

'THE BRIGHT LIGHTS OF SARAJEVO'

TONY HARRISON

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Tony Harrison was born in Leeds, Yorkshire, in 1937 and is a leading poet and translator. He has often written about social issues and sometimes about international issues. He wrote 'The Bright Lights of Sarajevo' when a national British newspaper sent him to write about Bosnia, a country in **the Balkans**, in September 1995.

The Bosnian War took place between 1992 and 1995. It was a bitter conflict between parts of the former **Yugoslavia**, which broke out along old national and cultural boundaries at the beginning of the 1990s. The main division was between Bosnia and Serbia, but the political situation was very complex. The war was motivated by ethnic prejudice and Muslims in the region suffered horrific **ethnic cleansing**.

The poem is set in Sarajevo, capital city of Bosnia, during the **siege** mounted by Serb forces which lasted the entire duration of the war. Thousands of people died in the city during the siege.

GENERAL VOCABULARY

the Balkans a group of countries in south-eastern Europe

Yugoslavia a country which separated into several smaller countries in the early 1990s

ethnic cleansing the action of forcing people to leave an area or country or killing them because of their ethnic or religious identity

siege a situation in which an army or the police surround a place and try to gain control of it or force someone to come out of it

BEFORE YOU START READING

- 1 The siege of Sarajevo is the longest siege of a capital city in modern history. Using the internet, do some research into the series of conflicts that broke apart Yugoslavia.
- 2 One event that captured the attention of the international media and people worldwide was the gunning down of a young couple commonly referred to as 'the Romeo and Juliet of Sarajevo'. Find out about them.
- 3 Think about how you would feel if your daily routines became restricted and it became too dangerous to even go out to buy a loaf of bread. How would you cope?



▲ 'match-lit flare test'