

The Irish poet Seamus Heaney said:

“Imaginative arts are practically useless, but they verify our singularity, they strike and stake out the core of self which lies at the base of every individuated life.”

In commenting on this, the linguist Helen Vendler wrote:

“Singularity and individuated life are those qualities indispensable (but not sufficient) for identifiable style. There have been singular and individuated selves who never created. But without a singular and individuated moral self there has never been a singular and individuated style.

The creative self does not have to be virtuous in the ordinary sense of the word, but it does have to be extraordinarily virtuous in its aesthetic moves. It must refuse – against the claims of fatigue, charm, popularity, money and so on – the received idea, the imprecise, the tired rhythm, the replication of past effects, the uninvestigated passage.

It is this heroic virtue in the realm of aesthetic behavior that courses in the Arts exist to teach. Human testimony is not uninteresting in itself, but it does not convey the morality of the imaginative effort toward aesthetic embodiment. That morality is almost unimaginably exhausting.”