What Kind of Poetry Reader Are You? (British Edition)

This ‘close reading’ assignment asks you to read yourself reading poetry. To get started, take a look at this reader-friendly web page from British publisher Bloodaxe Books, “New to Poetry”:

http://www.bloodaxebooks.com/newto.asp

Geared toward beginners, the “New to Poetry” page helps you flush out your assumptions about poems and think about how you navigate on your own. How do the suggested categories and examples nudge you to consider your own taste in poetry? Which poems on our syllabus most compel you? What particular qualities draw you in?

Instructions: Review the website and ponder my list of poetic modes below to gauge what kind of poetry reader you are now. Then choose two poems from our syllabus that are your favorites thus far. Your paper will make a self-diagnosis of your taste in poetry, using the two examples to argue for the particular traits that activate your readerly symptoms. You may use traits and/or categories from the website, my list, or both. Note that my “X-factor” category allows you to formulate your own poetic trait or category. Your conclusion should argue for the advantages and/or disadvantages you see in your taste. Note that this is an argumentative paper with a thesis, claims, and supporting evidence. (And yes, you may of course use the professional first person.)

Your essay structure should resemble this:
- Introduction: Self-diagnosis and the poetic traits and/or categories that compel you
- Section on Poem #1
- Section on Poem #2
- Conclusion – here you may touch base with the Bloodaxe website if you wish

Dr. Bryant’s Brief Guide to Poetic Modes & Moves:

The I’s Have It – Are you drawn to poems with strong speakers? Do you like to sense a person behind the poem? Do you like to feel close to the poet, or at a strategic distance from the persona?

Man (or Woman) vs. Wild – Do you like nature poems about flora, fauna, and more? How much human presence do you prefer? Would you rather walk into the garden or the wilderness?

Well Said! – Do you notice well chosen phrases or striking words when you read poetry? Do you relish wordsmiths? Do you download their bon mots and look for opportune moments to use them?

Argument Clinic – As the classic Monty Python skit reminds us, there’s an art to an argument. Do you thrill to the powers of persuasion? Do you admire poets who are master rhetoricians?

Divine Design – Do you notice rhymes, stanzas, shapes, or other patterns when you read? Do you think poets should follow W. B. Yeats’s dictum to “sing whatever is well made”? After all, shouldn’t poetry more than broken prose?

Extreme Makeover: Syntax Edition – Do you fancy avant-garde poetry? Should a poem be a laboratory for endless experimentation? Do you like poems that challenge your assumptions about how poetry should look and sound? Should it stop making sense?

Love, Actually – Do you embrace poems that traffic in this timeless theme? Are you looking for something a Valentine card could never, ever deliver? Are you compelled by poems about relationships?

Stanzas in Meditation – This title from one of Gertrude Stein’s poems reminds us that poetry often conveys spiritual awakenings and philosophical excursions. Do you prefer contemplative poems?

War and Peace – Are you drawn to occasional poems about Big Historical Events?

Occupy This – Are you compelled by poems of protest and other forms of social commentary?

Shelf Life & Gallery Guides – Do you prefer poems about literature and the visual arts? Do you like poems to be self-reflexive but not necessarily avant-garde?

X-Factor – invent your own trait or category!