One

"In the beginning was the Word"—a single word, we assume, and so the dream of every author thereafter has been to realize in his writing just the acuity and power of that one, only one, word. How else to explain the discovery of the idea of revision, of second and third drafts, the search for new connections and order—when the writer could more simply move on to other sentences, enlarging the present? Thus, he pares, makes transitions, evens the proportions among the fragments he first dispensed. Every change, every touch, draws the lines of the writing together, condenses them; the very idea of a line, constraining and directional, was itself an early recognition of this purpose. If the writer could persuade himself to keep on, if he had time and the patience to bear the silence of this labor, he would reach—a point. Exactly: one word that said all that he wished to say.

Think of the understanding a reader would require in order to grasp the meaning of that single word. In the end, this understanding must be no different from that of the writer: to read the one word demands the same accumulation of labor that had been needed to write it, the same energy, the same interest and impulse. The difference, then, between writer and

reader would be accidental—perhaps no more than the difference in the rooms they occupy or in the light by which they work. Not, in any event, the difference between what they believed or what they thought. The claims of the reader of genius would thus be no less than those of the writer of genius: we might well insist that their names be printed together on the title page of the book that contained this extraordinary single word.

To be sure, even good writers may have bad readers. But that is another and less interesting story.