

# THE NOBEL PRIZE

Student assignment: Utopias and Dystopias

## Harry Martinson's *Aniara*



Now you're going to get a chance to read and discuss two excerpts from author Harry Martinson's poem *Aniara*.

*Aniara* is one of the most famous Swedish dystopias. Martinson based the work in part on the Cold War of the 1950s and the development of increasingly powerful nuclear weapons.

In the story, the earth has been decimated by environmental destruction and nuclear warfare. People are forced to flee to Mars, but one of the spacecrafts, the *Aniara*, goes off course and careens aimlessly out into space.

We still pursue the customs formed on Earth  
and keep the usages of Dorisvale.

Dividing time into a day and night,  
we feign the break of day, the dusk, the sunset.

Though space around us is eternal night  
so starry-cold that those who still abide

In Dorisvales have never seen its like,  
our hearts have joined with the chronometer  
in following the sunrise and the moonrise  
and both their settings viewed from Dorisvale.

Now it is summer night, Midsummer night:  
the people stay awake hour after hour.  
In the great assembly-room they all are dancing  
save those on watch in the infinitude.

They're dancing there until the sun comes up  
in Dorisvale. Then smack comes clarity,  
the horror that it never did come up,  
that life, a dream before in Doric vales,  
is even more a dream in Mima's halls.

(from Song 7)

There is protection from near everything,  
from fire and damages by storm and frost,  
oh, add whichever blows may come to mind.  
But there is no protection from mankind.

(from Song 26)

# THE NOBEL PRIZE

Discuss in small groups and take notes of your answers.



1. What picture do we get from the first excerpt of life on the spacecraft *Aniara*?

.....

.....

.....

2. What do you think Harry Martinson means when he says in the second excerpt that there is no protection from man?

.....

.....

.....

3. What do you think is the message of the poem *Aniara*?

.....

.....

.....



*Aniara* has been performed on stage as an opera, a ballet, a play and a musical. In the twenty-first century it has also been made into a feature film and a book series. The picture shows the premier production of the opera *Aniara* at the Royal Swedish Opera in 1959.