

# Preface

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**Psyche and the Literary Muses: The contribution of literary  
content to scientific psychology**

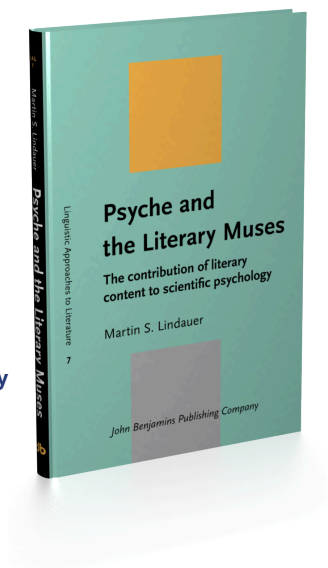
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## Preface

*Psyche and the Literary Muses* builds on the widely held assumption that much of literature, whether it refers to the creativity of authors, the reactions of readers, or the content of literary works is about psychology, that is, thoughts, feelings, personality, and the like. Psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychoanalysts acknowledge literature as a gateway to the psyche, as do writers, scholars, literary theorists, and the general public. In this book, my focus is on the literary work rather than, as is often the case, the author or reader. I consider the work central because here is where authors (who create) and readers (who respond) converge; there are no authors or readers of literature without a literary product. The novel, short story, and play come immediately to mind, but I look to the briefest of literary materials: names of fictional characters, titles of short stories, subject-matter indices of the content of literature, extracts from autobiographies, and clichés and quotations taken from literary sources. With these, it is easier to extract material on perception, thinking, emotions, creativity and a wide range of other topics, including person perception and aging.

The relevance of literary content to psychological matters is demonstrated through empirical research where objective evidence is relied on and quantification looms large. My perspective, in a word, is scientific. My goals are to strengthen the place of psychology in literature and the arts in general, and to thereby further interdisciplinary exchanges with the humanities. To achieve these goals, *Psyche and the Literary Muses* is organized as follows. Part I places the book within the frameworks of the psychology of art and psychology in general. To these ends, Chapter 1 summarizes the larger issues of the book; Chapter 2 surveys the relationship between the psychology of art and psychology in general; Chapter 3 reviews clinical and scientific approaches to the arts; Chapter 4 examines the relatively minor place of the psychology of art and the reasons for this. Part II introduces the psychology of literature in broad terms. Chapter 5 relates it to other kinds of art, mainly paintings; Chapter 6 summarizes the problems faced and possible solutions. Part III demonstrates the application, through research, of brief literary forms to psychology. In particular, Chapter 7 investigates the relevance of poetry to learning, autobiographies to creativity, and literary titles to expressive (physiognomic) perception. Chapter 8 investigates the relationship of literary names to physiognomic perception, the emotions covered in literature, and the bearing of literary clichés on cognition. Chapter 9 concentrates on literary

quotations and discusses their relevance to the studies that follow. Part IV presents several investigations of quotations primarily from literary and related sources. Chapters 10 and 11 study quotations on the perception of persons; and Chapters 12 to 15 examine them in relation to aging. Chapter 16 concludes by extending the book's findings to several larger issues: a perceptual approach to literature; a liberalized experimental aesthetics of literature; a reinvigorated psychology of the arts; a broadened scientific analysis of the arts; an advancement of interdisciplinary studies; and finally, an evaluation of this book's approach to literature.

I am not the first to write about these subjects.<sup>1</sup> Edited books usually contain a chapter or two on literature alongside ones on paintings, music, film, and so on. Books on creativity include writers among other kinds of artists from different areas. The psychology of the reader of literature focuses on the application of cognitive psychology, especially as it relates to readers' comprehension of literary works. Anthologies that contain extracts from literature illustrate a variety of phenomena, usually of the pathological sort. How-to works are directed to the practical aspects of writing, like overcoming writer's block and appreciating literature. The pertinence of literature to specific topics, like aging or madness, is also covered in separate books. Increasingly, some take a biological and evolutionary approach to literature. In addition, hundreds of research articles focus on poetry, novels, plays, or short stories.

Few publications, though, examine the psychology of literature the way *Psyche and the Literary Muses* does. It focuses on the content of literature, as already mentioned, but does so for its own sake and not for the elucidation of authors and readers. In addition, this work covers a wide range of brief literary and quasi-literary forms, relies on scientific research, takes a quantitative perspective, and uses research to demonstrate the relevance of different kinds of literary content to various psychological phenomena. More generally, this book ties together science, the arts, and the humanities within an interdisciplinary framework that includes literature, the arts in general, and psychology at large. All these features, rarely combined in one book differ sharply from qualitative, speculative, and psychoanalytic ("Freudian," "therapeutic," and clinical) approaches. These and other works are preoccupied with writers and their creativity, or alternatively, readers and their reactions to literature.

*Psyche and the Literary Muses* is addressed to two audiences. The first includes professionals: psychologists, both scientific and clinical; and scholars, literary theorists, and humanists with an interest in literature. The second audience is more general, readers who are curious about the relationship between literature and psychology, and not solely of the clinical sort, who wonder if these disparate disciplines can be usefully related to one another in ways that meaningfully contribute to both.

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*Psyche and the Literary Muses* complements a recent work of mine, *Aging, Creativity, and Art*, which also takes a scientific approach, but to paintings and their contribution to an understanding of old age. The book also updates an earlier work of mine, *The Psychological Study of Literature*, which reviewed early work in this field. *Psyche* also brings together my studies in different areas of the arts, including aesthetics and creativity, as well as essays on interdisciplinarity, along with investigations of imagery and physiognomic perception.<sup>2</sup> These introductory remarks set the stage for Part I, which looks at literature within two broader contexts of psychology.