*Explain the extent which* The Winter’s Tale *conforms to Giambattista Guarini’s theories in* A Compendium of Tragicomic Poetry.

In his *Compendium of Tragicomic Poetry*, Giambattista Guarini describes tragicomedy as a genre that is not merely a juxtaposition of tragic and comic elements within a fused plot, but an alloy or hybrid seamlessly integrated. Like bronze produced from copper and tin, or the mule that is offspring to a horse and an ass, tragicomedy is a genre made new from elements of each of its forebears. Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* in many ways demonstrates applications of these tragicomic elements within text. As Guarini outlines, the play mixes the high tones of tragedy with the low tones of comedy, defying rules of unity and verisimilitude. It combines plotlines containing high- and low-born characters, public and private matters, serious tones and wittiness, terror and laughter. It performs elements of tragedy and comedy each in moderation to produce a story with an optimistic ending, allowing for the ‘purgation of melancholy’ that Guarini describes.

The basis of *The Winter’s Tale* is built upon juxtaposition. Generations of dramatists have grappled with the contrasts between its two opposing settings of Sicilia and Bohemia. Sicilia, where the play opens, represents the tragic side of the play, conveying winter, court, age, and death. Bohemia, its comic counterpart in the second half of the play, conveys summer, country, youth, and rebirth. Both settings maintain a fantastic quality, a distance from reality and realism. There is also a sixteen-year time jump within the play, further pronouncing the contrast between these locations. The characters of the two landscapes unite in the play’s final act, fusing tragicomic elements just as Guarini suggests. Even individual scenes represent the contrast present in tragicomedy. For instance, the kindness and compassion of the Shepherd who rescues the infant Perdita in Act 3, Scene 3 is set in direct contrast to the agony Antigonus is experiencing from the bear’s attack and the misery of the doomed mariners. The setting of *The Winter’s Tale* represents the contrasting combination of tragedy and comedy that Guarini outlines.

Characters also demonstrate contrast, combining techniques of tragedy and comedy. Tragedies typically focus on noble characters of the upper class, while comedies revolve around more vulgar, lower-class figures. Throughout *The Winter’s Tale,* high- and low-born characters feature, with the play opening on Leontes’ court, but transitioning to the countryside sheep-shearing festival midway. Characters also straddle these boundaries of class, such as Perdita, who is unaware of her noble heritage, and Prince Florizel, who pretends to be a peasant at the festival. The play also experiments with traditional archetypes of tragic and comic characters. Autolycus is a unique sort of take on a tragic Vice character: a petty thief rather than a character capable of true malice, and a cheerful, singing figure rather than a menacing schemer. *The Winter’s Tale* uses the classes and personas of its characters to fuse elements of tragedy and comedy into its new hybrid form.

*The Winter’s Tale* strives to take elements from both tragedy and comedy in moderation, to “remove from comedy its excessive lewdness and tragedy its excessive savagery,” as quoted in the chapter introduction. It contains tragedy’s “stormy emotions somewhat attenuated, its pleasure but not its sadness, its danger but not its death” (Guarini 153). For instance, Shakespeare employs a technique in Act 2, Scene 1 that he has used previously in tragedies such as *Macbeth* by featuring the child Mamillus on stage to gain audiences’ affections and sympathies shortly before his death. However, Shakespeare does not linger on this tragic detail as he continues onto Leontes’ condemnation of Hermione. In fact, he undercuts his own tragedy by having Camillo refuse to commit murder, and by having Leontes’ lords oppose his choice. Thus, Shakespeare lessens the terror of tragedy, providing a sense of danger without the despair that would typically accompany.

Similarly, Shakespeare provides a sense of romantic comedy in the latter half of the play that has “laughter that is not lewd… modest pleasures… happy reversal, and above all the comic order…” (Guarini 153). It features typical romantic male and female leads in Florizel and Perdita, a *senex iratus* in the disapproving Polixines, and the formation of a new society as the lovers escape to Sicilia in order to be able to marry, leading to a righting of wrongs established earlier in the play. The higher class of these characters, as noted earlier, allows the story to feel elevated from typical vulgar comedy, while still containing comedic elements of spectacle such as in the satyr’s dance. The play’s romantic storyline emphasizes the importance of children and their innocence. As Leontes suggests early in the play, childhood is the stage of pastoral innocence that fades with sexual maturity, leaving room for tragedy to infiltrate. Perdita and Florizel’s youth and love portray innocence as opposed to vulgarity and provide the optimism that fuels the comedy and balances out the tragedy.

Guarini concludes his essay by speaking of how playwrights must write with the mindset of the audiences of their times. He sees both tragedy and comedy as too extreme for the audiences of his time. Tragicomedy becomes his solution, as it can “imitate with the resources of the stage a fictional action which is a mixture of those parts of tragedy and comedy which can unite with decorum and verisimilitude in a single dramatic form whose end is to purge by means of delight the sadness of listeners” (Guarini 159). *The Winter’s Tale* accomplishes this purgation of melancholy. After the semi-tragic opening (which Shakespeare softens, as mentioned previously), Act 4, Scene 4’s sheepshearing festival lightens the tone of the play, providing audiences a release into pastoral innocence. By the play’s conclusion, sixteen years later, Leontes’ tragic terror feels distant. Audiences are ready to forgive Leontes for his actions, ready for a happy ending to come to pass. The renewal of faith that Paulina prompts, and Hermione’s miraculous appearance emphasizes this sense of rebirth and renewal. Though the world isn’t perfect – Autolycus and Mamillus have still met painful ends, sixteen years have passed for Hermione and Perdita that can never be regained – the world still feels as though it is restored to order. The feud between Leontes and Polixines has ended. The lost princess has returned. Perdita and Florizel (and perhaps Camillo and Paulina) are able to wed. Audiences are able to let go of their fear and sadness, the melancholy that the start of the play provoked, and find freedom and solace in a happy conclusion.