

## Trumbo Favorite Son...or Parriah?

Dalton Trumbo was one of Grand Junction's more famous personalities. Depending on whom you talk to or what you read, it is debatable that he was a favorite son in the 1930s.

Trumbo was born in Montrose on Dec. 9, 1905, and moved to Grand Junction. He graduated from Grand Junction High School in 1924 and with monetary help from William Moyer attended the University of Colorado.

"Eclipse," Trumbo's first novel published in 1935, didn't make the New York Times Best Sellers list, nor did it go over big in Grand Junction.

The characters in the book were thinly-veiled residents of Grand Junction, most of who were still alive and living in town when the first few books reached Grand Junction. Copies found their way into many Mesa County homes almost immediately, accompanied by typewritten lists telling the identities of the major characters.

In July of 1936 Trumbo wrote a letter to a Mrs. R.L. Magill, a strong-minded Grand Junction clubwoman, in response to a letter she had written him about "Eclipse."

Trumbo responded to her with this explanation: "It has been a matter of some concern to me as to what reception the book would receive in Grand Junction, and I assure you it is pleasant to know that there are those who judge it rightly as a novel, rather than personally as a story about people they know.

He continued: "'Eclipse' had rather a strange history. For ten years I have considered the dramatic aspects of the story, but could find no fitting climax, and hence hadn't touched it. The bank holiday of March 1933 struck me as the most logical crisis, and I started the story at that time, doing it completely three times in twenty-four days. I then laid it on ice, partly to gain perspective on it, partly because I had the idea I would not submit it until the real life character upon whom it is admittedly founded passed away.

"However, as you may understand, it is not easy to know you have a sound story, and not make some effort to market it. I kept it for a year, and then dispatched it to my New York agents. It was sold to the firm of Lovat Dickson and Thompson of London on December 12, 1934. The date is somewhat important, in view of the fact that I understand Miss Ruth McQueen (a Daily Sentinel reporter of that era) has been accused in Grand Junction of giving me the basic material for the story. The truth of the matter is that Miss McQueen, who has been a dear friend of mine for at least fifteen years and is a clever writer on her own account, did not arrive in California until some three weeks after the sale of the book, and almost two years after I finished writing it.

"I had all of the basic material well in hand before I left Grand Junction in 1925, since I knew all of the principals, and needed only a few incidents occurring after my departure to round out the story. I make this plain because, as a person of wide literary interests it might be of interest to you, and because I think it very unfair for any person other than

myself to be accused of supplying facts which, I understand, have caused considerable resentment in some quarters. Whatever onus is attached to the job must fall directly on me. I was very careful to send no books to Grand Junction, trusting it would never be read there. However when I learned that two friends out here to whom I had given copies had shipped them back, I sent one or two to friends, knowing that any attempt to prevent the book from being read would be useless.”

Walter Walker, who had been Trumbo’s publisher at The Daily Sentinel, was one of those who received an autographed copy of “Eclipse” along with a letter in which he told Mr. Walker: “...As for “Eclipse,” I hope you will not be angry if you find characters whom you recognize in it.” He went on to write “I do not pretend that any of the portraits in “Eclipse” are real, yet you will, I am sure, see at least some characteristics of their counterparts in real life. I have no apologies although I do confess to some qualms. But the job is done, and it took a long time in the doing, and since I understand that one or two copies have already hit Grand Junction, there is no use trying to keep the book a secret...”

Mr. Walker responded to Trumbo that “Eclipse” had indeed created comment from the locals . He added that despite Trumbo’s contention that the characters in the book were not based on real people, locals would think they could match up the “fictional” character with locals.

Mr. Walker told Trumbo that his biggest disappointment was that Trumbo had released the book before the death of William Moyer, on whom the major portion of the book was based.

\As a celebration of Trumbo’s 104<sup>th</sup> birthday, the Legends Sculpture Project will have a special viewing of the movie “Trumbo” at the Avalon Theatre on Wednesday, Dec. 9. Doors open at 6:30 p.m and Trumbo’s son, Christopher, will introduce the film at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$10 at the door.

For those who may be interested in reading the book, the Mesa County Public Library reprinted “Eclipse” in 2005. The new printing includes a list of characters in the book and who they were in “real” life. Go to the Mesa County Public Library and check it out.

