

Charles Tatum as a tragic figure

On second thought, Charles Tatum, the principal character in *Ace in the Hole*, is a tragic figure. Although he is thoroughly despicable, by his own admission he is a murderer, his pomposity and pretentiousness calls attention to our own weaknesses and imperfections as human beings. Tatum was not born being bad. At some point in his life he was innocent, spiritually pure, and happy. Then something happened to distort his personality and corrupt him. The movie does not allude to that event but it can be inferred that some trauma must have occurred to cause him to become warped. He harbors resentment against the paper in New York that fired him, but even if the firing was unjust, that trauma alone is not sufficient to explain Tatum's twisted personality. He craves power, prestige and money; his grandiosity knows no bounds; he wants to be treated like a god. These aspirations are a fool's dream and one that can only bring destruction. Tatum's strivings are an exercise in futility. He is like a puppet that is trying to pull its own strings, in the process getting the strings tangled. Throughout the story Tatum is a mess and his behavior erratic. He is attracted to Lorraine, yet beats her. He risks his life by going into the cave, but it is only for show. He is energetic and resourceful, for reasons that are self-serving. He is the kind of guy who will bail you out of a jam but only for a price; the kind of guy who will help you out then do you in; the kind of guy who will help you fix your car because he wants to steal it. Tatum could have been a hero. He could have called attention to Leo's plight not as part of a gimmick for self-promotion but because he really wanted to help save a life and really cared. He could have been a positive role model for Lorraine and Herbie, and for everyone else who admires him. But he squanders the opportunity and winds up acting the fool and being the fool. What a waste. In this respect, Charles Tatum is a tragic figure.