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| **Symbols in *Riders to the Sea*****Bartley’s Horses Symbol**  |

Bartley’s horses are a complex symbol of death and fate, as [Bartley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/riders-to-the-sea/characters/bartley) dies by being thrown into the sea by the gray pony. The Christian overtones of the horses are important to understand, since Bartley’s accident is a direct reference to a passage from The Book of Exodus: “I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; The horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.” In the Biblical context, these lines are a celebration of God’s defeat of the Pharaoh, which allowed the Israelites to escape Egypt. However, the parallel between Bartley’s horses and the Bible does not cast Bartley’s accident as God’s will—instead, Synge presents the sea as eclipsing God’s power and inevitably taking the lives of young men, despite fervent prayers and the Priest’s promises. In other words, Bartley’s accident is not the will of God, but the will of the sea. Just as God threw “the horse and his rider” into the sea, the sea wants Bartley (and all other young men) so badly that the gray pony knocks him into the water even before he leaves on his dangerous voyage. Bartley’s horses illuminate the title of Riders to the Sea, as the riders are Bartley and Michael, both of whom are riding to their deaths.