

Johnny got his gun:
fishing with father



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Dalton Trumbo is perhaps best known for his Communist viewpoints and for his involvement in the HUAC committee in Hollywood and for his work in the movie industry. However, Trumbo's novels are widely regarded as some of his best work. In one of those esteemed and probably best-known novels, *Johnny Got His Gun*, Dalton Trumbo uses a third-person point of view and stream of consciousness-like syntax to characterize the exceptionally complex and changing relationship between the young man and his father.

Trumbo's book is structured in an exceptionally unique way. The most striking aspect of its structure is Trumbo's extensive use of flashback. The passage about the main characters fishing trip with his father is an example of Trumbo's use of flashback, as it is written in a reflective point of view of the young man on a camping trip with his father and his friend. " They had been coming to this place ever since he was seven," says Trumbo, " Now he was fifteen and Bill Harper was going to come tomorrow... Tomorrow for the first time in all trips together he wanted to go fishing with someone other than his father (Trumbo). While the third-person point of view somewhat isolates the reader from the situation, it also makes it more interesting in that it emphasizes just how groundbreaking the situation is in their relationship. In other words, the third-person point of view amplifies that the boy is growing up and is breaking away from the once close relationship he and his father had once shared. The use of third person point of view likewise highlights a striking generational gap between father and son. On one hand, the son wants to wake up " Early in the morning" to go " Fishing" with his friend Bill Harper. On the other, his father, who is presumably old, tired, and somewhat boring, " Doesn't want to go fishing" as he's tired and

“[Going to] rest all day” (Trumbo). Not only does point of view illuminate a generational difference, it also characterizes the changing nature of their relationship. That is, they were once best friends who did everything together, but now are growing apart as the boy grows up and becomes his own person, not needing the once invaluable support and attention of his doting father.

Additionally, Trumbo uses stream of consciousness-like syntax to characterize the evolving relationship of father and son. This is especially evident when Trumbo says, “ For a while his father didn’t say a thing. Then he said why sure go along Joe... A little later [he asked if] Bill Harper [has] a rod?” to which the son responded that Bill doesn’t have a rod (Trumbo). The boy’s father in turn tells his son to “ take my rod and let Bill use yours” as he wasn’t going fishing with them and thus had no use for it (Trumbo). The fact that the boy’s father gives his son his prized pole, the “ only extravagance his father had in his whole life,” is a kind of symbolic passing of the torch between father and son (Trumbo). In other words, the pole is a symbol for both the newfound independence and freedom of son and for the changing nature of the relationship between father and son (from loving and almost mutualistic to loving yet independent). Similarly, Trumbo’s use of such fast-paced, stream of consciousness-like syntax during which the boy’s fishing trip is described at the end of the passage underscores the boy’s happiness for his new freedom and the changing nature of his relationship with his father when Trumbo says, “ He got up and gave Bill his rod and took his father’s for himself...” (Trumbo). The boys then went to their fishing trip,

hoping that they catch something and yearning for an experience without adult supervision, again showcasing the power of a single fishing pole.

In effect, the son is becoming his own person who doesn't particularly need his father anymore. And through the use of third-person point-of-view and symbolism, Trumbo not only makes the aforementioned evident, but also makes it clear that the two, even though the son is becoming his own man, will always be close to each other and will still have a good relationship no matter what happens in their lives, which is underscored when the boy ironically destroys his father's pole, signifying that the father's broken trust in the boy and foreshadowing the gruesome fate of the boy.

Works Cited

Trumbo, Dalton. *Johnny Got His Gun*. New York: L. Stuart, 1970. Print.