Shakespeare king of hill at Winedale

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WINEDALE — Terry Galloway isn’t given to understating her pleasure at returning to James Ayres’ summer Shakespeare course. “When I came to Winedale in 1972, it was the most wonderful thing that had ever happened to me.”

For the past 10 years, Ayres, an associate professor of English at the University of Texas, has been taking about 17 students to Winedale each summer for an intense course on Shakespeare.

Ayres says that the best way to learn Shakespeare is to perform his plays, and at 6 p.m. Thursday, his students will present the first of three plays to be performed over the next two weekends in Winedale’s hay barn.

This is the first time he has cast the plays before leaving the UT campus, Ayres said, and he is pleased with the results. “In past years, the students would meet and read the plays together during the first week and then cast the parts. If a student was asked to play a shallow role, they would often worry that they had been cast for the part because the rest of the students viewed them as shallow people.”

He might have added that it doesn’t hurt to start rehearsing early when you are tackling a play like “King Lear.”

“My only reservation about scheduling ‘Leah’ is the big contrast between the robustness of ‘Twelfth Night’ and ‘Lear,’ where the language, the individual words, are so damned important.”

Cindy Williams, who is working on a master’s degree at UT, says energy will be a key factor in performing “Lear,” from the standpoint of the performers and the audience. “On the one hand, the audience will see two comedies — ‘Comedy of Errors’ and ‘Twelfth Night’ — imbued with life, vigor and vitality, and leave the performance feeling uplifted. Somehow, we have got to use just as much energy in ‘King Lear’ making people miserable.”

In “King Lear,” Shakespeare depicts a world afflicted by evil, and harnesses the elements of nature and man’s spirit in gripping fashion. As is often the case in Shakespeare’s works, wisdom comes from the mouth of a fool, the king’s Fool — played by Galloway. At one point, Galloway tells the king, “Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise.”

While the plays represent plenty of challenge, it is the learning process and the development of character that makes the Winedale experience special for the students.

After rehearsing a storm scene last weekend, Galloway filled her pipe and started whistling at her Fool’s stick. A woman of tremendous intensity, warm and Galloway has written and performed many sketches for Esther’s Follies and been praised by producers of the NBC television program “Saturday Night Live.”

She is an artist of stature who nonetheless goes to Winedale like a pilgrim on a visit to Mecca.

“The Winedale changed my life and forced me to take a second look at my future,” Galloway said. “Before coming here in 1972, I had worked as a historical archaeologist, which I liked well enough, but after Winedale, nothing was good enough.”

The biggest mistake students can make when signing up for the Winedale course is thinking it will be something of a holiday. Some are severely shaken when they discover the long hours and intense nature of the work expected while they stay at the university-owned historical settlement.

Robert Faires, who recently graduated from UT with a degree in studio art, faced that problem when he came to Winedale in 1978.

“The first time I came, I wasn’t ready for it,” Faires said. “At the end of the course, I went home feeling pressured and a little sour about the entire experience. However, the more I thought about it the more I realized it wasn’t anyone’s fault. It’s just difficult to become accustomed to working 18 hours a day for six weeks, and if you’re not prepared for it, the work gets to you.

“Fortunately, I understood what the experience could be and realized I had not lived up to it. So, I decided to ask Doc (Ayres) to give me a second chance, which he did. This time I came prepared to push myself in every direction possible and it has made a big difference.”

“Being subjected to the language of Shakespeare 24 hours of every day is a wonderful experience,” Faires said. “Now I can look at the sky or a tree and conjure up one of Shakespeare’s descriptions. Frankly, I’m in love with the way the man used the language.”

Caryl Gorski is a Plan II sophomore at UT. By last Saturday, she was feeling like a professional seamstress. Barely 24 hours earlier she had made the first dress of her life for her part as a courtroom in the “Comedy of Errors,” which, incidentally, will mark her stage debut. Since then, she has made five pair of pants.

In the role of theater, Terry Galloway is probably the most experienced of the students. She also may be the most enthusiastic.

“I could work from dawn to dusk with the greatest pleasure. And why not?” she said. “I got to do Shakespeare, to be on stage and play with people. That’s my heart’s desire, so I’ll continue to work.”

“The best thing about doing Shakespeare is that it always deals with life. He says so much in such a small amount of space. Here at Winedale, we find ourselves constantly paying homage to the man.”