1.

I started NWP books out of a kind of pedagogical desperation.

I was a rookie prof at Heritage College, teaching my intro class in more or less the same way it had been taught to me when I was a student myself. I noticed half-way through the semester that quite a lot of my kids were failing. Some of them told me they were failing because they didn't have the textbook. They soon explained why. Their circumstances required them to make hard choices between buying their books, or paying the rent. They simply did not have the money for both.

So, with the help of a few friends of mine, I wrote my own. And I gave it away to my students for free.

The process of publishing it necessitated acquiring the power to issue ISBN numbers. Well, perhaps it didn't *necessitate* that, as such. But I wanted to do it anyway, so that a paperback edition of my new textbook could be sold online at the lowest possible cost, to any student anywhere in the world.

One could say, therefore, that NWP Books was born out of a sense of social justice, connected to a sense of the importance of knowledge – two values which are necessary and indispensable for the full flourishing of human life.

And I named my new publishing company after a song by Canadian folk musician Stan Rogers. Maybe later, I'll sing it for you.

Since then, I've also published philosophical and literary works by several other people, most notably including Giorgio, who has seven works with me now, including the one we're here today to celebrate.

2.

Now let me turn a new page. For the original reason to create NWP Books grew into another one.

Have you seen how the organization and culture of the modern university affect the kind of philosophical work that gets published? It is a managerial culture, in which entrepreneurial values like efficiency, growth, impact, and media-penetration have displaced epistemic values like truth, curiosity, and discovery. And so, teachers and researchers find their budgets cut. In many American universities, entire departments in the humanities are declared irrelevant, and dissolved. All their teachers let go.

It's also the culture of a permanent class of adjuncts and sessional lecturers: precariat workers who are paid poorly and who have no job security. Corporate donations and foundation funding which trivializes or excludes research that doesn't lead to market commodities; indeed it's called a "marketplace of ideas" instead of a forum or a garden of ideas. It's also a culture of publish-or-perish for its faculty. A culture which rewards people for publishing noncontroversial research; raises the barriers-to-entry for recent graduates exceedingly high; and incentivizes increasingly-puritanical forms of political posturing, along with hostility for anything that smells like it came from a rival political camp. Such politicized research can and does produce new knowledge for us. But in the culture of the modern university, the production of knowledge is no longer the point. The point has become to produce glamour and prestige, in order to attract new research funds and new students, and then to produce employable graduates, effective and competitive functionaries of the global market.

In that culture, would Giorgio have found another publisher for his *Soulscapes and Dreamscopes*? Maybe. But not easily.

For as you have already gathered, his book is not an essay-style work of prim and proper propositional prose. It's a work of avant-garde theatre. Avant-garde in the sense of a forward line pushing into an undiscovered country. A "normal" book promises you something and then delivers what it promises, maybe with a surprise or two. An avant-garde book negotiates with, and subverts, your expectations. It experiments, innovates, and *plays*; it wants to know how uncustomary and uncanny styles could be part of the message. With the result that readers may be more than just surprised: they may be troubled, shocked, alienated, or even disturbed. Giorgio's book is a magic circus, rather like the one in Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf*. It's surreal, satirical, sarcastic, strange, marvellous, bizzarevellous, and odd. And sometimes scary. And sometimes sad.

Friends, another thing missing from the culture of the modern university is the courage to write like that. Yet that kind of writing has always been part of philosophy. Indeed there is no single form for philosophical writing, and there is no standard style. Think of Plato's dialogues, Spinoza's 'geometric' style, Nietzsche's parables and aphorisms, Wittgenstein's numbered propositions, Jean Jacques Rousseau's autobiographies, the letters of Margaret Cavendish and Catherine de Parthenay, and novels by Iris Murdoch and Umberto Eco. Philosophers have experiment with many forms and styles, with excellent effect more often than not, for centuries! The prose essay, the standard in English-speaking classes and journals, is a relative newcomer to the field.

Giorgio's experiments with style began in most obvious earnest in his sixth book with me, *Thinking and Laughing*, which includes a satirical glossary of philosophical terms, and a straight-up Terry Gilliam version of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus.* In his *Uncanny Soulscapes,* the circus flies even higher. It's a work that can be compared to the "exercises in style" practiced by the writers of the Oulipo group, founded in 1960 in France and still active today: members like Raymond Queneau described the group's style as that of constructing "a labyrinth from which they plan to escape."

Uncanny Soulscapes participates in a tradition that goes back to Greek and Roman satirical playwrights such as Titus Plautus, and which today is also embodied by, for example, the surreal and cerebral slapstick of The Goon Show, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, the sophisticated comedy of Billy Wilder, the gentle humour of my fellow Canadians, Stephen Leacock and Stuart McLean, and the cringe neuroticism of early Woody Allen films. (Look at me name-dropping like a boss here!) In some places Giorgio returns the concept of humour back to its original meaning of a 'fluid', in the sense of the old 'four humours': blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. In that way he shows how humour overlaps or enters a relationship with horror and tragedy: *Uncanny Soulscapes* is full of saliva, urine, bile, sweat, semen, tears, vomit, and blood. Did I yet mention blood? Well I'm mentioning it again.

There is no standard style in philosophy because knowledge is more than "justified true belief", the standard formula of Anglo-American thought. If that's all it was, a prose essay could say everything on a given topic that needs to be said. The Oxford professor Derek Parfit says 'the evening star' can be reduced to 'the planet Venus' and that the reductionist account is the only account we need. But look at what he's missing. Venus is a planet, to be

sure; the evening star, by contrast, is a *story*. To take another example: moonlight is not just reflected sunlight. It's the silver shafts of magic, filtering through bare branches of trees, on a brisk November night. It's a audacious young boy sneaking out under cover of darkness to meet his lover, against their parent's wills. It's a circle of witches, calling up the gods. It's legends and stories told around the fire. And ships lost at sea. And lonely desire.

So what is knowledge, when considered in that light? Knowledge is the unfolding of flowers, as the snow recedes in spring. It's the sunrise in the morning, and the stars emerging from twilight. It's the unwrapping of a christmas gift, it's the birth of a child, turning the pages of a book, and turning on the light. Knowledge is *aletheia;* an old Greek term for un-covering, disclosing, revealing. It is the thing that emerges from darkness and into visibility, the thing that grows out of silence and becomes music. Logic and Systematic Reason, the method we use to pursue this *aletheia*: sure it has to do with Boolean operators, truth tables, and Venn diagrams. But those instruments are only for facilitating precision and eliminating errors. At its heart, Reason is organized curiosity. It starts with *aporia* and confusion, it continues through struggle and courage, it ends with invention and discovery. From there it can go to more *aporia,* and from there to more discovery. It is not mere description and calculation; it is more important than that. It is imagination, it is adventure, it is ambition, it is wonder, it is joy, it is love, it is life.

And I want to publish books by people who remember that.