

The narrative poem 'The Bright Lights of Sarajevo' is set during the Bosnian civil war of the mid 1990's. It was written by author/poet Tony Harrison who was reporting on the war at the time. He is one of Britain's premier verse-writers, having won nine literary prizes, and some of his works were performed in the Royal National Theatre, London. The poem tells the story of the Sarajevo's trapped during the Siege of Sarajevo, and how they survive and try to live normal lives. The key message of the poem is that even through horrible circumstances, love will always survive.

In 'The Bright Lights of Sarajevo', the young couple are illustrated in a way that juxtaposes the war-torn environment around them. The boy's movements towards her is described as a 'flirtatious ploy' and the girl's voice is described as a 'tender radar'. The metaphor of 'tender radar' brings to the reader's mind a radar from a military. The juxtaposing use of a military machine to describe the couple in love displays how the Bosnian civil war was close to the people of Sarajevo, so close in fact, that it became part of the everyday culture of the city, that is the poet's message. The characters in the poem had become completely naturalized to the war and are living normal, un-fraid lives again. However, the reader thinks that people in warzones are constantly in fear, and so they see their lives as strange, and contrasting to their surroundings.

The structure of 'The Bright Lights of Sarajevo' gives an uplifting touch to the poem and makes the characters optimistic. The rhyme scheme is very strict, 'flights ... nights', 'progressed ... test', 'away ... café'. This rhyme scheme is one where every couplet shares a rhyme. This scheme is usually used in poems with cheerful messages, and an interpretation of the usage, is that the poet uses this reference to make the poem more uplifting, giving the message that the boy and girl in the poem are hopeful for the future (and their future together). But, a more sinister interpretation of the rhyme scheme is that, because the scheme is also characterised with children's poems (e.g. Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star) Harrison could be using the scheme to hint that the characters are living a life of childlike ignorance, ignoring the obviously dangerous environment around them to spend time with each-other. I believe that they would do this as a defence mechanism against the war around them, to distract and comfort themselves and each-other. However, I think that the first interpretation is most likely because the poem's clear message is that love prevails in all circumstances, so having love be a mere unconscious defence mechanism is counterintuitive to the message.

The author of 'The Bright Lights of Sarajevo' uses various structural techniques to make the boy and girl seem unafraid of their surroundings. In line eleven a powerful Volta 'but' is used to shift the focus of the poem from the reality of conflict to romantic and positive imagery, this depreciates the effect of the morbid representation of war before the Volta. Another example is the generous usage of caesura while the poet is talking about the boy and girl's love, 'progressed beyond', 'away to', with meagre usage of caesura before the Volta, which is where most of the graphic war imagery is found. These help the reader stop paying much attention to the disfigured environment around the characters and start focusing on the boy and girl themselves. Due to this, the couple are presented as a strong force, existing even within the awful situation they are in, and their bond is strong enough, that they can brave their surroundings, and even come out into the open at night together.

In conclusion, Tony Harrison uses various techniques in 'The Bright Lights of Sarajevo', like juxtaposition, Voltas and a couplet rhyme scheme in order to make the argument that even through a struggle like war, love will find a way to survive, and maybe even thrive, and he tells the story of a young couple living in those circumstances to do this.