

In the fourth stanza, the speaker asks whether this high cost was truly necessary: "was it needless death after all?" It is possible that England would have granted Ireland freedom without this rebellion. The rebels may have been misguided in instigating a violent uprising. But the speaker again puts aside this criticism to honor them for their bravery: "We know their dream; enough to know they dreamed and are dead." In other words, regardless of their flaws of judgment or character, it is enough to make them heroic that they were willing to die for their cause. The speaker honors the rebels as heroes by listing out their names in the final lines of the poem and affirming again how they have been "changed utterly." This act of bravery means they are no longer defined by the flaws the speaker noted earlier. They have been transformed from people the speaker criticized to people the speaker must admire forever, "now and in time to be."

Theme of Death and Mourning

In "Easter, 1916," the speaker is conflicted about how to commemorate those who have died for a cause. Should commemoration comfort those who are mourning, or force them to face the harsh reality of death? Should the dead be honored only if people know what their sacrifice achieved? Though the speaker initially asks whether the rebels' sacrifice was necessary to reach their goal, he ultimately rejects that question. He concludes that the appropriate way to commemorate the dead is to honor and remember them without deciding whether they made the right choice or knowing what that choice achieved.

In the final stanza, the speaker considers representing death with the comforting image of sleep. He says the mourners should remember the dead by naming them "as a mother names her child When sleep, at last, has come." This is a comforting, consoling image of death, suggesting that the mourners can still protect the dead and also that they are not really dead, just asleep, and so will wake again. The image of death as sleep is a Christian one tied to a belief in the resurrection of the dead, which is also invoked by the word "Easter" in the poem's title.