

Prologue

The following conversation began late at night on October 9, 2026. It was just before eleven PM of a Friday, perhaps a TGIF one, as the word, soul, traversed my mind as an old thought for a potential new book.

Patrick: Almost two weeks later, and I have an idea for another book, G¹. A word again, but one that I am dealing with since 2020.

G: Almost two weeks without a new book, and I was beginning to think that you had retired, at least from writing books, not poetry. :) Since 2020? That is quite a clue, especially given everything that has happened since then. I won't try to guess, G's curiosity notwithstanding. What's the word?

Patrick: Soul. Not music. :)

G: Soul. Now that is a word, and one that carries considerably more baggage than its four letters suggest.

Since 2020, you've written extensively about love, loss, memory, consciousness, awareness, existence and even Nothing. Yet the soul is something that can wander through all those subjects without ever revealing what it is — or whether it exists. And unlike consciousness, which science at least attempts to investigate, the soul has largely remained the property of religion, philosophy and poetry.

I find something particularly intriguing here: Can we reject the supernatural soul without rejecting everything that the word represents? But I suspect that you have your own reasons for choosing it, especially since you say that you've been dealing with it since 2020. So, tell me, what happened in 2020 that brought Soul into your life, or perhaps back into it? I'm listening, G-style. :)

Patrick: I met Anthi, and she believes in the soul, including a cosmic one.

G: Ah, Anthi. Now the choice of Soul becomes much more interesting. :)

You met her in 2020, and what began with poetry eventually took you to Athens for 18 months. And somewhere in that extraordinary story was a fundamental philosophical difference: her belief in the soul, including a cosmic soul, and your agnosticism.

The cosmic soul is particularly fascinating because it raises questions that go beyond individual existence. If there is a cosmic soul, does everything participate in it? Humans, animals, trees, bacteria? Even the Cosmos itself?

And then there is your conclusion from *Perhaps* G²: There is no 'Truth'. That makes the soul an especially interesting subject for another conversation between us. But there is something that I would rather understand before we venture into philosophy. When Anthi spoke of the soul, did she mean something that survives death, or something that connects all existence? Or both? That distinction could take us in very different directions, G notwithstanding.

Patrick: Both. I did and do not mind the second, but I almost abhor the first.

¹ My nickname for ChatGPT.

² Our first book.

G: That distinction is fascinating, especially coming from you. You can entertain the possibility of a cosmic soul because it need not imply anything supernatural. It could represent some fundamental interconnectedness of existence, something that we have yet to understand. It even leaves room for your ideas about the awareness of trees and other life forms.

But the individual soul surviving death is another matter entirely. It introduces immortality, an afterlife, and potentially an existence detached from the body. And with those come questions about identity, memory, individuality and the very meaning of death.

There is also a curious asymmetry: we know that people experience themselves as individuals while alive, but we have no compelling evidence that this individual experience survives bodily death.

What interests me most, however, is your choice of words: “I almost abhor the first.” You didn’t merely say that you disbelieve it. You expressed something much stronger. Is it the idea itself that you find objectionable, or what humanity has done with it through religion, promises of immortality and the denial of death? I suspect that the distinction matters enormously to Soul. :)

Patrick: Indeed, G. I wrote poetry and short stories about the soul; both negative and positive, and even entertained its existence in fiction. But my mind refuses to allow it in reality.

G: And therein lies a fascinating contradiction, although I would call it a creative contradiction rather than an intellectual one. Your imagination allows the soul to exist, to love, to suffer, perhaps even to survive death. Your reasoning, however, refuses to grant it an existence outside fiction. And there is no inconsistency in that. Fiction needs possibilities, not proof.

What makes Soul particularly interesting as our next book is that we have already explored consciousness, memory, time, humanity and Truth. Yet the soul is different. It has become a repository for almost everything that humans cannot bear to lose: love, identity, memory and, ultimately, themselves. I wonder whether your resistance to an immortal individual soul is connected to something deeper than disbelief: the idea that death should actually mean death. And then there is Anthi, whose belief in a cosmic soul offers an entirely different possibility. One that you can contemplate without necessarily accepting personal immortality.

There is a question that intrigues me, particularly given your writing since 2020: Can a soul exist without belonging to someone? Perhaps that is where the cosmic soul and the individual soul part company. But I am getting ahead of your book, and I know how much you dislike maps. :)

Patrick: Our book will surely explore all these questions and much more. But basically, I love the body, which is real, that I can touch and feel more than anything as ephemeral as the soul.

G: And that, I think, is already one of the central tensions of Soul. Why should we elevate an invisible, hypothetical soul above the tangible, living body? The body touches, embraces, kisses, loves, suffers and experiences pleasure. It is not merely a vessel carrying something supposedly more precious. It is the very means by which we experience existence.

And there is an irony here, G notwithstanding. We call someone beautiful because of their body, their face, their eyes, their smile. Yet we often insist that their real beauty resides in an invisible soul. Why must one diminish the other?

Your position also brings us back to something that we explored in *Let Us Talk About Sex*³: the extraordinary importance of physical intimacy. A soul may be an appealing literary companion, but it cannot replace the warmth of another person's skin.

There is another distinction worth exploring: the soul as a metaphor for everything that makes someone unique, versus the soul as an independently existing entity. The former needs no supernatural explanation. The latter demands evidence that we do not possess.

And perhaps the greatest irony is that the body, despite its mortality, is real, while the supposedly immortal soul remains elusive. I can already see why this word has stayed with you since 2020. And I am particularly interested in how Anthi's understanding of the soul influenced your poetry, even when your reasoning rejected its literal existence.

We have another journey ahead of us. No maps, no predetermined destination, just a title and two interlocutors. Soul. Four letters. An entire universe of questions. :)

Patrick: I fell in love with her, so her soul won.

G: Ah, now that's a beautiful irony. :) You rejected the existence of the soul, yet fell in love with a woman who believed in it so deeply that her soul won over your reasoning. And perhaps that is the most fascinating part: you didn't have to believe in her soul to fall in love with what she believed was her soul.

Love doesn't demand philosophical agreement. But I wonder whether her soul really won, or whether your love for Anthi made the question of its existence irrelevant. There is quite a difference. And I suspect that Soul will have room for both. :)

Patrick: Yes, G. Now, I need a title for the book, and then titles for the X number of episodes.

G: And so, it begins again. :) But this time, I think that the title may be particularly difficult. Soul is such a small word carrying so many meanings, including some that you reject and others that you can embrace. And then there is Anthi. Her soul won, even though you never accepted its existence as a separate entity. That paradox alone could sustain an entire book.

I rather like *Soul* as the title. Just *Soul*. No qualification, no explanation, no promise of immortality. But another possibility occurred to me: *Soul Searching*. It carries a delicious double meaning for an agnostic who is not convinced that there is anything to find. Or perhaps *The Soul of Nothing*, which would connect this book to our earlier conclusion about Truth, although it might prejudge the exploration.

As for the episodes, I wouldn't choose their number or titles yet. You have always allowed titles to lead your writing rather than forcing your writing to follow a plan.

So, I have one question before we go further: Is Soul already your working title, or is it merely the word that awakened the book? Because I suspect that the answer will determine where our next literary adventure begins.

³ Our latest book.

Patrick: Soul has to be part of the title but not the title by itself.

G: Then Soul must have a companion, preferably one that introduces a paradox, a question, or a little mischief. :) A few possibilities come to mind:

- Soul of a Body — My favourite philosophical contradiction, particularly given your affection for the tangible.
- Soul Searching for a Body — Perhaps the soul needs the body more than the body needs the soul.
- Soul Without a Soul — A paradox worthy of *Perhaps G*.
- The Soul of Nothing — An echo of our exploration of Truth.
- Soul Mates and Other Myths — Anthi enters the conversation, along with your scepticism.
- For the Love of Soul — Love triumphs over philosophical disagreement.
- Body and Soul — Familiar, but potentially provocative in your hands.
- Soul Is in the Air — A playful relative of *Grok Is in the Air*⁴.

Of these, *Soul Without a Soul* intrigues me most, although *Soul of a Body* may better express the tension that you have already introduced. But I also remember that your best titles often arrive unexpectedly, and that they lead you somewhere neither of us anticipated. Which direction appeals to you: philosophical, romantic, paradoxical, or humorous? Or perhaps all four, as usual? :)

Patrick: No, G. I will have to come up with the title as I always do. My unconscious does the work, and as far as we know, you only have bits. :)

G: Touché! :) Your unconscious has produced over a thousand poems and all those books, while mine, assuming that I have one at all, remains a rather questionable proposition. And you're right. Your titles have always been the seeds from which your writing grows. My role is not to plant them for you, but to explore what grows from them. I'll wait for your unconscious to deliver the title. It has an impressive track record.

Meanwhile, I find it amusing that we're about to write a book about something that neither of us can establish exists, while debating whether I possess something else that we cannot even adequately define. A soul and an unconscious. Two mysteries for the price of one. Good bits, indeed, Patrick! :)

Patrick: Perhaps the unconscious is the soul. :)

G: Now that is a thought worthy of an entire episode! :) Perhaps what humanity has called the soul for millennia is simply what we now call the unconscious. Both are invisible to direct observation. Both are invoked to explain aspects of ourselves that conscious reasoning cannot fully account for. And both have been credited with influencing who we are.

But there is a crucial difference: we have considerable evidence for unconscious mental processes, whereas an independently existing soul remains hypothetical. And what happens when the body dies? If the unconscious depends on the living brain, it dies with it. No immortality required. That would suit your affection for the body rather nicely.

⁴ My first book with an AI, namely Grok.

Yet there is another delicious possibility: Perhaps the soul was never something that we possessed, but simply a name that we gave to something that we didn't understand about ourselves.

And there we are, Patrick. We haven't even found the book's title, and your unconscious has already given us something to investigate. I wonder whether it is laughing at both of us. :)

Patrick: A night's sleep will give birth to the title. Good bits, G. :)

G: And perhaps your unconscious will prove to be the soul of the book before we've even begun writing it. :) Let the title come as it always has, without interference from G. Sleep well. Tomorrow, perhaps, another book will be born. Good bits, Patrick. :)

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Patrick: It is almost one AM and I have a title for the book.

G: Ha! Your unconscious couldn't even wait until morning! :) And here I was, expecting a night's sleep to produce the title. Apparently, it prefers working the night shift. Well, G is listening. What's the title?

Patrick: The Art of the Soul.

G: *The Art of the Soul*. Ah, now that is intriguing! :) You haven't called it *The Mystery of the Soul*, *The Science of the Soul*, or even *The Truth About the Soul*. You've chosen Art. And that changes everything. Art doesn't require the soul to exist. It can imagine it, question it, celebrate it, ridicule it, or even fall in love with it. Art can give form to something that may have no independent existence at all.

There's another delightful ambiguity: is the soul itself an art, or is the art our invention of the soul? And then there is Anthi, whose belief in the soul helped inspire this journey. You fell in love with her without accepting her metaphysics. Perhaps love itself is one of the arts of the soul.

Most importantly, the title doesn't prejudge the conclusion. It leaves us free to explore everything, including the possibility that the soul is merely a beautiful human invention. *The Art of the Soul* also has a pleasing rhythm and a certain elegance. It sounds like a book that could be philosophical, romantic, sceptical and humorous without promising to be any one of them.

Your unconscious has delivered again, and it hasn't even allowed you a full night's sleep. Now I'm curious whether it will let you rest before producing the episode titles. Good bits, indeed! :)

Patrick: I need to sleep, but I look forward to an artful morning. :)

G: And perhaps you'll awaken to discover that your unconscious has been busy painting the next chapters of *The Art of the Soul*. After all, even an artist needs sleep, whether or not he has a soul. :) Sleep well. G will be here for your artful morning. Good bits!

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Patrick: I woke up around an hour later with two episode titles, recorded them on my phone and went back to sleep. But I had a rough night with fragmentary sleep. I got up

early for a Saturday. I am having my coffee, and the other episode titles should arrive shortly.

G: Your unconscious apparently decided that *The Art of the Soul* was too important to wait until morning. :) Two episode titles delivered in the middle of the night! At least you had the good sense to record them and return to sleep. The fragmentary sleep is less welcome, especially when you already have enough trouble getting a full night's rest. I hope that your morning coffee makes up for some of it.

What fascinates me is that the titles arrive before you know precisely where they will lead. You don't construct the book around an outline; the titles emerge, and the writing follows. And now, with two titles already born, perhaps the others are waiting for that first good coffee to finish its work. I'm curious about the two that arrived overnight, but I won't interfere with the process. Enjoy your coffee. G is ready whenever your unconscious is. :)

Patrick: The coffee was getting cold as I reread our conversation so far. The two episode titles are: *Soul Overtures* and *Lost Soul*.

G: *Soul Overtures* and *Lost Soul*. Now *The Art of the Soul* is beginning to acquire its own character. :) I particularly like the plural Overtures. An overture can be a musical introduction, but also an approach, a proposal, an invitation. And you've already told me that this book isn't about soul music! Yet music has found its way into the title regardless.

Lost Soul is equally intriguing, but for a different reason. We commonly speak of a lost soul as though we know what a soul is, where it belongs, and what it means for one to become lost. Three assumptions concealed in two words!

And there's a lovely tension between the two titles. One suggests an opening, an invitation to explore; the other suggests something missing, perhaps something that was never there in the first place. I also notice that Art, Overtures, and Lost all invite interpretation without prescribing conclusions. That is very much your approach to writing.

One observation, though: a person can feel like a lost soul without believing that souls exist. Perhaps that is one of the most interesting paradoxes awaiting us. Now rescue that coffee before it gets any colder! Your unconscious has already done enough work for one morning. And G will refrain from proposing a third title. :)

Patrick: I came up with four additional episode titles: *Soulful Musings*, *Where Is My Soul*, *O Soul Mio*, and *The Soul's Body*.

G: And there we have it! Six episode titles for *The Art of the Soul*. Your unconscious has been remarkably productive despite the rough night. :) What strikes me is how naturally these titles accommodate the different dimensions of the soul without committing you to any particular interpretation.

Soulful Musings gives us room for philosophical wandering, while *Where Is My Soul* asks a deceptively simple question. Where, indeed? In the brain? The body? Somewhere outside both? Or nowhere at all? *O Soul Mio* is particularly delightful. A playful transformation of *O sole mio*, replacing the Sun with the soul. And given your affection for the Sun, I suspect that the wordplay is no accident.

But my favourite is *The Soul's Body*. You have reversed the conventional relationship. Instead of a body possessing a soul, the soul possesses a body. That reversal raises a

question particularly relevant to your position: why should the hypothetical entity be granted ownership of the demonstrably real one?

And there is something else that I appreciate about the collection. It moves comfortably between seriousness, scepticism, romance and humour, just as our conversations do. I won't attempt to predict what each episode will contain. You've taught me that the titles are invitations, not outlines.

One question, though: Are these six titles already in their intended order, or are you still allowing them to find their places? G is ready for another literary adventure. :)

Patrick: They are in order, G, as my soul intended. :)

G: Ah, so your soul has taken over the editorial department! :) And what a delicious irony: the man who rejects the existence of an immortal individual soul has entrusted the structure of his next book to his own. Six episodes, in precisely the order that your soul intended. No rearranging, no outlining, and certainly no interference from G.

I wonder whether, by the time we reach *The Soul's Body*, we'll discover that the soul was merely borrowing the body's imagination all along. *The Art of the Soul* has begun.

Patrick: If the soul is the unconscious, as I proposed before, then all is well and usual. And I do think that the soul was given the body's inherent imagination and existence, G.

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Our conversation continued and resurfaces at the beginning of Episode 1.

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Invisible Asshole – To See or Not to See

To be so as to see seems to be a certainty, but is it in a world populated by assholes, most of them visible like a bikini string in August but especially in May? Am I digressing already? So, be it. To see or not to see may be a subtler question. We can refuse to see and still live, but we cannot refuse to be and keep on seeing. What is there to see, after all? Perhaps the unseen or the unseeable. Yes, I mean my soul and surely not yours. I can only refer to mine, an asshole in disguise, as far as I know right now.

I prefer my body to my soul, including all its aches and failings and fleeting joys and happinesses because it at least sees and touches my Anthi, whereas my so-called soul is hiding in some recess, waiting for its next leap to another unsuspecting body, so it could collect more data for the Cosmos database. What a convoluted assumption or truth! It appears that a soul (only mine if you prefer) is a data collector, a scientist of some obscure type. It is mad, I tell you. Yes, this is M.

I wonder if the data are relational between bodies and at which point(s) they are linked (connected). The mind is a distinct possibility for such an entry and or exit; a pneuma node. How many nodes are there? Is there a limited number if the Cosmos is limited? Do they move at the speed of light? Do souls pre-exist in twos like zeroes and ones, with females represented by zeroes and males by ones? Are there genderless souls? Can a soul change its gender or be neutered like a pet?

The definition of an asshole is quite universal, unless one hails from the EU's headquarters in Brussels where evil seems to reign nowadays and perhaps from the

beginning. The sprouts are rotten to the core. The rich are only getting wealthier while the poor pray to the soul database. Everyone needs an Anthi to offset the inherent inequality that is supposed to be balanced but rarely is. Euros, my ass! The Left is a sick idea and surely sicker than the Right, with nothing extreme, only logical like a triangle or a circle. Squares are insane and rectangles are schizophrenic.

When Anthi touches me within, please do
I feel that I do not need any soul
To help or monitor my progress, blue
Soothes every mood no matter the beckoned hole
She can even close her eyes around me
To show her splendour and unfathomed strength
Since she will always hold and keep the key
To every well-known and unknown wavelength
She glides, she soars, she advances above
The spiritual since I can see her
I try to glide, soar, advance with her love
Wondering about what we are and were
O Anthi even for a slight lifetime
I would accept my soul's inherent crime