

## FOREWORD OF THE EDITORS

In this volume we want to pay homage to the work of Marthe Robert and particularly to her *Origins of the Novel (Roman des origines et origines du roman, 1972)*<sup>1</sup>. That famous study is a creative, convincing exploration of Freud's views on the 'Family Romance'. In her examination of novels as significant as *Don Quixote, Robinson Crusoe, Madame Bovary* and others, Marthe Robert not only gives us a new method to analyse the novel but also presents the results of her research as a contribution to the history of the genre. She invites us to distinguish between two categories of novels. The first type is created by 'oedipal' or 'bastard' authors. Such writers leave intact the inherited image of the mother but banish the image of the father. In their novels young heroes set out to conquer the world. These hero figures succeed thanks to the love of women, who often behave like mothers, and to the example of great heroes who assume the role of the father. Different from these novels - but very often intermingling with them - we find a second category which is that of the 'foundling', the hero of the scenario of the pre-oedipal writer. In this last type of novel Robert includes for instance the work of Kafka, Beckett and many fairy tales of the brothers Grimm. These authors create an universe in which our daily reality remains totally absent and where both father and mother who are responsible for that reality, are replaced by dream figures.

Robert's study offers such a persuasive proof of the relevance of Freud's theories that it still stimulates us to expand on these ideas and suggestions. The authors of this volume devoted themselves to this challenge during a conference on '*The Origins of the Novel*' which was held at the University of Groningen (Netherlands) in November 1992. The contributions to this volume are derived from different cultural areas. English, French and German scholars make evident the fecundity of Robert's views, revealing as well the possibilities for some revision. They write about the historical and mythical figures Medea, Electra, Mary, Sir Gawain and Kaspar Hauser. Other articles are devoted to the 'Family Romance' in works by the following authors: Barthes, Beckett, Camus, Drieu La Rochelle, Faulkner, Flaubert, Goethe, Goll, Gombrowicz, Greene, Kafka, Lévy, Modiano, Petronius, Sartre, Vigny.

We wish to acknowledge our gratitude to the Faculty of Arts, Groningen University for its assistance in the publication of this volume, and to Mrs. Marja Pijnenborg for her indefatigable work on these texts.

<sup>1</sup> English and American editions in 1980 in Brighton (Harvester Press) and Bloomington (Indiana University Press)