

FIFTY WORDS: A COLLECTIVE WRITING EXPERIMENT





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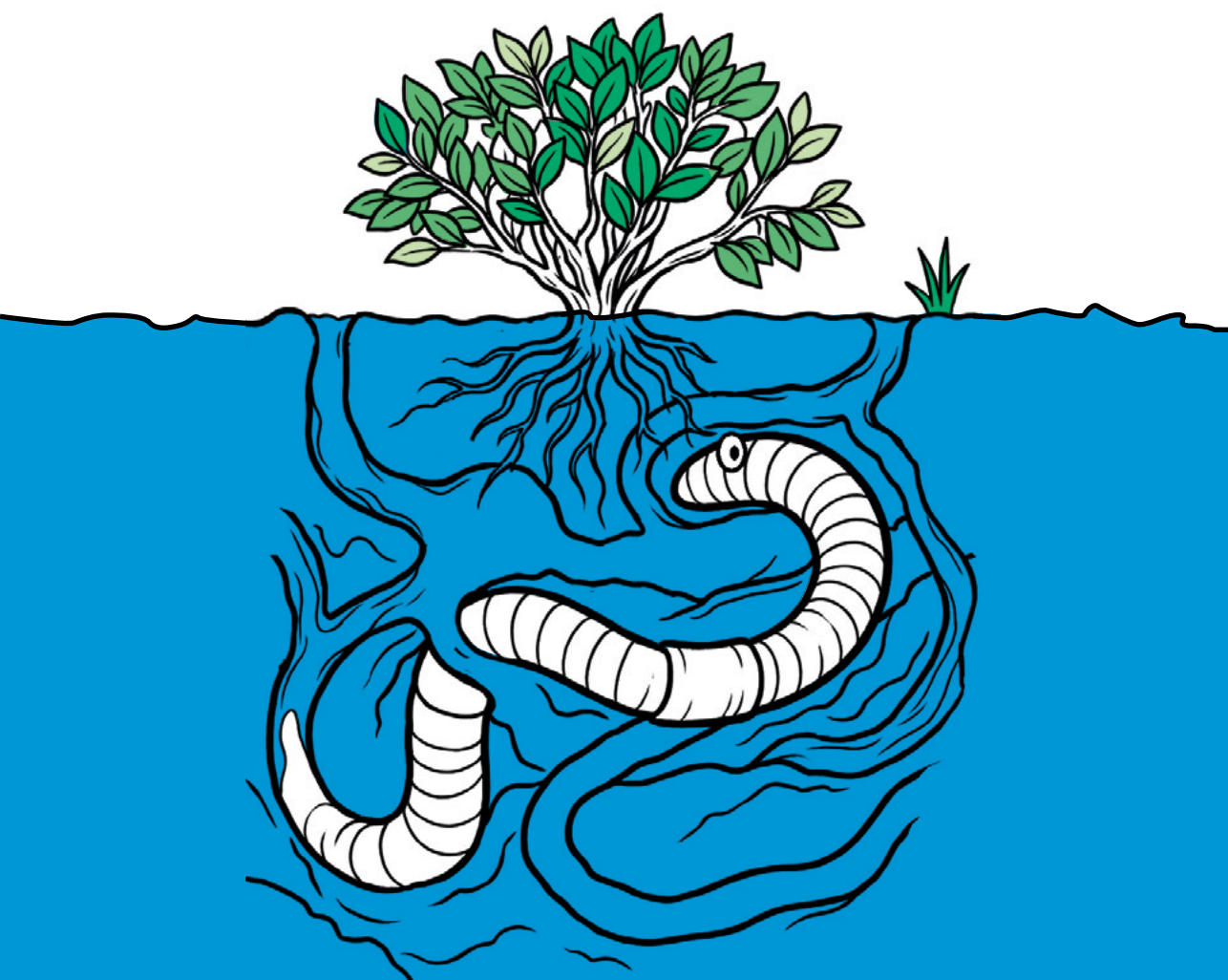
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INTRODUCTION




From the Dean

Catalina Tejero Mayor

Dean of IE School of Arts and Humanities, IE University

World Book Day is a celebration of reading, but it is also a celebration of the creative process. This year, IE Arts and Humanities students transformed that celebration into an act of shared creation. Inspired by Dr. Seuss's remarkable linguistic experiment, they invited our community to compose a collective story typed publicly on a mechanical typewriter. Across our Segovia and Madrid campuses, students, faculty, and staff paused in their daily routines to contribute. What emerged was an example of communal creativity. The pages that follow preserve that experiment. They capture a week in which our university did what it does best: think and create together.



From IE Editorial Knowledge


Cynthia Fernández Lázaro

Director of IE Editorial Knowledge, IE University

At IE Editorial Knowledge, we believe books are spaces where ideas, voices, and perspectives converge to create meaningful dialogue. Supporting our IE community in sharing and amplifying knowledge is at the heart of what we do. This project offered a unique opportunity to showcase the creativity and collective talent that exists across our institution.

Our role has been to transform that creative energy into a lasting editorial experience while preserving its open and collaborative spirit. These pages reflect not only an experiment, but the value of creating together and giving new voices space to be heard.

We are grateful to the IE School of Arts and Humanities for inviting us to accompany a project that reflects so naturally the collaborative and creative spirit of IE.



Fifty Words: A Collective Writing Experiment

Goretti Teresa González

Assistant Professor of Literature, IE School of Arts and Humanities,
IE University

In 1960, U.S. author, Theodor Seuss Geisel, accepted a wager that has since acquired near-mythic status: to compose a book using only fifty distinct words. The anecdote is often told as a charming curiosity. Yet, the result is the best-selling book, *Green Eggs and Ham*. The book is a minimalist narrative in which the character Sam-I-Am repeatedly urges a resistant interlocutor to taste the dish that titles the book.

The present project was conceived as a public, pedagogical experiment grounded in that same premise, but adding collectivity. For one week, a mechanical typewriter was installed in a shared space on the Segovia and Madrid campuses of IE University. Beside it appeared a lexicon of fifty words, curated in collaboration with my Literary Texts and Critical Methods students. Members of the university community were invited to contribute a single line to an unfolding text, on the condition that they draw exclusively from this vocabulary and adhere to the project's ethical framework. What emerged is a collectively produced text that showcases what happens when we think and create together.

This project situates itself within a broader transnational tradition of formally constrained and collectively imagined literature. In France, Oulipo (Ouvroir de littérature potentielle), brought together writers and mathematicians committed to exploring how deliberately imposed constraints, such as mathematical patterns or rule-based procedures, can generate new literary possibilities. Anne Garréta's *Sphinx*, for instance, demonstrates how the elimination of gendered pronouns can expose the structural assumptions embedded in language. Similarly, in *Alphabet* Inger Christensen uses the Fibonacci sequence to generate lyric expansion. More recently, Ana María Caballero has developed a form of digital poetics grounded in what she terms "analog generativity," a practice that treats readership and the body as legitimate inputs into computational systems. Meanwhile, the Italian writing collective Wu Ming publishes

fiction under a shared name and rejects the model of a singular author in favor of collaborative production. While differing in scale and intention from these movements and authors, this project asks what forms of meaning emerge when authorship is shared within a formal boundary?

The fifty words that structured this experiment were curated by students enrolled in *Literary Texts and Critical Methods*, a second-year humanities course at IE University: Victoria Beroeva, Molly Jean Flaxman, Mariana Henriques Marthaus, Lana Kamal, Andrea Christina Faylona Marcelo, Maya Rose Menconi, María Pía Méndez de Vigo Salinas, Daniela Alejandra Moreno Villagrán, Ignacio Ortuzar Palomino, Luca Retana, Julia Caroline Sanfiz, and Leopold Günter Schmahl. Victoria Beroeva also created the artwork accompanying this volume. These students also acted as co-editors, shaping both the conceptual framework and the linguistic boundaries of the project.

The fifty words: worm, valley, root, mist, forest, bushes, river, water, salmon, kingfisher; she, he, they, I, it, we; flowing, wilting, rot, flourish, am, see, try, make, find; wild, raw, golden, crisp, rocky; warmly, violently, quietly, ever-changing, constantly; in, on, with, by, from, and, or, but, if, a, the, that, this, no, do..

The lexicon they developed reflects an engagement with ecocriticism. Ecocriticism is defined as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. It insists that the natural world is an active force that informs narrative structures and ethical orientations. Within this framework, the selected vocabulary for our collective writing experiment, performs nature. The words encode processes, cycles, and natural relations that mirror environmental systems.

The texts produced across IE University's Segovia and Madrid campuses reflect nature as a cyclical rhythm. In Madrid, the writing often unfolds through patterns of recurrence. We see the river flowing, the salmon returning, and the forest flourishing, even as the speaking voice registers processes of decay and transformation. In Segovia, the text foregrounds a more fragile ecological balance. The figure of the worm becomes central. Taken together, these texts offer a layered ecology of voices. They demonstrate how collective authorship can produce forms of meaning that exceed individual intention. In their repetitions and emergent patterns, the texts invite us to read for the ways in which meaning, like the environment the language evokes, is shaped through ongoing interaction.

TEXTS



MADRID

IE University, Madrid Campus Collective Writing

We
see the river
flowing
in the ever-changing valley.

The salmon
flowing
in the golden mist.

She tries
to understand
it.

But we only find
the river
moving on.

I am wild
and
flowing in water.

I try
constantly.

In the mist.

I am
rotting.

But I see bushes flourish
and I find this wild,
and raw,
and crisp.

I am quietly wilting,
violently flowing
in the river.

A golden
rotting worm.
flowing
in the water
I see
the wild salmon
flourish.
The kingfisher
sees it
through the water.

Violently,
the worm tries
to hide, and quietly
waits
for the salmon
to wilt
and rot.

The mist in the valley
makes the river.

But
seeing the salmon,
we
find
that,
ever-changing
root.

I am rotting,
but the forest
flourishes.

II

I am
in the forest
I am
in the river
and the river flowing,
flowing,
in the ever-changing mist
We see the salmon,
the salmon
flowing violently
flowing and flowing
in the water
The bushes flourish
flourish in the valley
The kingfisher
see the river
see the water
I try to find
I try to find
the golden water
And the salmon
flourish,
flourish,
and flourish
in the river
and I am,
I am
quietly
in the
mist
in
the forest

III

I am
in the forest
We,
in the forest
with
the river
flowing,
flowing constantly.

We
see the salmon
we see
the salmon
In the valley
the worm
rot,
but the river
flowing
flowing
and flowing.
The kingfisher
see
it,
see
the salmon
And
flourish
in the water.
And
I
Am,
I am quietly
with
the river,
with
the mist.

IV

In the forest,
in the
forest,
we
see the river,
we see
the salmon,
in
the water.

But the bushes
flourish,
flourish,
in the valley.
The kingfisher
see
the salmon,
see
the river.
We
find
it,
we find it,
in the mist.
The salmon
flourish
in
the river,
and we,
we
quietly,
in the
forest.

SEGOVIA

IE University, Segovia Campus Collective Writing

We
see the river
flowing
in the ever-changing
valley.

The forest, wild.
The river, raw
I see the salmon.

The crisp water
constantly
flows
Golden mist.
The roots.
It is flowing.
I see it—
I, the worm
violently

wilting in the water.
From kingfisher
to river
to mist
we rot.
i am, wilting.
i am, violently raw.
The worm makes
the rocky root.
If The king fisher
finds the worm.

No Salmon
No forest
No flourish
I, worm.

||

I am
in the river
I am in the forest
with
the mist
The worm
rot,
rot and rot
with the kingfisher,
in the
water
We
See
the bushes
wilting,
wilting
in the valley.
I try
to find
the river,
the water,
But
the worm rot,
rot,
and rot.





III

From the valley
to
the forest
the river
flowing.

We see
the salmon,
the salmon
in the water,
I try to make,
make
a golden salmon
in the mist,
in the valley
The kingfisher
see it,
see the worm
And the river
flowing,
flowing
violently
but
I
Am,
I am
quietly
with the
worm.

IV

We,
the forest
We,
the salmon
in the
valley,
in the
bushes,
in the
river
wilting
in the
forest
the river
the
mist,
rot
and rot
and
we,
quietly,
with
the worm.



Want to learn more about this project?
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