Native American Poetry and Poets

Below are a series of quotes taken from the introduction to Harper's *Anthology of 20th Century Native American Poetry*, edited by Duane Niatum. Read each quote and consider its implications on how Native American Poetry is discussed, and the effect labeling the poets can have. Also, consider how the quotes change your own perceptions on what you have read so far, or if they change any preconceptions you had about Native American poetry.

"Modern Indian Poetry can 'tell you more about the Indian's travels in historical experience then all the books written and lectures given'" *Vibe Deloria, Jr*

"History can be taken for granted, in the way of the conqueror, because things worked out the way they were supposed to. But the Native American poet *is* his or her own history" *Brian Swann*

" . . . [is Native American poetry] just poetry with variety of themes and techniques that happens to be written by Native Americans?" *Brian Swann*

"There is no genre of 'Indian literature' because we are all different. There is only literature written by people who are Indian and who, therefore, infuse their work with their own lives the same way that you do" *Wendy Rose*

*"*Anyone who claims there is [a particular Indian way of writing] encourages a conventional response from both Indians and non-Indians, and as a result actually inhibits the reader's imagination" *Duane Niatum*

"Too often classification can reduce attention to what is special" *Brian Swann*

" . . . if we use [classification] knowing that such a grouping is only a start . . . then it is useful. It helps us to hold on to something new and distinct" *Brian Swann*

Considerations

From what you have read and discussed, what do you think grouping poets under one heading does to their poems and how they are viewed? Write a few bullet points for discussion below:

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What were your initial expectations of Native American poetry?

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Has this changed? If so, how has it changed, and why do you think it has?

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