience. A strong narrative doesn't avoid the dark places, it gives value to them by acknowledging that our trials are essential, that where there is hurt, where there is woundedness, where there is a broken place—there is a way in. And where there is a way in, there is the potential for transformation.

This isn't a human story, it is *the* human story. It is the vital story that has been told and retold throughout time. It affirms that it is the challenges we face that define us. There's little evidence that we grow and evolve just because it's a good idea. In reality, we seem to grow when external conflict and tension places so much pressure on the status quo that our old systems of survival break down, and we are challenged to find new answers, new perspectives, and new ways of interrelating with others. It is this point of

breakdown where the light of new consciousness has the potential to break through and we are made new.

So, if this sounds like a good story, it is. In any genre, in any format, this is the story we yearn to be told. In *The Shawshank Redemption*, we didn't just ride along on a prison break; our spirits were shown the path of liberation. And although *Avatar* may have spun us into outer space, it also took us down into the depths of human interrelatedness. These stories include us because even if we're not the same age, the same sex, or even from the same planet as the protagonist, we share the same internal quest. At the level of internal transformation, his or her story is my story—we are the same, except in the detail. And his or her story affirms that my challenges are not meaningless or punitive, but essential.

Yes, there is too much gratuitous violence in the media today and the fix for that is a matter of will and commitment. But we need to also acknowledge that there is an enormous void of interior content in our modern stories—even well-intentioned ones—and the fix for this comes from a deeper place. It starts with recognition that when the heroic model is idealized in a way that offers victory only to those who are the best, the brightest, the bravest, and the cleverest with no demand for internal maturity and growth, it sets us all up to fail. How do we learn to place value on our

own suffering and sacrifices in the face of life's daunting challenges when the models in our stories make it all appear effortless?

If stories without this internal component were merely trivial, inconsequential, and infrequent, it would be of little concern. But if we are hardwired to ingest story as a guide for living, how do we distinguish between stories that illuminate the path toward wholeness and the ones that merely take us for a joy ride? The answer is, we can't.

Although more subtle, I would suggest that the prevalence of the non-dimensional heroic model is one of the real culprits in the assault on today's values. It has left us wide open for infection by religious and political dogma that demands allegiance to the right or the left, to the secular or the non-secular, to the pro or the con, judging us as moral or immoral, right or wrong, good or bad.

When heroic models in a culture fixate only on what is perceived as these so-called higher virtues of good, moral, or righteous, they no longer convey the transformative, life-evolving information about the true human experience. Therefore, with no *real* story to serve as a guide, individuals can become stuck and the culture itself can become trapped in a fixed, unconscious void.

But, of course, there is a way through this—for where there are broken places, that is where we will find the way in. If art is a reflection of our inner realm, then striving to make a conscious connection is not just a matter of creating better stories, but of courageously relating to the depths of those stories that are yearning to be told. And what we will discover at those depths is the poetry of the soul.