

# **The Poetics of Being**

**Rolf I. Vaernes**

**Cand. Mag., Cand. Philol.**

**This Thesis is presented for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy, Murdoch University, 2004**

## Declaration

'Except where I have indicated, the thesis I am submitting is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for assessment at any other University.'

.....

20.01.2004

2004 © Rolf I. Vaernes

All rights reserved. No part of this thesis may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system without permission in writing from the author.

## Abstract

### Rolf I. Vaernes, *The Poetics of Being*

The aim of *The Poetics of Being* is to inquire into how the apperception of the Being of beings is produced. We will recognize this production not primarily in philosophy, but in a medium accessible to us all, theatre. Although the Romantic tradition of literary criticism from Herder to Bloom has noted that Shakespeare produces an exceptional sense of what is [true], so much so that he is said to create the impression of nature or life, no one has so far attempted to show how precisely Shakespeare affects this experience. Contrary to T. S. Eliot, who is unable to discern any kind of poetics in Shakespeare's plays, we have discovered an insistent and consistent pattern of inadequation, a kind of mismatch. The thesis argues, that the predominant tropes of inadequation are falsity, dissimilarity, nothing, indefiniteness, elision and substitution. We shall show that these figures of inadequation are the universal means by which Shakespeare, almost imperceptibly, compels the spectator to infer the apperception of what *is* [true].

On the basis of these tropes of inadequation the thesis makes the fundamental philosophical claim that the cognition of Being through non-Being is a negative form of what Heidegger calls the ontological difference. We call this the *negative ontological difference*. The thesis demonstrates that with the exception of some Pre-Socratic thinkers, Plato in the Sophist, the work of Pseudo-Dionysius, and the writings of Derrida, the bulk of the tradition of Western philosophy has argued Being in terms of positivities. While the thesis does not question the possibility of realizing the ontological difference in a positive fashion, as does Heidegger's philosophy of unconcealment, the thesis claims that the negative ontological difference, or ontological contradiction, is the more forceful process by which we become aware of what *is* [true].

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Princess Mirah for love, encouragements and support, but even more, for like a goddess indicating the true direction for this thesis, for sharing an experience of life without which this thesis would not be possible. I would also like to thank her for sharing her family at the Palace in Karangasem, Bali. My thanks extend to her family, who through their care provided me with what is invaluable to all fundamental research: time. Horst Ruthrof has been an invaluable mentor from the beginning to the end, and I would like to praise him for systematically, forcefully and knowledgeably, guiding me to the completion of this thesis, so effortlessly and cleverly that I at times may have had the false impression that I could have done so without him. Through his kind advice and learned company, I have for the first time in my academic life realized an intention, which would have been impossible if he had not from the beginning known where I was heading better than myself. I am also grateful that he has convinced me that there is even more to learn from people than from books, for he taught me the basic tenet of his own philosophy without saying a word. Furthermore, I would like to express thanks the administration at Murdoch University for guiding me from beginning to end through all bureaucratic hurdles, but especially to director of research Paul D'Sylva for having introduced me to the University itself. I would finally like to thank my parents in Norway for being there when this project was first conceived years ago, and my students for always reminding me that if you don't make yourself understood there is hardly any reason to speak at all. To Carl Burman I wish to extend my gratitude for showing me that there is always a way if you are more than willing to talk the talk, that is, walk the walk. And perhaps all those I have mentioned are among those Heidegger had in mind when he said, 'Only those who walk along, know there's a way.' For showing me that, I am eternally thankful.

**Rolf I. Vaernes**

***The Poetics of Being***

**Murdoch University**

<b>Abstract</b>		
<b>Acknowledgements</b>		
<b>C0</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>C1</b>	<b>THE HERMENEUTICS OF BEING</b>	<b>23</b>
§1.1	Making the Shakespearean Aporia	26
§1.2	Unmaking the Shakespearean Aporia	40
§1.3	The Topology of Being	54
<b>C2</b>	<b>PHILOSOPHIES OF UNCONCEALMENT</b>	<b>72</b>
§2.1	Plato's Khora	76
§2.2	Aristotle's Place	81
§2.3	Plotinus' Mirror	87
§2.4	Nietzsche's Chaos	91
§2.5	Derrida's Khora	104
<b>C3</b>	<b>PHILOSOPHIES OF CONCEALMENT</b>	<b>112</b>
§3.1	Derrida's Death	113
§3.2	Kant's 'Paralogisms of Pure Reason'	125
§3.3	Dionysius' Mystical Theology	139
<b>C4</b>	<b>THE TECHNE OF BEING</b>	<b>157</b>
§4.1	The Inadequacy of Mimesis	158
§4.2	The Techne of Inadequation	168
§4.3	Instruments of Inadequation	179
<b>C5</b>	<b>THE TRUE PRODUCTION OF BEING</b>	<b>193</b>
§5.1	The Battle for Truth	194
§5.2	The Body of Truth	208
§5.3	Shakespeare's True Betrayal	217

<b>C6</b>	<b>THE FALSE PRODUCTION OF BEING</b>	<b>237</b>
§6.0	The History of What is False	238
§6.1	The Topos of What is False	254
§6.2	The Function of What is False	266
§6.3	The Paradox of What is False	278
<b>C7</b>	<b>THE PRODUCTION OF BEING THROUGH DISSIMILARITY</b>	<b>290</b>
§7.1	The Topos of Dissimilarity	291
§7.2	The Function of Dissimilarity	304
§7.3	The Paradox of Dissimilarity	313
<b>C8</b>	<b>THE PRODUCTION OF BEING THROUGH NOTHING</b>	<b>324</b>
§8.0	The Battle for Nothing	325
§8.1	Saying 'Nothing'	333
§8.2	Showing Nothing	348
§8.3	Being Nothing	359
<b>C9</b>	<b>THE PRODUCTION OF BEING THROUGH SUBSTITUTION</b>	<b>375</b>
§9.1	The Topos of Substitution	376
§9.2	The Function of Substitution	386
§9.3	The Paradox of Substitution	401
<b>C10</b>	<b>THE PARADOX OF BEING</b>	<b>414</b>
	<b>Glossary</b>	<b>426</b>
	<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>434</b>

To Princess Mirah, for showing that love is the self-sacrificial desire to unconceal what *is* true and false, the Being of beings.