

## **The Meeting of Ernest Hemingway and J.D. Salinger**

Excerpted from [Salinger](#), by David Shields and [Shane Salerno](#). Simon & Schuster. 2013. p. 110 -111; 114-115.

**JOHN C. UNRUE:** One of the great stories of literary history is the meeting of Ernest Hemingway and J. D. Salinger in Paris.

**SEÁN HEMINGWAY:** My grandfather was staying at the Ritz and receiving all kinds of visitors.

**CARLOS BAKER:** Another of Ernest’s visitors at this time was a young, dark-haired sergeant in a CIC outfit. His name was Jerome D. Salinger and he was much impressed with his first sight of Hemingway. Salinger was a writer of short stories, twenty years Ernest’s junior. At twenty-five he had already sold some of his work to *Story* magazine and the *Saturday Evening Post*.

**LEILA HADLEY LUCE:** Hemingway was Salinger’s icon; he loved the way Hemingway wrote. At the hotel, he went up to Hemingway and told him of his admiration for his work.

**CARLOS BAKER:** He found Hemingway both friendly and generous, not at all impressed by his own eminence, and “soft”—as opposed to the hardness and toughness which some of his writing suggested. They got on very well, and Ernest volunteered to look at some of his work.

**LEILA HADLEY LUCE:** Jerry asked Hemingway to look at a manuscript, which took a great deal of derring-do on his part, really. And Jerry was not somebody who would easily go up to someone and ask him to do anything for him.

**SEÁN HEMINGWAY:** Salinger had with him a copy of the *Saturday Evening Post* that contained a short story he had written, “Last Day of the Last Furlough,” which was about World

War II. My grandfather was impressed with Salinger as a young soldier, and he was equally impressed with his writing. Upon meeting him, my grandfather told Salinger he had heard of him before, had read the story, and was delighted with it.

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**A. SCOTT BERG:** Hemingway had a huge influence on Salinger, and I'm thinking mostly of the style of writing here. Hemingway prided himself on writing according to what he called the iceberg theory. In this theory, as Hemingway first explained in *Death in the Afternoon*, and then in several other interviews and books, he says that if a writer knows enough about what he's writing about, he can omit certain things in the story, and in fact, every time he omits something he strengthens the story. He likened that to the iceberg in which seven-eighths of it is underwater and all you see is the tip. Every time you leave something out, he said, it strengthens the iceberg from below and it affords the reader an even greater reading experience, because [the reader] is basically running the story, doing the film in his own imagination.

There was a corollary as well. Hemingway said if a writer does omit something because he hasn't thought it through, the reader will instantly pick up on that and there will be a huge hole in the story.

Salinger is one of the prime exemplars of the iceberg theory of writing. He did it extremely well. His stories have a spare quality, and every word feels hand-selected.

**GORE VIDAL:** Hemingway was very good at graphic descriptions of violence and hunting. He was very good at showing how things happen: how you load your gun, how you sight it against the arc the bird is taking, how you fire. He was just very good at that. And there are people, the same people who read *Popular Mechanics*, who love that kind of writing.

**A. SCOTT BERG:** Hemingway, it has long been thought, had a greater influence on American writing of the twentieth century than anyone else because he introduced a new style, a new sound people read first in the short stories, but especially in *The Sun Also Rises*. This new kind of hard-hammered writing really took hold. Hemingway has had more imitators, more bad imitators, than any other writer of the twentieth century. I'm not suggesting that Salinger imitated him exactly, but I think Salinger got from him a rhythm and certain techniques.