WRITING WITH

Monster Talks: a Monster Network Podcast

The Monster Talks Jingle:
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Line Henriksen:
Welcome to this episode of Monster Talks. Today we're going to be talking about monstrous writing or monster writing and looking at how writing can be monstrous or can be viewed as monstrous; and what that might do to how we engage with our writing practices.

Today, it's me, Line Henriksen from the Monster Network and I'm here with Aino-Kaisa Koistinen also from the Monster Network. Aino-Kaisa, would you like to say a few words of introduction? What is your relationship with writing?

Aino-Kaisa Koistinen:
Yes, hi everyone, I'm Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, sitting here in my kitchen.

My relationship with writing goes back, really way back. I guess, I was always an ambitious writer. My mother was a librarian. So, obviously, when I learned to write, I started to write books, straight away. They were basically novels. But then I also used to throw them in the fireplace. I guess, I've always had this kind of ambitious and maybe a bit dramatic relationship with my writing. But joking aside, I'm obviously a scholar. I write scholarly texts. I also like to write these texts that try to popularize, if that's the right word, that try to popularize scientific research. I also write speculative fiction and poetry.

Lately, I have really tried to combine all these three: academic writing, speculative fiction and poetry. I think that writing is a really big part of my existence in the world. How about your relationship to writing?

Line:
It's also a bit tense, I think. I'm also writing academic texts. I'm currently a post-doctoral researcher. I do write academic texts. I have to obviously write academic papers. I find it incredibly difficult. And I've always found writing incredibly difficult.

So, that's why at the end of today, I'm going to be talking a bit about my relationship with procrastination because I think that's one of my most intense writing partners. It's the need to not write. I think it's incredibly difficult to write. But obviously, I still do it because I have to do it for my job. I do enjoy it sometimes when it works. I also do write fiction, very short fiction that I publish in sci-fi magazines. And sometimes that's a joy, and sometimes it's really difficult as well. I think writing to me is always a bit contentious. It was never purely pleasure or whatever. It was always a bit difficult.

I'm really looking forward to talking to you today about, indeed, the more monstrous aspects of writing. And why it can be so difficult to write. And why sometimes it can feel like the text, or the writing process in itself, is almost a creature of its own mind; and its own intentions; and its own plans; and sometimes it doesn't really care what you as the author wants it to do.

Just a quick FYI, we are right now on Zoom, recording this on Zoom. I'm sure there's going to be some weird noises, glitches, and weird voices. That's probably also going to be part of monster writing but through a different medium.

One of the reasons that we started talking about writing, and the monsters of writing, is that the *Monster Network* has actually worked quite intensively with writing, especially, the monster as a method for writing differently and for doing research differently.

We've just done, this summer, or was it last summer? I forget the time now, because last summer we did a keynote at the conference in the UK, in London, basically working with the monster as a method, a tool for thought. That turned into monster as writing creatively. That has since then turned into a paper, which is right now being published as we speak.

Aino-Kaisa, would you say a few words about the *Monster Network* and how we have worked with the monster and writing?

Aino-Kaisa Koistinen:

Well, where should I start?

Line:
I'm putting you on the spot, I'm sorry.

Aino-Kaisa Koistinen:
One thing that already kind of makes our writing monstrous is that we are five people behind the *Monster Network*, or that work and write as the *Monster Network*. That always brings with it this multiplicity of voices and this sort of dialogic structure. Even though we have noticed many times that the multiplicity of voices is hard to maintain when you're writing an academic text, we then somehow find ourselves again, and again, speaking in the same voice as the *Monster Network*.

Line:
I agree with you. Something that we have been working with is the multiplicity of the voice that speaks and that writes, and sometimes also the struggles to keep the differences intact when you write with other people. Something that we started discussing was also how the multiplicity of the voice is not just in the group. When you write collectively and you have collective voices writing about a similar topic, it's not always that the multiplicity is necessarily in the group work. It's sometimes also in the voice of the individual writer that we, each of us, actually write with multiple voices.

Whenever we write, we are haunted by various kinds of ideas, scholars, concepts, and things we have kind of stolen or picked up from other people and we are being spoken by those other voices. When we started talking about wanting to do a podcast today about monster writing; and then started talking about the multiplicity and this question: Who do we write with when we write? Who are our writing companions?

If we talk about the writing subject as multiple and as speaking almost in voices, what does that mean? How can we perhaps conceptualise it? Or try to theorise it? What does it mean to speak in that kind of voice and to be speaking with others when you write?

That was something that we started talking about. I think it was you, Aino-Kaisa, who said something about writing with or this idea of companionship, when we write. That's basically what we're going to be talking about here during this podcast. We are going to be introducing, obviously, our own writing companions. Like I said, I'm going to say a few words about procrastination as my companion. And I know, Aino-Kaisa, you have a very specific companion in your cat, who has been teaching you some very specific lectures about writing. We have some voices as well from people who agreed to share with us their own writing companions. They will be interrupting our conversation throughout today. We're going to do a more in-depth introduction to who they are at the very end.

That's what's going to happen today and the layout for why we are here and what we're talking about it. I can say that for me, at least part of the necessity to talk about this multiplicity, and this monstrousness of writing, is that I am schooled within an academic tradition that has a very specific understanding of what writing is. I was always told that the writing comes after you do your research. So you go out there in the field, you find out all there is to find out. You come back home, you sit down, you write it down. And then writing is purely communication. It kind of happens at the very end of the process— it's not part of the process itself. It's something that just happens as a bit of an afterthought.

And to me, that has never been how writing works. As soon as I sit down and try to write something, I change my mind about the thing I write about. I think a lot of us have tried to… as soon as we write, it changes how we think and writing is actually thinking. A lot of research going on right now within, for example, feminist theory, but also within cultural studies in general and other fields when it comes to writing, is to rethink writing as a tool of thought and a kind of method, a process. But how has your experience been with that?

I know Aino-Kaisa, you also struggled a bit with writing as communication.

Aino-Kaisa:
I liked what you said about writing as actually doing research, that the process of writing is the process of thinking. I've always hated the form of academic articles that some disciplines really like, there are the theories and whatnot, and then the discussion, the discussion is in the end. I would like to see the thinking, and the discussion, and the conversation with the data and with the scholars that have sort of inspired the author. I would like it to be visible throughout the text. I have also always felt that I write and think together. I think with writing.

I'm so much better at writing than at expressing myself orally. You will probably notice it in this podcast, too. That I stumble and I might stutter and it's sometimes very hard for me to get my meaning across, especially in English.

But when I write, I think that the process is so much freer. In a sense, it leads you to different kinds of conclusions when you just let go and start writing.

Line:
Yeah, I think that's a really good point. I do think that it's important to look at writing as, indeed, something that you do in order to think and also get to know the subject that you are engaging with. But also to me, at least, something that sometimes has a mind of its own, at least feels like it has a mind of its own. I'm often struggling with trying to make it do what I want it to do, and it doesn't do it.

Kaisa Kortekallio:
Writing with darkness is a precarious business. It starts in September and October with soaking up as much sunshine as you can. You sit outside, in a sunny spot, until it gets too cold. You hope this will suffice.

In November, you wake up and try it out. The darkness is a substance on your skin, in your skin, like powdered bedrock or some kind of dried-up slime. You test the weight of darkness while you sit up in the bed, pull on woollen socks, consider herbs for your tea. The darkness sits with you in your socks, in your guts, and soaks up your tea. Some mornings it puts you back to sleep. Some mornings it has you looking out of a window for an hour or two until you see the light gray afternoon sky. There is no snow.

Writing with darkness, you spare your movements. You exist in a cocoon of tea and low lights. Reach out to adjust the brightness of the screen to the minimum. You extend two fragile arms, ending in twiggy digits and type. If you were sensible in September, you have your tasks laid ready for you. Handwritten notes to draw on, skeleton frames to upholster, citations to chew on. With pre-organized materials, you can lay out your text like you would a jigsaw puzzle, technically correct and stylistically passable. But in the case you were not sensible in September, you have to do some heavy lifting with actual weights.

The darkness is of the earth, you see, and it enjoys iron. It nestles into the 20-kilo plates and rides with them as you push against gravity, the squat, the press, the deadlift. You do this in the evenings two times a week. Eventually, heavy lifting brings you back to the screen. The darkness, now a warm buzz in your muscles, sustains you. It might grant you one new item and aid, a new paragraph or subtitle, a constellation of Post-it notes on the desk. From your warm muscles, it slowly pours out a syrup rich in minerals and settles into verbal form.

A year from this November, you can take these words out from their folder, lay them out and see if they ring true or not. If they do, you can find them a place in your puzzle.

Line:
Me and my colleague Katrine Meldgaard Kjær, are both working at the ITU University of Copenhagen. We are affiliated with a methods lab called ETHOS. In November last year, we tried to do a workshop where we wanted to look at writing as something that was anxiety inducing, perhaps a bit uncomfortable. We wanted to do it through the lens of the monster, where we were asking: What would monster writing be? What if we look at our text as a monster or something monstrous?

We invited people to come bringing texts that they were trying to finish, but it was difficult for them because it was difficult for them to be in the companionship of that particular text because it made them uncomfortable, or they could finish it, or they were unhappy with it. So we worked directly with those texts, among other things, talking directly to those texts as though they were creatures in and of themselves. And then trying to basically cut them up as monsters, afterwards, and trying to rearrange them and work together to create new texts.

I think it was interesting to have these discussions with people because there was a general understanding and experience of writing as something that was incredibly vulnerable, that was difficult. And also the text and the writing process itself seemed to have indeed a kind of a mind of its own and being a creature in and of itself. If you start looking at it as a creature, and if you start looking at it as a monster, you also start looking at it through the lens of the creator or the scientist and all of these monster scenarios where, what kind of relationship does the monster or the creature and the creator have? It's often very contentious. What kind of responsibilities does the creator have towards the monster that she unleashes onto the world?

Aino-Kaisa:
So the text becomes a Frankenstein's monster.

Line:
Yes, indeed. At the very end, we did also cut up all these texts and put them together like new monsters, to try to really lean into this fragmentation of the monstrous body. And this feeling of the text as something that was always incredibly vulnerable, always filled with these cracks that were not supposed to be there. It was not this easy process at the end of the research. It was something much different and sometimes filled with lots of negative emotions of shame or discontent, unhappiness, anxiety. So if it was possible to talk to the text, maybe also change how we felt about them by looking at them as creatures. That was what we were experimenting with. And it was kind of interesting and I think it worked really well.

What made me interested in looking more in-depth when it comes to who is keeping us company when we write; when we create these monsters that we create. Because these texts were not just the offspring of some kind of almighty order, we had full control. It was something completely different. It was a creature of a lot of things, a lot of parents, so to speak. Nobody had full control of their offspring because it was not an easy process. Those were some of the things that came up when we did that particular workshop.

Aino-Kaisa:
Yeah, that's really interesting.

The question of vulnerability brought me back to the idea of writing companions and writing with. Because when you're doing academic texts, you're always writing to an audience. Even when you're writing creative works like speculative fiction or poetry, if you aim to publish it, you're always already writing with something, writing with all these expectations about genre, about academic norms, for example. But writing with can also be this really empowering experience. For example, I felt very passionate about writing with or writing as the *Monster Network*. Because I felt that especially in this newest text where we have been able to really set ourselves free and experiment with the form of the text, and even break some academic conventions. I felt kind of free from certain pressures of academic writing that have to do with academic publishing, that you can only write these certain kinds of texts in certain kinds of high-ranking publications.

And about writing with and the vulnerability. It has to do with the fact, as you said, your text is always a monster and you can't control it. Especially after publishing, then it goes out there, it goes viral online, it has a lot of its own and you really can't control it.

Quite recently, last weekend, one of my friends defended her thesis and in her defense, as a surprise to me, I found out that she had used a concept that I had created in my PhD thesis. She had taken that concept and she had found that useful. And I found that extremely empowering. So in a sense, the thing that you cannot control your work, it might bring anxiety, but also this empowering surprises.

Line:
Indeed, because we're going to be talking about writing with; and who do we write with? when we write in order to be able to write. But there's also the question of “who writes with us?”

So in this case, it was basically somebody writing with you to some extent, using you as a writing companion, but without it being your conscious self. It was your you that was embedded in this writing. I think in these contexts, the relationship between object and subject, and who does and who's being done to, shifts and changes a lot and creates various kinds of selves that you don't have a lot of control over at the very end.

Katrine Meldgaard Kjær:
When I was asked to say something about what my writing companions are and what I write with, I immediately thought of music. I don't have pets and I don't use a writing program or app in my writing, but I am really dependent on writing with music. The thing is that my companion music to my writing, it has to be music that's not what you would conventionally understand as very good, very deep. It must be pop music. I have written several chapters of my PhD to the tune of Justin Bieber. Because that's the other thing, It has to be just one single track that's on repeat.

I think it's because the music, that type of music and the repetition of it, of the three minutes just over and over again, provides a rhythm I can tap into. It provides sort of an upbeat atmosphere that I can just relax into and put aside all of the perfectionism and even

sometimes anxiety that's also connected to writing. Because it's pretty difficult to be anxious when you're listening to Justin Bieber or Pitbull.

I often see actually, in my writing, because I write things, or specific chapters or specific articles, to one song. And then the next time I write something, it will be to another song. I don't repeat songs typically. I can often tell from the flow of my writing, what kind of music I have been writing with. It can be that I can see I have shorter sentences or that my flow is different according to which piece of music I've been writing with. So I am rarely alone when I write. I am almost always in the company of pop stars.

Line:
If we circle back to the idea of the companion and the writing with, at least to me, the writing with is associated with Donna Haraway's work on companionship. The companion is the one you eat with. And here we're looking at again, something that you are a companion that you do something with, in the sense of writing companions. To me, there is a lot to be gained from having this eye to the writing subject as somebody who is multiple; who is not in full control; who is not fully gathered and collected and fully conscious of everything that's going to happen in the creation of this monster that you are yourself also a part of.

The question is, who do we write with when we write? And I know you have been working on the companionship of cats when it comes to writing and cat writing. Is that something you can say a bit more about?

Aino-Kaisa:
Yes, I definitely can. As you already mentioned, Donna Haraway. The idea of cat writing came to me in 2018 or 2019 or so when we were having this reading group at my university, an animal studies reading group. I was rereading Donna Haraway's *The Companion Species Manifesto* for that reading group. Then I came across Haraway's concept of *dog writing*, which Haraway describes as… I actually wrote down a quote for myself. She describes it as, "a part of Feminine's theory or the other way around." I really love that quote. She also writes, asks, "How might an ethics and politics committed to the flourishing of significant otherness be learned from taking dog-human relationships seriously?"

When that reading group took place, I had just, quite accidentally, actually, been living with a cat for about six months or so. It was an accident since the cat came to us, to me and my partner, as sort of a rescue cat since she could not tolerate the newborn baby in her family. She needed, she's an elderly cat, she needed more peace and quiet; so she came to us. I think that when I read Haraway's *The Companion Species Manifesto* yet again, and I came across the concept of dog writing, it struck me that there definitely also is a concept and a very material, semiotic process of cat writing. I would claim that everyone or probably everyone who lives with a cat and has a laptop, you know, cats really, really like to disrupt your writing. They really materially may take part in the reading process. They walk across your keyboard, they come purring and they just like to disrupt.

I really wanted to start writing about this process. And not just about the cat disrupting me while I was writing, but also about starting to sort of live with the cat, accidentally receiving this cat. I knew nothing about cats since I'm actually allergic to cats. I have always found cats strangers to me. But I had heard that you usually become immune to your own cat. And that also happened to me. So the cat also changed me bodily. She really changed me.

I've told people that, for me, the cat could have been a space alien. Because, you know, strange to me as a space alien. Then I wanted to, since I'm a writer, I wanted to write about this, to somehow represent the process of living with the cat, and writing with a cat, and also write about the meta-level of writing about this with the cat, with the actual cat, materially disrupting the process. I've tried to write about it, both within or with using academic language, and also poetic language, but I keep finding out that the cat always escapes. She escapes representation or the process of writing about cats with the cat. It cannot be represented. It just escapes. And it's not just writing with a cat. It's writing with this particular cat. I have to mention here that it is kind of perfect that my cat's name even is Sotku, which is “mess” in English.

So, how could I not see these connections to Haraway's sort of messy entanglements with animals? when I'm really given a cat who is even named “mess. It has all been really too perfect to be true, but maybe what I really still want to say about cat writing is that when I write about Sotku and with Sotku, I also write with all the lived histories between humans and non-humans, the histories between humans and cats, but also the histories and the ethical and political questions inherent in broader human, non-human relationships. I think that the process of cat-writing has made me so sensitive to the cognitive dissonances related

to my ethical and political choices that I make on a daily basis. For example, it completely tears my heart apart that in order for this wonderful caring and loving relationship between me and Sotku to flourish, other animals must die. I'm trying to sort of explain this to me, how I can decide which animals may live and which may die. It's been a really hard process for me. I think that I have found solace from Patricia MacCormack's *The Ahuman Manifesto*, where she writes, something on the lines that we humans, if we stop procreation, we can just sort of slowly die together with all our companion animals.

As I am a woman with no children, I kind of take solace of this idea that I have my cat and we might be hurting other animals so that we can exist, but at least we're not procreating. The cat is also neutered. So, we are kind of marching towards oblivion together, but doing it with as much love as we can. I would like to read a poem here, in the end, that I just wrote. It's a very raw draft, but it's called *The Original Escape Artist*.f

A softness sometimes reachable, a sharpness
hidden yet ready, an echo reaches further
to a farm, to picture book animals, still life

Nothing to be said, nothing to be done, except
to hold on to the softness, while always feeling
the sharp pain beneath

You talk with narrow eyelids
no taming, only living
and there is nothing more
to be said.

Line:
Is that an example of cat-writing?

Aino-Kaisa:
Yes, one of the examples of me trying to grasp everything that happens in the process of cat writing and maybe cat living.

Line:

I think it's a super exciting, interesting angle that you are relating this to MacCormack's *The Ahuman Manifesto* and this idea of marching into oblivion, as you say, which is also a really good way of putting it. How would you say that writing works in this context? Because you are talking about not procreating, but you are creating, you are leaving something behind, you are leaving some kind of creatures behind that you are putting out there in the world. How is it, the relationship between text and procreation in this sort of ahuman way?

Aino-Kaisa:
That's a really, really good question. I think that maybe if you really think about MacCormack's *The Ahuman Manifesto* and also Donna Haraway's, some of her more recent work, maybe, it's more about communication than procreation. It's more about building communities in the now and trying to find ways to act in the now. It can even be this activist process.

Maybe, I'm not really thinking about leaving a legacy or, in a sense, leaving marks in the world with my writing for later generations, since perhaps there won't be any later generations. But it's more about trying to act in the now and that's also something that I very much found in Patricia MacCormack's *The Ahuman Manifesto*. I know that many people read the Manifesto very differently, I was also reading it in a reading group and I think that I was the only one who was raving about finding solace from the text. Many others found it kind of disturbing. Not everyone, I think that some others in the group were also inspired; but I think that it's a really sort of polemic text. If you haven't read The *Ahuman Manifesto*, it suggests that humans should stop all procreation for other species to thrive.

Line:
Yes, what I think is interesting about writing, and especially if we look at writing as something that is never solitary, that is always together with, it's always in the companionship of, then I think that to me at least writing has a sense of the future about it. Because you're leaving a trace for a future reader, even if that reader is you five minutes into the future. But writing is based on this haunting of a future reader and the possibility of writing as something that will live beyond the author herself. And also haunted, obviously, by the past. Because if we didn't have a past of people using the same language again and again and again, we would not have an easily recognisable language that would then be able to be projected into the future.

To me, writing is haunted by a future and is haunted by a past. I think it's interesting to contemplate the idea of a future without a possible reader, a future beyond the human, where your text can never be read, but it does exist to some extent anyway. It has a kind of an extent. I think that's a very interesting take, to have this idea of the non-human future embedded in the writing. I think that's also part of what makes it monstrous, the text that in the end may not be able to be read.

Nina Lykke:
A writing with story, with love from Nina Lykke.

With whom do I write? First of all, I write with my house. My house is where I lived with my passed-away lesbian beloved life partner for many, many years. The house is our house. The house of my beloved and me. It's big, and it's very old. It's for sure not a fancy house in any modern sense. It's a bit like a fairytale house with strange rooms behind other rooms. It's filled with books and stuff, which my beloved and I, over the years brought home from much travelling. The things are strange as the house is. They tell strange stories. For example, I have on my living room wall a horse without legs. It's from Egypt. My beloved bought it from a couple of 7 or 8-year-old girls 30 years ago. The girls were standing next to a pretty deserted road with a small box filled with things they wanted to sell if any tourists should pass. Unfortunately, they lived in a place where not many tourists came by. But then they saw us, my partner and me, and became very eager to do business. It was evident that they themselves had sewn and in other ways made the things in the box without help from any grown-up persons. Since they were not that old, they had not totally been able to make a fancy finish on all their goods. The horse had a small pillow, a stomach and a head. It was sewn together with pretty big stitches and in addition tied up with coloured ribbons. My partner pinpointed the horse, which, for sure, looked pretty nice, but evidently, it had no legs. So who will buy a horse without legs?

When the girls understood that we were interested in the horse, they started a long explanation in sign language. This was they gave us to understand a very, very, very special horse and we would become very, very, very happy if we bought it. But because this horse was so special, it was also really, really, really expensive, they said. My partner entered into a long sign language conversation, pretending that she fully believed all this. But said that she could not pay the extremely high price that the girls first had mentioned. The girls found it enormously funny that my partner actually seemed to be so stupid that she wanted to buy

a horse without legs. And they could not help jiggling a lot, even though they at the same time tried very hard to keep up a serious business-like discussion about the price. My partner gave the girls a very good price for the horse. And now for around 30 years, this strange horse without legs has been hanging on the wall of our living room. I sit next to it when I write.

On the other side of me when I write is our cat, Mose, often taking her afternoon or evening nap next to me, in the sofa. When she was a small kitten who had been left by people at a nearby public parking area, we gave her shelter in our house. This was some months before my beloved died six years ago. Mose has been living here with me since then. She has an especially comforting pillow, which is located in the sofa where I most often sit when I write. We, Mose, the horse without legs, the spectre of my beloved, the house, and for sure I should not forget the computer, we make up an assemblage. For me and for the computer, it's a writing assemblage. For Mose, I think it's a sleeping assemblage. What kind of assemblage is it for the house, for the horse, and for my spectre beloved? I can only guess. But I hope that they all love it as much as I do.

With love, from Nina.

Line:
I write with a lot of procrastination, I write with writing that does not want to be, or writing that… I have so many ideas about what the future result of the writing will be that it affects me in the present, so I cannot write it. Often, I have these preconceived ideas that this text that I'm working on right now is going to be so bad that I might as well just not get started. The future of that particular text, this horrible text that doesn't exist yet, but haunts me in the present, means that I have to go watch another YouTube video or go check Twitter again. Go to other texts, basically reading other texts rather than producing the text that I have to produce. So when I do end up writing, I think I write with procrastination more than I write in spite of procrastination. At least, I'm trying to challenge myself a bit to consider what it might mean to think of writing with procrastination more than procrastination only being something that means that you do not write.

Because, obviously, we also write when we are not directly engaged in the process of putting words on a page. Things are still happening somehow, at least I think that we still write when

we're not sitting and actually producing words; but something's still going on, and we're still having some ideas falling together or apart or making sense or not making sense.

I think for me, sometimes, I have a tendency to procrastinate with watching trailers on YouTube. I will have to watch the same trailers again and again and again. It's always like these fantastical trailers. I especially love… I think I finished my PhD, writing my PhD while I was watching the trailers for *Guardians of the Galaxy* One and Two. In some sense, it just eased my anxiety a bit to see something so, so too much; so filled with affect; so filled with intrigue and drama and people saving the galaxy. Then I could kind of return and write a sentence about Derrida. And then that's kind of okay. Then I can return to the high stakes of you know sci-fi afterwards, and then return again to my own paper and write maybe a sentence or two.

I think I had to procrastinate, I had to move into something else and get reignited by a different kind of affect than my anxiety and my fear of the future. I don't know if that even makes sense but I had to do something different. Another one I keep watching is the trailers for *Mad Max: Fury Road*, which is my all-time favourite film. And sometimes, I just have to have that feeling in my body in order to return to the writing.

To me at least, procrastination is a weird companion and it's one that I try to get a better grip of. I think that's my writing companion.

Aino-Kaisa:
That's really, really interesting and that also got me thinking of escapism and science fiction. Because I was actually just today, teaching about science fiction. We were discussing escapism and how science fiction and fantasy are sometimes sort of deemed childish and not that relevant; because they're just escapist fiction and entertainment. But then, I think that escapism is also a doorway to creativity as your example very well showed. I love space battles. Galactic space battles, they somehow restore me.

Line:
My kind of writing would then be procrastination writing. I don't know, anxiety writing, writing anxiously. And that's a constant companion.

Aino-Kaisa:

I find that also very intriguing. Because I think that I often don't have a problem with procrastination, but with excess. that I might write excessively. I don't know if I'm lying too much if I say that there's 180 pages left over from my PhD thesis.

Line:
Wow.

Aino-Kaisa:
We were talking about thinking with writing, so I really do that. There are theorisations about different types of writers and this would be, and I think, it's an exploratory writer: that you just start to write and see where it gets you. But I get so much excess material, and so much of these half-thought ideas, and such so that I get really anxious when it comes to editing and then publishing, the whole process of polishing the work.

I feel that when I'm writing, I'm just being creative, I'm being free, but then when I start to think about writing with or in the process I write with… I write with freedom, really, I just write and I'm happy and I'm productive, and I'm writing with all these cool scholars and all these cool ideas; but then when it comes closer to the actual publication, I start to think about these different writing companions. Then I also get this anxiety. When the book has been published, then it's really terrible, I never want to see that text anymore.

Line:
Exactly, I never read my text. As soon as they've been published they live a different world. I, just by mistake, having to look at some of them because I have to upload them somewhere, and it was like reading something from another person. I could not remember having done this at all. I think that's also part of the monster process of writing that the text becomes something that is sometimes so completely different I don't recognise it as me. I don't recognise the voice as me. I don't recognise the words. I have no idea who this person is, who wrote this thing, even though it's me for two years ago.

I think that sense of alienation and distance is there in the writing moment, not just in the future. I think that basically that other voice or that stranger within is there in the writing moment. It's so weird to see, at least for me, to see all the texts that I have done because I have no idea who this person is or who this voice is.

Aino-Kaisa:
But that alienation is also good because it reminds you that you are really not the text. It reminds us of the multiplicity of voices and also of a writer's voice. There's often a lot of talk in the creative writing circles about someone's own authentic voice. But I don't really believe in that. I think that you always have multiple voices.

Line:
Yeah, I think that's a really good wrap-up of our argument. I think, basically, what we have perhaps tried to do here is give a bit of an exploration of the idea of the writer as having a singular voice that is somehow unique to that particular person, or more authentic, than other kinds of voices, and instead explore how we actually want it by a lot of different voices belonging to a lot of different people; some of them not even people at all; some of them are projections from the future; some of them are projections from the past; some of them are cats; some of them are other kinds of animals.

I think of the author, or the writer perhaps, as haunted and also as the writer is somebody who is actually being used to write with by others. I really like that you talked about this experience of having somebody read your work and then take it and run with it. I think that's when we become the writing companions of others without even knowing that this is happening. But it is only right now that we have a lot of written doppelgängers out there, both in our digital personas, but also in things we have published. I have no idea who's reading it, what they're doing with it, how they are. The reading process is actually actively to some extent being used in their own writing process. The writer is incredibly haunted by lots of voices, or speaking in voices, and being spoken by others who also speak in voices.

Is there something we haven't touched upon yet that we really need to say?

Aino-Kaisa:
No, I think we can wrap this up and go watch some space battles.

Line:
I think that's the only way to wrap things up. I think that's what we do. So thank you so much to everybody who's listening to Aino-Kaisa and me talking about writing here at the Monster Talks.

Thank you to all the voices who interrupted us on our way.

Thank you for listening to this episode of Monster Talks. We are grateful to Kaisa Kortekallio from the University of Helsinki, who spoke on writing with darkness. To Katrine Meldgaard Kjær from the IT University of Copenhagen, who spoke on writing with music. And to Nina Lykke from Linköping University, for speaking on her many writing companions. Thank you so much for sharing these stories of companion writing with us.

If you want to learn more about the work done by Kortekallio, Meldgaard Kjær and Lykke, you can find their bios and links to their websites in the description of this episode.

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