In many of Shakespeare's plays, there is a strong contrast between the country and the not-country, the latter of which is sometimes city but most often court. The contrast these plays reflect lies in the differences between, on the one hand, institutions of strict order and rules, which depict city or court life, and, on the other hand, a less prescribed life style, a space where the limitations set by urban civilization do not apply and everything and/or anything is possible, that is country life. It is this contrast in Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It* that I will look into more closely in the current article.

*As You Like It* is definitely not the only play by Shakespeare where such a "clash" can be seen. Similar patterns can be detected in his other comedies like *The Winter's Tale*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Cymbeline*, for example, or in tragedies like *King Lear* and romances like *The Tempest*. And while the contrast may not be the main theme of *As You Like It*, it is certainly a prominent one. An editor of *As You Like It* for the Arden Shakespeare series, Agnes Latham, writes in the 1975 edition's introduction to the play that the opposition of court and country feeds into the corollary that the play "is about right values and the good life. Paradoxically, and momentarily, the good life is found in the woods. It should be found in the court and when Duke Senior resumes his sway it will be found in the court again". Whether that be the case or not is a matter of interpretation (and one often disputed), but what seems more obvious is that the values in these two locations do differ, and this is precisely the matter which this article explores.

According to Rosalie Colie, who has discussed *As You Like It* as a special kind of pastoral, "the literary pastoral celebrates the glorious unrealities of the imagination, its necessary furlough from its assignment of work, obligation and duty". And she adds that the opposition between urban and rural men became "a topos in itself" in the Renaissance, "but with a particular fit to Renaissance literature and socio-economic notions, that is, it shifted its formulation from "city" to "court", and the court-country paradigm became one major focus of pastoral organization". So, the contrast really came to be between the different levels of social stricture in the two locations. Borrowing once again from Rosalie Colie, "Arcadia" was not measured merely against, for example, Rome or Paris, "but against any strict program of social forms, formalities, polite fictions, or flatteries". And she continues:

Thematically, these pressures from urbs urging a return to at least the idea of nature are absorbed into the unspoken dialectic of pastoral and inform much pastoral writing in the Renaissance. In Shakespeare's plays, this pattern usually involves the removal of good people, from a court somehow grown evil, to a rural or woodland setting, whence the exiles return in triumph, often with a train of natural or naturally-restored companions, to undertake the

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1 Shakespeare 1993, lxxiv.
2 Colie 1974, 249.
3 Colie 1974, 249.
4 Colie 1974, 249.
5 Colie 1974, 249.
human responsibilities appropriate to the renovation of the court they had earlier left.

To embellish upon Colie’s remarks, where there is a contrast, there are opposites, and hence there must be boundaries separating one from another, or marking the territory of the transition. Such binary oppositions have been studied by Juri Lotman, who in his treatment of semiosphere has discussed the notion of boundaries:

Composed as it [the semiosphere, EB] is of conflicting structures, it none the less is also marked by individuation. One of the primary mechanisms of semiotic individuation is the boundary, and the boundary can be defined as the outer limit of a first-person form. This space is ‘ours’, ‘my own’, it is ‘cultured’, ‘safe’, ‘harmoniously organised’, and so on. By contrast ‘their space’ is ‘other’, ‘hostile’, ‘dangerous’, ‘chaotic’. [...] The boundary may separate the living from the dead, settled peoples from the nomadic ones, the town from the plains [...].

Also, and perhaps most importantly to my approach, Lotman adds that “what is not allowed with us is allowed with them”, suggesting quite rightly that some boundaries must be crossed in order to enable characters to change their usual patterns of thought or behaviour. Should they wish to act differently from the “courtly norm”, they have to alter their location, to leave the court and go to the forest where the criteria for what is allowed differ.

Applying these perceptions to As You Like It, such contrasts and boundaries to be crossed and/or stressed were necessary to enable the shift in the mood of both the play itself and the characters in it – in order to invert the established modes of behaviour, the characters need to change the scene, to move into another location, to a more carnivalesque world where they no longer have to act according to the rules governing their deeds in their ordinary setting, the life in the court. Another aspect of Lotman’s work also pertains directly to the current analysis, namely, that „Conscious human life, i.e. the life of culture, also demands a special space-time structure, for culture organises itself in the form of a special space-time and cannot exist without it”.

These spatial and temporal criteria as defined by Lotman are instructive in Shakespeare’s As You Like It with regard to how the boundaries between the court, the organised structure and institution and the country, the carnivalesque location, manifest themselves in space and time. There are two distinct spatial locations in the play (though most of the events take place in one of them, in the rural setting of the forest of Arden). And there is also a distinction of time in these two locations, which serves to sharpen the spatial contrast between the two settings. While the spatial difference is most clearly seen in the actions of the characters – moving from one to the other – it is also clearly present in their words, their lines, and so is the temporal one. These two matters – space and time, can be viewed as essential to some (or perhaps even most) of the characters in the play.

**SPACE**

To start with the spatial matter – it is extremely important to note how the difference of life in court and life in country is verbalised by some of the play’s characters. Of course, it is naturally seen also in

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6 Colie 1974, 284.
7 Lotman 2000, 131.
8 Lotman 2000, 132.
the action of the play – there are many characters who are banished from the court (the Duke Senior, Rosalind, Orlando, also Celia, who goes with Rosalind voluntarily) which turns out to be for their own good. After all, it is in the forest that they can be who they really are and reach what they have, however unwittingly, aspired towards or wished for – for example, Rosalind and Orlando, who have already fallen in love, can get together in the forest (like many other couples in the play). They can act according to their real selves, abandon the strictures of courtly manners and expected behaviour in favor of their innermost desires. Rosalind even transmutes her physical self, dressing up like a man, which gives her even further freedom in achieving her goals.

But what I’d like to stress most is the noteworthy frequency of the characters’ comments about and comparisons between urban and rural life. Firstly, the play’s imagery is highly dependent upon nature imagery, most metaphors and comparisons being taken from the sphere of the flora and the fauna (and uttered not only by those who already live in the rural setting, like Duke Senior or Jaques or the shepherds, but also by the “new-comers” from the court, Rosalind, Orlando, etc). Also, among the words used most often to name, discuss or describe various phenomena and items are the following: nature, natural, desert, deserted, city, citizens, civilise, forest, court, time, and other similar ones to point to the contrast. For example, when Orlando first reaches the forest and meets the Duke Senior there, he is overwhelmed to realise that the place is so peaceful and “civilised”, in an ironic sense. When the Duke treats him kindly, offering food to the starving and tired Orlando, the latter replies, almost in a state of shock:

Speak you so gently? Pardon me, I pray you.
I thought that all things had been savage here.

Therefore, being banished from a „civilised“ place, the court, i.e. being treated in an inhumane way, he is set face to face with the fact that what he thought of being an „uncivilised“ place, i.e. the forest, turns out to be far more human and kind which constitutes a total inversion of his values.

Linking these words and the ideas behind them to the notion of values mentioned earlier, a good example to illustrate the contrast would be the following passage from Act II Scene i, where the Duke Senior and his companion discuss the different reasons for hunting deer for city/court people and country folks, and the other lord comments on Jaques’s words upon hunting as a sport for the urban man, calling them „fat and greasy citizens“ who kill for the mere fun of it, while the countrymen kill out of the need for food. Yet, they have only reached this opinion through personal experience – the Duke himself used to hunt for sport once, and it is only now, after living in the forest, that he has come to look at the matter differently.

The melancholy Jaques is, throughout the play, the one to stress the discrepancy between the urban and rural life to the extremest point. He is also the only one of the characters who does not return to life in the court at the end of the play, as the
others do. For him, the values in the forest are the true ones and so he stays true to both these values and himself. On the other hand, the clown from the court, Touchstone, cannot cope with the different life style of the forest, and keeps exalting the court life whenever he gets the chance. In a lengthy dispute about these two alternative ways of living with the shepherd Corin (act III scene ii), Touchstone bluntly states that since Corin has never been to court, he is damned because in that case he never saw nor learned good manners, which, according to him, leads straight to sin and damnation. Corin, with his sane countryman’s wit, replies that the manners of the court are ridiculous in the country, and vice versa. Touchstone keeps urging the matter until Corin wisely says that Touchstone’s wit is too “courtly” for him and he will rest the case. That does not, however, deter Touchstone who goes on until Corin states the essence of being a countryman, that is “a true labourer”, saying: „I earn that I eat, get that I wear; owe no man hate, envy no man’s happiness; glad of other men’s good, content with my harm; and the greatest of my pride is to see my ewes graze and my lambs suck“13. But even that cannot convince Touchstone, who simply claims that all the abovementioned qualities and criteria are all the more reason to be damned. There is no way to make him see life from someone else’s perspective, and Corin lets the matter slip, which is yet another point in favour of his „sober“ thinking, which in itself can be seen as the contrast between the artificial life of court and the simpler, more down to earth life of the country.

Yet, although the corresponding arguments used by the counterparts cannot meet in a solution satisfying both parties, there undoubtedly is a dialogue started, and that is already an advance, though naturally it stems from the fact that there are two different settings, there is a boundary – without these criteria there would never be a dialogue that lives on different information to be exchanged:

The boundary as we have already pointed out is ambivalent and one of its sides is always turned to the outside. Moreover the boundary is the domain of bilingualism, which as a rule finds literal expression in the language practice of the inhabitants of borderlands between two cultural areas. Since the boundary is a necessary part of the semiosphere and there can be no ‘us’ if there is no ‘them’, culture creates not only its own type of internal organisation but also its own type of external ‘disorganisation’. In this sense we can say that the ‘barbarian’ is created by civilization and needs it as much as it needs him. The extreme edge of the semiosphere is a place of incessant dialogue14.

Touchstone, however, doesn’t rest his case, in the following scene15, while he is arguing the merits of being married as opposed to being single, he uses the following comparison: „[...] As a walled town is more worthier than a village, so is the forehead of a married man more honourable than the bare brow of a bachelor; [...]“16.

**TIME**

The temporal axis of the play gives further support to the contrast of the two modes of living. Time is essential in the city. This is not to say that it wouldn’t be so in country, but the „scale“ of measuring time

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14 Lotman 2000, 141–142.
15 Shakespeare 1993, III.iii.
16 Shakespeare 1993, 55–57.
is different – in the city it is counted by shorter intervals, one focuses on hours, minutes even. In the country time is measured in larger proportions – mostly by seasons (when to sow the seeds, when to harvest the crop, etc.), or sometimes by general periods of the day – there are things to be done in the morning or at midday or in the evening.

In fact, in the dream-like setting of the forest of Arden in *As You Like It*, time seems to have little meaning at all, „there’s no clock in the forest”\(^{17}\). The very word „time“ itself is uttered most frequently by the characters in the play to draw attention to the different measuring of it, or, as in the case with Touchstone, to indicate his inability to cope with the temporal dissimilarities of the country life. For him as someone coming from a more (or, at least differently) organised time setting, adjusting to a „no-time“ space may prove impossible (and so it does).

The matter of time is even further complicated with regard to this play, as A.D. Nuttall, among others, has noted, there is some confusion with it right from the first act, where we learn that though it was just a few days ago that Rosalind’s father left the court, we are also told that she and Celia have grown up together since that happened\(^{18}\). And once the action of the play moves into the forest, time seems to pause completely for a while\(^{19}\). This can be looked at as a mistake by Shakespeare, but could also be seen as directing the audience’s attention to the importance of time in this play. The latter idea is put forward rather straightforwardly through Rosalind when she (still disguised as a man) discusses time with Orlando. Though the main thought behind their conversation is time’s relativity for lovers – either too quick, when they are together, or too slow, when apart-Rosalind utter the following, quite „universal“ line that seems to describe the main idea about time in the whole play: „Time travels in divers paces with divers persons“\(^{20}\).

Two contrasting ideologies concerning temporal conceptions can again be seen in the opinions of Touchstone and Jaques. Ironically, the clash is further strengthened by Shakespeare via the fact that we hear about Touchstone’s concept of time through Jaques’s lines. The latter has met Touchstone in the woods, when he has just arrived there along with Rosalind and Celia, and Jaques forwards what he has heard Touchstone saying, being amazed about how such a trivial matter (not that time in a more general sense would be a worthless matter for Jaques, but rather is so the way Touchstone sees it) can be worthy of such a lengthy meditation for someone. Jaques sees him looking at his watch („dial“) and remarks:

> [...] ’It is ten o’clock. Thus we may see”, quoth he, „how the world wags:

> „Tis but an hour ago since it was nine, and after one hour more ‘twill be eleven;

> And so from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe,

> And then from hour to hour, we rot, and rot,

> And thereby hangs a tale\(^{21}\).

Jaques considers that trivial „moral on the time“ (II.vii.29) to be outrageous, yet also so hilarious that, according to his own words, he laughed non-stop about it for „an hour by his dial“ (II.vii.33), and infers

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\(^{17}\) Ibid., III.ii., 296–297, as Orlando puts it in.

\(^{18}\) Nuttall 2007, 235.

\(^{19}\) Nuttall 2007, 235.


that Touchstone, whom he just met, was a true fool.

However, just a little later in the play, Jaques gives his own meditation/reasoning on time, the famous speech of the seven ages of man, which I take to be a reply to Touchstone’s. Since Jaques seems so content with the space and pace of life in the forest, his speech reflects his different outlook on time, which he measures in larger units, in the various stages of life each man goes through, rather than minutes, hours or days. That conception seems to back his stoic philosophy. The speech is delivered by Jaques within the frames of the very same scene as Touchstone’s thoughts on time quoted above, starting with the well-known line “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players”23. According to Jaques’s philosophy, every man goes through various stages in his life and thus acts all the roles of a human life (provided one gets to live until old age), and ends his speech with another “key-word” in the whole discussion about time, reflecting his relaxed and yet somewhat contemplative attitude towards it:

[...] Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything24.

So the last stage, oblivion, emphasizes that there comes a point when time no longer has a meaning.

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22 Shakespeare 1993, 139–166.
23 Shakespeare 1993, 139–140.
24 Shakespeare 1993, 163–166.
26 Shakespeare 1993, I.i.6–7.
So, by the end of the play, the rural setting is no more seen as negative or threatening, but rather as one creating a joyous atmosphere. Therefore, the characters need to change location once again, to return back to court and see how they will manage to use the lessons they have learned in the forest if indeed they have learned anything at all – according to Nuttall, it is a characteristic of Shakespeare’s pastoral that the courtly persons are not really educated by the shepherds (a requirement of the pastoral genre), but they make the wild place courtly, usurp simplicity by mannered sophistication, instead of learning real simplicity\textsuperscript{28}. However, should they have come to cherish new values, there is no knowing of how successful will be their application in the urban space and time. Perhaps it will be a peaceful return, as suggested by Agnes Latham in the quote I cited in the beginning of this article, or perhaps it will lead to another clash, as renovations often do.

**SOURCES**

**Primary Literature**

**Secondary Literature**

\textsuperscript{28} Nuttall 2007, 232.