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## UNTIMELY DEPARTURES

Why is it that some great souls die so young, their all-too-brief appearance on the world stage resembling shooting stars, flashing momentarily against the dark abyss? John Keats died in his twenty-fifth year, but not before leaving behind a legacy that later established him as one of the leading poets of the English Romantic era; his “Ode to a Grecian Urn” remains popular to this day. Percy Shelley, a contemporary of Keats, died at the age of twenty-nine; he authored “Prometheus Unbound” and is said to be one of the finest lyric poets of his time. Emily Brontë had time for only one novel before she died at age thirty, but her *Wuthering Heights* has had numerous film adaptations, from as early as 1920 to as recently as 2011. The Austrian composer Franz Schubert managed to write ten symphonies, eleven string quartets, and assorted chamber music before he died at thirty-one. And if anybody ever deserved the label of *genius*, it was Amadeus Mozart, whose musical oeuvre was astonishing, covering virtually every genre of his day; he never saw his thirty-sixth birthday. The Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer passed away at forty-three, his output consisting of mostly domestic scenes; more than three hundred years after his death, one of Vermeer’s oil paintings inspired the movie *Girl with a Pearl Earring* starring Colin Firth.

That their sojourn in this world ended much too soon is apparent to the aesthetic sensibility. A thoughtful person cannot help but wonder if their early demise was due to *chance* or to *design*. If the capricious hand of fate was at work, these early deaths may be considered to be nothing more than items on the list of life’s tragedies. But what if these truncated lives were pre-ordained, so to speak? What if they were meant to be?

In Mahatma Letter 68 (chronological edition), oblique references are made to the idea that the soul comes into an incarnation “destined to live” a certain span of time, an idea that seems compatible with the thought that each incarnation has a purpose. Could it be that the life of a Mozart or a Keats was never intended to grace the stage of life for more than a few years, but just enough for them to bestow their sublime gifts to humanity? Of this we can only speculate. If the early departure of such souls was one of chance, we see tragedy. But if a hidden purpose was at work, the meaning of which we are unable to divine, we behold a mystery. Fortunately the fruit of their creativity remains, enriching our lives and uplifting our spirits.

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