

ANALYSIS

“The Thinker” (1919)

from *Winesburg, Ohio*

Sherwood Anderson

(1876-1941)

“George’s interest in writing is not mentioned until the book is half over, when, in ‘The Thinker,’ t appears to have been an interest that he had had for some time. He talks ‘continually of the matter’ to Seth Richmond, and the ‘idea that George Willard would some day become a writer had given him a place of distinction in Winesburg.’ At this point his conception of writing centers on externals, on the opportunities the writer’s life offers for personal freedom and for public acclaim. In a remark that suggests a reading of Jack London, George explains to Seth that as a writer he will be his own boss: ‘Though you are in India or in the South Seas in a boat, you have but to write and there you are.’ Since writing for George is at this stage mainly a matter of fame and fun, it is not surprising to find him in ‘The Thinker’ deliberately, and naively, planning to fall in love with Helen White in order to write a love story. The absurdity, Anderson suggests, is twofold: falling in love is not something one rationally plans to do, and one does not write thus directly and literally out of experience anyway.”

Walter B. Rideout  
“The Simplicity of *Winesburg, Ohio*”  
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