

*Ace in the Hole* as a work of art

*Ace in the Hole* is about a brash, self-centered news reporter, Charles Tatum, who shamelessly exploits a tragedy to satisfy his own personal needs. He doesn't care about other people; he just cares about himself and abuses his responsibilities as a journalist to create havoc. Kirk Douglas delivers a powerful performance as Charles Tatum. Douglas succeeds in capturing Tatum's depravity. Jan Sterling also delivers a strong performance as Lorraine, the cynical yet emotionally vulnerable wife of the man trapped in the cave. Lorraine is on to Tatum. She knows that he's a con man doing a con job. Yet, this movie is not about Lorraine, it is about Tatum. Tatum drives this story.

Charles Tatum is not a tragic figure. He has no redeeming qualities. He is a womanizer, a bully, a drunk and a trouble maker. Tatum is too crass, too deceitful and too violent to warrant any sympathy. He cruelly exploits the plight of a suffering man and beats up on a woman, not once, but twice. His conduct is beyond mitigation. He is not a Walter Neff, who was just doing his job, gets caught up in something and then gets manipulated into making questionable decisions. Tatum knew the rules of conduct and by his own volition deliberately violated them. He knew he was doing wrong and did it anyway. He has only himself to blame.

Yet, the story is tragic, not for what it says about Tatum, who by the end of the story is revealed to be what he is, a broken down, discredited nobody, but for what it says about a society that would give credence to a creep like Tatum in the first place. Had a society that produced heroes like Sergeant York and Lou Gehrig

and solemnly prayed for the safety and success of its brave soldiers on Omaha Beach become so decadent and depraved that it could gloat and laugh over the plight of a suffering man stuck in a cave? Or tolerate the idea of man viciously hitting and terrorizing a woman? Or permit a drunkard to masquerade as a savior? Or produce people willing to sell out in order to gain cheap political advantage? In this respect, this movie is a form of social commentary and by watching it, a consciousness raising experience. For those reasons alone, it qualifies as a work of art.