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Students and Teachers: An Interview with Aranye Fradenburg Joy

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Abstract

This essay showcases the pedagogic philosophy and legacy of UC Santa Barbara Professor Emerita Aranye Fradenburg Joy, a Chaucerian distinguished by her contributions to feminist, psychoanalytic and new historicist thought. The piece features an interview between Fradenburg Joy's former PhD student, University of Iowa Professor Kathy Lavezzo, in which Fradenburg describes her approach to teaching as well as her experiences with a host of teaching instructors and mentors. In addition, Lavezzo shares and discusses some of the notes she took as a TA for Fradenburg's *Canterbury Tales* class, and recalls, with UC Berkeley Professor Maura Nolan, Fradenburg's teaching style and its considerable impact on them as students, teachers and researchers. Ultimately, this piece registers intellectual gifts handed down by not only an important Chaucerian, but also a genealogy of professors who have passed to the next generation valuable knowledge on teaching a paradigmatic medieval work.

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As a foremost thinker among contemporary medievalists and "in many ways a more profound Lacanian than Lacan himself," Aranye Fradenburg Joy has generated a literary critical oeuvre that is as challenging as it is generative (Holsinger 2005, 307).[1] When I was fortunate to be her advisee during the 1990s, Aranye generously—and, indeed, awesomely—brought the full intellectual gravity and heft of her scholarship to bear on both her graduate courses and her personal interactions with doctoral students. More than any instructor I ever encountered during my studies, Aranye raised the stakes of literary analysis in a way that inspired me to move, dialectically, toward an ever-deeper critique of medieval texts, culture, and society. Above all, the UCSB classes that Aranye taught—and cotaught, with Julie Carlson and Elisabeth Weber—clarified the utility of theory as both a means of analyzing medieval texts and an object of study in its own right.[2] In courses with Aranye one would read, for example, *Yvain* beside Barthes' *Mythologies*; the *Knight's Tale* alongside Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*; and *Piers Plowman* with Bataille's *The Accursed Share*. Perhaps the most fundamental lesson I received from that theory-driven coursework was an appreciation of the hermeneutics of suspicion which a bona fide medieval criticism demands. As Aranye puts it in her groundbreaking 1989 essay on *The Prioress's Tale*, "if we deny ourselves the opportunity for cultural analysis . . . we risk confusing 'the Middle Ages' with the ways in which the Middle Ages (mis)represented itself to itself" (Fradenburg 1989, 75). That crucial insight shapes my scholarship and pedagogy.

Beyond my advanced coursework with Aranye, my experience working as a teaching assistant for her undergraduate *Canterbury Tales* class was nothing less than revelatory. Unlike her graduate seminars, these classes entailed relatively little give-and-take between students and teacher; instead, they were all Aranye, all the time, presented with an eye toward the needs and interests of undergraduate majors. And, perhaps ironically, my graduate student self couldn't ask for more. My notetaking may well have been more furious than anyone else in the lecture hall, as I was thrilled to discover in her lectures a new window into the significance of Chaucer's masterpiece, one that made my own love of the medieval English poet exponentially grow.

This piece highlights Aranye's formidable pedagogic talent as an instructor of not just graduate but also undergraduate students of medieval English literature and especially, of Chaucer. In what follows, I first address Aranye's undergraduate pedagogy by summarizing a recent exchange with UC Berkeley professor Maura Nolan, who was Aranye's student during the 1980s at Dartmouth, where Aranye taught prior to her arrival at UCSB.[3] I then turn to the centerpiece of this contribution, my interview with Aranye on August 5, 2022, in which she comments on both the thinking that informed her UCSB undergraduate pedagogy and the lessons she gleaned as a student and as a teacher of literary, cultural, and historical criticism. I conclude by further elaborating upon my experience listening to Aranye's undergraduate *Canterbury Tales* lectures. Namely, I share images of notes taken during a day

[1] In addition to *Sacrifice Your Love* and the pieces cited elsewhere in this essay, Fradenburg's major critical projects include but are not limited to Fradenburg 1991, Fradenburg 1990, Fradenburg 1995, Fradenburg 1999, and Fradenburg 2004.

[2] Carlson is a feminist and a romanticist whose publications include monographs on Coleridge and the Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley family. Weber is a translator and editor of theorists including Derrida and Levinas; her scholarship includes publications on psychoanalysis, German Judaism, and German literature.

[3] Nolan is a medievalist whose publications include a monograph on John Lydgate and essays on late- medieval English aesthetics, John Gower, and William Langland.

in the mid-1990s when she discussed *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and preface those images with a description of the overall pedagogy to which they speak.

Like me, Maura vividly recalls Aranye's deeply cool style (during our conversations about this piece, we exchanged precise details "of her array" the first day we encountered her as a teacher) and treasures the extra-curricular dimensions of Aranye's generosity (for example, for me, high tea at the Four Seasons in Montecito and a shared motel room in Kalamazoo; and for Maura, a weekend during which Aranye introduced her to Manhattan). Maura aptly characterizes Aranye's teaching at Dartmouth as "electric, crackling with new ideas, illuminating dark corners of a past most of us had never encountered" and describes how, as her thesis advisor, Aranye "often responded to my drafts with penetrating questions, some of which have stayed with me—really, haunted me—ever since." Maura particularly recalls how, "when we met to discuss my chapter on Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, Aranye asked a question that hit me like the proverbial ton of bricks: "Why, for you, does Chaucer always have to be the good guy?" That question—one which gets to the heart of the matter regarding the work of critical interpretation—speaks to the way in which the groundbreaking elements of Aranye's scholarship informed her pedagogy, even at the undergraduate level.

Maura also describes the lasting and profound impact of a seminar Aranye taught called "Legends of Troy":

> More than any other course I took as an undergrad, that class both shaped my vision of the Middle Ages and taught me how to read medieval texts. To give one example, when we discussed the love scene in Book III of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Aranye made the text come to vivid emotional life even as she made us feel its estrangement from our modern world. As we read the conversation between the lovers line by line, she commented that they were engaging in "pillow talk"—a phrase that jolted all of us into instant recognition of the very human, very ordinary scenario being described. At the same time, she explained Chaucer's allusions in the text to the story of Philomela, via the image of the nightingale. Her insistence that reading Chaucer meant both discovering and living with the contradiction between those two ideas . . . influenced my thinking in ways that I'm only now truly beginning to understand.

Maura goes on to state that, "[o]ver the years, I have taught versions of that class many times, . . . always with a nod to Aranye's original seminar." I can say the same about Aranye's undergraduate Chaucer course. In many respects, every time I have taught the *Canterbury Tales*, I've riffed on the example set by Aranye at Santa Barbara.

In the remainder of this piece, I discuss with Aranye her teaching methods at Santa Barbara and the ways in which her own instructors and mentors shaped and nurtured both her intellectual identity and pedagogy.

[This interview has been edited for clarity and concision.]

Kathy Lavezzo: While my education at UCSB centered on the readings, research, writing and exchanges that happened in graduate classrooms, it involved so much more. I learned a great deal, for example, while working as a teaching assistant for your undergraduate course on the *Canterbury Tales*.

I have so many questions about how you approached that class and your undergraduate pedagogy overall. To begin, how did your employment by a large public institution, with a quarter system, figure into your pedagogy?

Aranye Fradenburg Joy: In terms of not teaching all the tales, I felt that was too much for a quarter as opposed to a semester. I had taught in semesters when I was at Virginia. Dartmouth, where I began shaping my undergraduate Chaucer class, was also on a quarter system. Because the *Canterbury Tales* is not an easy poem for students to experience, I chose groupings that had ongoing threads and interesting internal dynamics. The frame of the *Canterbury Tales* is just so fascinating. Even if the touch is very light and incomplete, the opportunity that it gives you to talk about intertextual dynamics is just golden. The *Canterbury Tales* are a wonderful thing to teach undergraduates because of how much leaks across these apparent endings and beginnings, which of course Chaucer is always very fascinated by. He loved beginnings and he had a really hard time with endings. And I like that about him. In terms of the large or largish public university thing, when I first came to UCSB a lot of people said things to me like, "Oh you must miss your students at Dartmouth," implying that the students I had at UCSB were in some inferior class compared to an Ivy League college. And I never felt that. I don't consider a surfboard to be an intellectual depressant necessarily, though it can be. I don't make those sorts of automatic associations. While their preparation sometimes was perhaps a couple of years off, my students at UCSB were relaxed, open, and made uniquely wonderful use of the space of the classroom. These students were really capable of enjoying something when given the opportunity and when somebody trusted them enough to do it. I found my job was to challenge them, to ask for something authentic and thoughtful from them in the nature of a response, and to help them find ways to be interested in things that were different. I worked to build their trust in thinking, in reading, and in finding their way to something that was relatively remote from the cultural situations in which they had grown up and to be influenced by or inspired by it.

K.L.: What you have described seems to perfectly encapsulate what a liberal arts education at a public institution should involve. The goal isn't to have this one-to-one relationship between a major and whatever job one gets. It's about precisely what you described: learning ways to open oneself up to, make contact with, and enjoy newness and difference.

A.F.J.: Exactly. It's about having a better experience with one's mind.

K.L.: What aims, expectations and desires about undergraduate pedagogy informed your presentation of material, your assignments and exams, and your lectures? I mention the format of your assignments and exams because I've retained them in various ways over the years. For example, my midterms and exams still follow the shape of your exams, which involved identifications as well as both short and long essay responses to passages from Chaucer that you had covered in lecture. Were these your innovations, or did you adopt or adapt them from others?

A.F.J.: Well, I did learn that way of setting up an exam from Peter Travis and Alan Gaylord.[4] When I was there, Dartmouth still had the shreds of an old tradition of having a junior faculty person partner with a senior faculty person to teach a class, and so I did teach Chaucer with Alan, and also with Peter. In some ways it was frustrating because you always want to do what you want to do. But there's absolutely no doubt that I was also very supported by that and learned a lot from them. I really liked how they constructed their exams and kept doing it because it's very textual. If anything is going to encourage a student to really look at the words that are right in front of them, that does. The passages gave them something to hang onto, showed them that they had gotten somewhere with context, with resonating with middle English, and with how amazing these texts are as poetry. And still of course they find many ways of writing *next* to the text rather than *on* it, though they have a chunk right in front of them! One of the questions you asked is how things have changed. It has always been hard to teach close reading, but it's really hard now.

K.L.: As I hear you talking about close reading, it brings home to me the added challenges of teaching it during these para-pandemic days. But I'm not giving up on teaching close reading. One strategy I've adopted is invoking the rhetoric of mindfulness; encouraging students to take a moment or two to center themselves before reading the text, to slow down and be fully present to the words on the page.

I did not realize that you co-taught with Alan Gaylord and Peter Travis. By any chance did you encounter the beginnings of Travis's deconstructive book on the Nun's Priest's performance (2010)?

A.F.J.: Just the beginnings. Peter has a wonderful mind and is a real mensch. He is an intuitive and gifted close reader who cares deeply about intellectual problems. I was at Dartmouth during the 80s. And, as you know, at that time there were some groups in the humanities who were very much against theory in any way shape or form, some who didn't think it was appropriate for older periods, some who thought it was the bees-knees in any situation, and some who thought everything in between. Peter was not anti-theory and we shared interests. He always respected the ways I was thinking about things. He cared deeply about both historical context and how contemporary and medieval intellectual problems inform each other. Sometimes you learn more about an old question by thinking about how a version of it remains unresolved, something that we still stumble over. Peter was what I hoped medievalists were like.

I had good experiences with that in the rest of my education. My undergraduate medievalists at Macalester, Giles Gamble and Glending Olson, were very kind and encouraging to me.[5] Glending, who taught there before he went on to Cleveland State, wrote about literature as forms of recreation and healing in the Middle Ages, a topic I discuss in my "Living Chaucer" piece for SAC (Olson 1982; Fradenburg 2011). Glending's book was a historical study about the tradition of how to treat

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[4] Peter Travis is a Chaucerian whose publications include a monograph on the Nun's Priest's Tale and numerous essays. Alan Gaylord (1933-2017) was a Chaucerian who published numerous essays on that medieval poet.

[5] Gamble taught courses in medieval and renaissance literature at Macalester College; his publications include essays on Shakespeare, Chaucer and Dryden. Olson would leave Macalester to teach at Cleveland State; his publications include a monograph on literature as recreation in the late Middle Ages.

melancholy through the arts in the ancient world and in the Middle Ages. When you put it like that, almost every medievalist will go oh yeah, of course obviously they were thinking about states of mind and how language affected those states of mind. Glending cared about the way people formulated their emotional experiences in the past and how they tried to heal. And he was that kind of person too. Both Glending and Peter were.

My graduate mentor Del Kolve was a performer.[6] He really loved to lecture, to perform a script, and he did it so beautifully that the response he tended to get from everyone who took his lecture class on Chaucer was, mouths hanging open, "could you just say that entire thing over again, I have an extra hour." Everyone who knew him remarked on his delivery. I recall that his first big piece of advice to me after a teaching observation was not to swallow my words, to round out my voice and to project it into the crowd.

I think of the way Del taught as an extension of his commitment to beauty, and interest in emotion, that emerges in his research. His first book, on drama, asked what various religious practices and positions were about in terms of the realities of human emotion: What were medieval feelings? What feelings were medieval rituals supposed to move a person to (Kolve 1966)? Critics like Del were often thought of as New Critics or kind of Leavisites. The work certainly was about close reading, but not exclusively for Del. He took very seriously questions of beauty and ugliness, of shared cultural practices thereof, and of what they meant, both privately and communally. He was a very good fit for the dramatic literature that he worked on, and for Chaucer (1984; 2009). Del's approach at Virginia greatly contrasted with the Robertsonian method at Princeton, which I'm not sure I would have survived.

K.L.: Was that the other possibility?

A.F.J.: Princeton and UVA, being sort of mid-Atlantic contestants for a certain segment of the population, keep an eye on each other. Princeton is where Seth Lerer was trained.[7] Carolyn Dinshaw's training there emerges in her first book, where she does a kind of feminist exegesis of scripture (1989).[8] Dinshaw takes Robertson and turns him in a different direction. But the method is very similar to the kind of exegesis that Robertson thought we all should perform, because that's what medieval people thought literary criticism was, and so we of course had to be in lockstep with them (cf. Fradenburg 1997b, 212-214).[9] Given who I was becoming, even before I was aware of the split and really understood much about the politics in the field, I was lucky to have found places and people to work with. I had a sense of hope going in.

K.L.: Did your turn to psychoanalysis happen at or post UVA?

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[6] Kolve would leave UVA to teach at UCLA. His publications include books on medieval drama and the *Canterbury Tales*.

[7] Lerer is a medievalist whose many books cover topics including Shakespeare, Boethius, Chaucer, and children's literature.

[8] Dinshaw is a medievalist, a founding editor of *GLQ*, and the author of numerous books and essays on gender and sexuality in the *Canterbury Tales* and other medieval works.

[9] D. W. Robertson (1914-1992) was a Chaucerian who generated an influential approach to medieval study that stressed Augustinian exegesis.

A.F.: Actually, it started when I was an undergraduate. I took as many kinds of classes on literary criticism as I could and remember reading, for example, some psychoanalytic treatments of *Hamlet* and thinking "wow, this is a great way to think about literature." Virginia at that time was a place where you could be psychoanalytic, even when working on earlier periods. I took three classes with the early English scholar at UVA, Jim Earl, who is almost more of a rebel in medieval now than he was back then (for example, Earl 1994).[10] Wally Kerrigan was also at UVA. He was not an unproblematic figure, but he was also brilliant. He wrote that amazing psychoanalytic book on Milton, vision, and the primal scene (1983).[11] E. D. Hirsch was also there.[12] I also took classes with Ralph Cohen on the theory of history.[13] Having been trained in this Euro-American tradition of thinking about history as not this thing that happens to you, but rather as a very complicated subject in and of itself that can be approached in different ways, I could never figure out why some historicists in our [medieval] field were so uninterested in the philosophy of history. They weren't all exemplars of the kind of thinking I wanted to do, certainly not some of the more conservative trends.

Ralph Cohen wasn't exactly a wild man. He was interested in linguistics, in reader-response, and in how traditions are created and maintained. But just the excitement of the thought was there, and that was good for me. My training began early and was advanced significantly by a couple of people at UVA. But when I went to Dartmouth, I was still figuring out various versions of the questions you just asked me. My dissertation is kind of in two halves that don't fit together very well. One part is very structuralist and reader-response oriented, and the other is psychoanalytic and materialist. And the psychoanalysis and materialism parts—really, figuring out a way to think with those things as a premodernist—came together when I went to Dartmouth. During my first three years, for example, I wrote my *Manciples's Tale* article on servitude and the master slave dialectic, a piece I still love (Fradenburg 1985). Richard Corum, my former husband, was a big influence on me at Dartmouth. He was, is, a brilliant man with a great sensitivity to language who, as you know, loved to teach (cf. Corum 1998).[14] He was working on Donne at the time and had many amazing thoughts about Donne that came from his own theological training and experience as a graduate student at Berkeley. The conversations that we had, long before we became an item, about what I was thinking about and what he was thinking about, were wonderful and very exciting for me. I feel like I kind of put together my style of thinking in my early years at Dartmouth. It has changed over time.

But what I always wanted to do as a critic was get to the heart of it, to get to the heart of—the core feeling—of, say, the magic of the *Wife of Bath's Tale* in relationship to the prologue, that amazing transformational discourse (cf. Fradenburg 1986). Even if you are going to argue that it is not so amazing after all, even if you are going to argue that prologue and tale have so much more in common than you realize, even if many critics say that core feeling is just a fantasy, or all convention. But, you know, conventions emerge for a reason.

[10] Earl would leave UVA for the University of Oregon, where he taught medieval literature, psychoanalytic criticism, the Bible and other topics.

[11] Kerrigan would leave UVA to teach at the University of Massachusetts. His publications include editions of Milton's prose, poetry, and drama.

[12] Hirsch is a theorist and literary critic who gained national attention for his advocacy of "cultural literacy."

[13] Cohen was the founder of *New Literary History*, which he edited for over four decades.

[14] Corum would leave Dartmouth to teach at UCSB.

K.L.: I still have an archive of the notes I took during your undergraduate Chaucer lectures. I've shared with you two related examples: my notes on your November 1994 lecture on *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* (Figure 1) and a page from my lesson plan for a section meeting that covered the Wife (Figure 2). Desire, pleasure, and enjoyment are key categories in these notes from my Fradenburg pedagogy archive. Could you speak a bit about how you translated psychoanalysis to the medieval undergraduate classroom, both as a way of doing literary criticism and, perhaps, as a model for the instructor-student dynamic?

A.F.J.: Of course, psychoanalysis is not an appropriate model for one's relationship to one's students. Psychoanalysis is very clear about this. The psychoanalytic office has to be a liminal space. I loved this idea of liminality when I was teaching the *Canterbury Tales*. And it is in my profession now as a psychoanalyst. But I never thought that I was psychoanalyzing my students or anything like that. I don't like it when psychoanalysts carry those things out into the world. But as an orientation, that way of thinking was very important in terms of how I tried to interest students in these older texts that they may not have an easy time finding their way to, as funny and brilliant and sad as they are. And that was exactly the point to me. These texts are talking about joy and suffering and lived experience.

What does it mean to live, and in the company of others? What are other people for? How do they change and inspire us? Chaucer embodies the spirit of all those questions in medieval English literature. He was brilliant at using types of characters that have conventional treatments elsewhere (I'm not sure that I really like that term, "conventional," but I mean to indicate when a writer brings out something stark about an aspect of human feeling or the human condition). And Chaucer wanted something different than his peers did from that starkness and that kind of trenchancy. The question of using psychoanalysis or theory broadly in the classroom was, for me, all about how to elicit student interest.

And, while my mind has always been more connective than disconnective, I've tried to assist students in holding a doubleness that informs their contemporary moment and the past (for example, "These are versions of things that worry you, but they are also different"). It's not that easy to do. I don't think gender issues in the Middle Ages were the same as they are now, but they are also deeply connected. I don't see why those two things can't be true at the same time, but for so many people they can't.

K.L.: As my section preparation notes stress, binary oppositions—such as salvific vs. lethal, sacred vs. profane—were key to the approach to Chaucer you adopted for that undergraduate course during the 90s. What thinkers and pedagogic aims motivated that emphasis?

A.F.J.: With respect to the binary oppositions, it was about clarity being a basis for fluffing things up and making things messy. If I gave students five or six terms to be thinking about during the course of the term, they would have this formation and feel safer going "well but this is kind of lethal too, even though it looks like it's life-giving," and thus start to move more nimbly. It's basically soft deconstruction, and I always found that it worked well with students.

K.L.: Looking back, it seems that you were quietly and unofficially nudging the students toward dialectical thinking without saying "I'm going to show you how to think dialectically," or "I'm going to explain to you what structuralism is, and how language and literature work." I've known other teachers who assign theory to undergraduate students along with their primary readings. But, at least in the lecture courses where I served as your teaching assistant, I never saw you do that. Instead, theory discretely entered the classroom.

A.F.J.: By the way, I did keep using Miller's *Sources and Backgrounds* until the Internet really turned out to be so much easier a way to post those kinds of materials (1977). But, yes, like oppositions, sources were a great way for students to compare and get at meanings through that kind of work.

K.L.: And now there are editions of the *Canterbury Tales* that have those source contexts.

A.F.J.: The *Norton Canterbury Tales* is great, edited by my friends Del Kolve and Glending Olson (2018).

K.L.: In their 2021 volume *The Teaching Archive*, Rachel Sagner Buurma and Laura Heffernan identify the classroom as a key site for a teacher's scholarly development. Have there been ways in which your research has been shaped by your undergraduate and graduate teaching, whether at Santa Barbara, Dartmouth or elsewhere?

A.F.J.: Getting to teach the *Canterbury Tales* has been one of the best experiences of my life. It sounds kind of ridiculous to put it that way. The infinite jest. I truly don't idealize him, too, too much. But it's true that if I could spend a half an hour with anyone in history it would be with him. That's how much of a Chaucerian I still am. I know and I sympathize with the critique he's gotten. He's so canonical, he's gotten so much attention at the expense of so many other interesting and important medieval things, he may in fact have done some dreadful things himself. Thinking about living is still what I do psychoanalytically. I work on biophilia, on "forms of vitality" and so forth within psychoanalysis (Stern 2010).

I ask to what extent does psychoanalysis take the human organism as its companion, interlocutor, and object of knowledge. What are the limits of that and what are the things that open up for us when we really see our patients that way? And Chaucer totally brought me to that. Chaucer is so aware, in those portraits, of all of those facets. And when he leaves something out it's fascinating. Why *doesn't* the knight have a body? Except dust and, you know, right, he's got some stuff. But on the other hand, he doesn't have any warts on his nose, so…I think he was a certain version of the holistic thinker in his time. By holistic I don't mean anything too woo-woo, but rather the scientific sense of being fascinated by connectivity and multiplicity. Rather than agonizing and trying to look at one very tiny piece, it's believing that you can't talk about the tiny pieces without talking about the environments that they are in, and so forth. That has continued to be a really important part of what I am interested in intellectually, and I can definitely trace that back to Chaucer.

I learned a lot while I was giving lectures and teaching classes. I always got ideas and those ideas often became part of my writing. I still remember one smaller, thirty-five-person, Chaucer class, when we were talking about *The Wife of Bath*, one of my students said, "well you know, every woman wants to think that she can change her man." Yes, there's the hetero nature of that statement, and the assumption that these tropes speak to everyday realities. But nonetheless, it was just like something falling into a slot, or like the penny dropping. It put me a psychoanalytic question about what is the desire to change the other, what is the desire to transform or be transformed by the other?

K.L.: Did that student make that comment prior to your work on "The Wife of Bath's Passing Fancy?"

A.F.J.: No, it wasn't prior to it. It's just that I had never thought about it in that way, in terms of the desire to transform. Christopher Bollas has some wonderful writing about what he calls the transformational object that is kind of heir to Winnicott's transitional object and a few other types of trans objects that have come along since then (1987). So, it just launched a whole new train of thought for me. It was such an apparently basic thing to say, but it was brilliant. I have never been that great a reader of romances. It's not my guilty genre.

My sister reads them all the time. I do remember *Heartthrob* and *Secret Romance*, all those kinds of comic books from when I was a little girl. So, it was a student who herself had been steeped in that kind of common wisdom, if you will, about men and women and love. But her remark was just somehow numinous enough in its simplicity to raise a whole new set of questions for me. Don't you love it when the obvious turns into something mysterious and worth thinking about? That's kind of a big part of pedagogy, I think, because the temptation of our culture is to take everything as so self-evident and to think that it's so obvious why people are like this or like that. And, because it isn't at all obvious, I wanted my students to feel like they were interesting, that their lives were interesting, that their thoughts could be interesting, and that they could be interested.

Aranye's investment in attuning undergraduates to their ability to "be interesting" and "be interested" in Chaucer emerges in the notes that follow, which were taken during one of Aranye's initial discussions of *The Wife of Bath*'s performance for her undergraduate lecture course on *The Canterbury Tales*. I hope these notes indicate Aranye's expertise in conveying a wealth of information to her students in a manner that was accessible yet never oversimplified. In particular, the language she employed silently signaled her respect for her young auditors as budding theorists who could take seriously and weigh in on the meaning of Chaucer's text and its engagement with received medieval Christian ideas of gender and social hierarchy. Turns of phrase such as "idealizations of the powerful" (Figure 3) or "reason capitulating to sensuality" (Figure 2) made Aranye's classroom akin to the workspaces of the hit 2000s television program *Project Runway*, where the sophisticated vocabulary deployed by mentor Tim Gunn enabled contestants to take seriously the aims, methods, and practice of clothing design.

Crucial to Aranye's lectures was not only the elevated style of her language but also the sophisticated dialectical mentality that she modeled for students. The lecture began, for example, by encouraging students to consider how the Wife engages with medieval ideas about both the spaces

that are proper to women and the proper spatiality of the female body. Here, as always, Aranye knitted into her discussion of Chaucer's text citations of relevant readings from Miller's *Sources and Backgrounds* (abbreviated SB in my notes), specifically Ecclesiasticus on the Good Woman.

In addition, the notes exemplify Aranye's characteristic interest in using binary oppositions as a way of assessing Chaucer's achievement in the *Canterbury Tales*. At the start of the course, Aranye provided students with a handout that contained a series of dualisms to consider while reading Chaucer's poem (for example, insider versus outsider, or salvific versus lethal) and encouraged students to generate their own binary oppositions while reading. In the case of *The Wife of Bath*, Aranye highlighted how ideas of private vs. public, open vs. enclosed, chaste vs. promiscuous, and vocal vs. silent supported received ideas of the "good" woman. Along the way, Aranye noted how Alison seems interested in defying such notions about proper femininity and in transforming the binaries that ostensibly define her. Ultimately, Aranye asked her students a version of the question that poststructuralist-psychoanalytic critic Joel Fineman had posed over a decade earlier (1980), and that she and other Chaucerian feminists like Susan Crane had wrestled with more recently in a gendered register (Fradenburg 1986; Crane 1987): is the Wife always contained by the terms of patriarchal Christian discourse? Or does Alison at times seem to reject that discourse and its binarisms altogether and seek out a new mode of crafting her identity and social relations (Figure 2)? Importantly, Aranye doesn't answer those questions but rather uses them to initiate thinking about Chaucer's text on the part of students. In other words, Aranye's pedagogy involved sharing with students not settled knowledges and conclusions but equipment for explorations and assessments. Aranye's undergraduate lectures, like her graduate pedagogy, were less about showcasing her brilliance—though they, inevitably, did—than about empowering students as young Chaucerians worthy of joining ongoing and important critical debates.

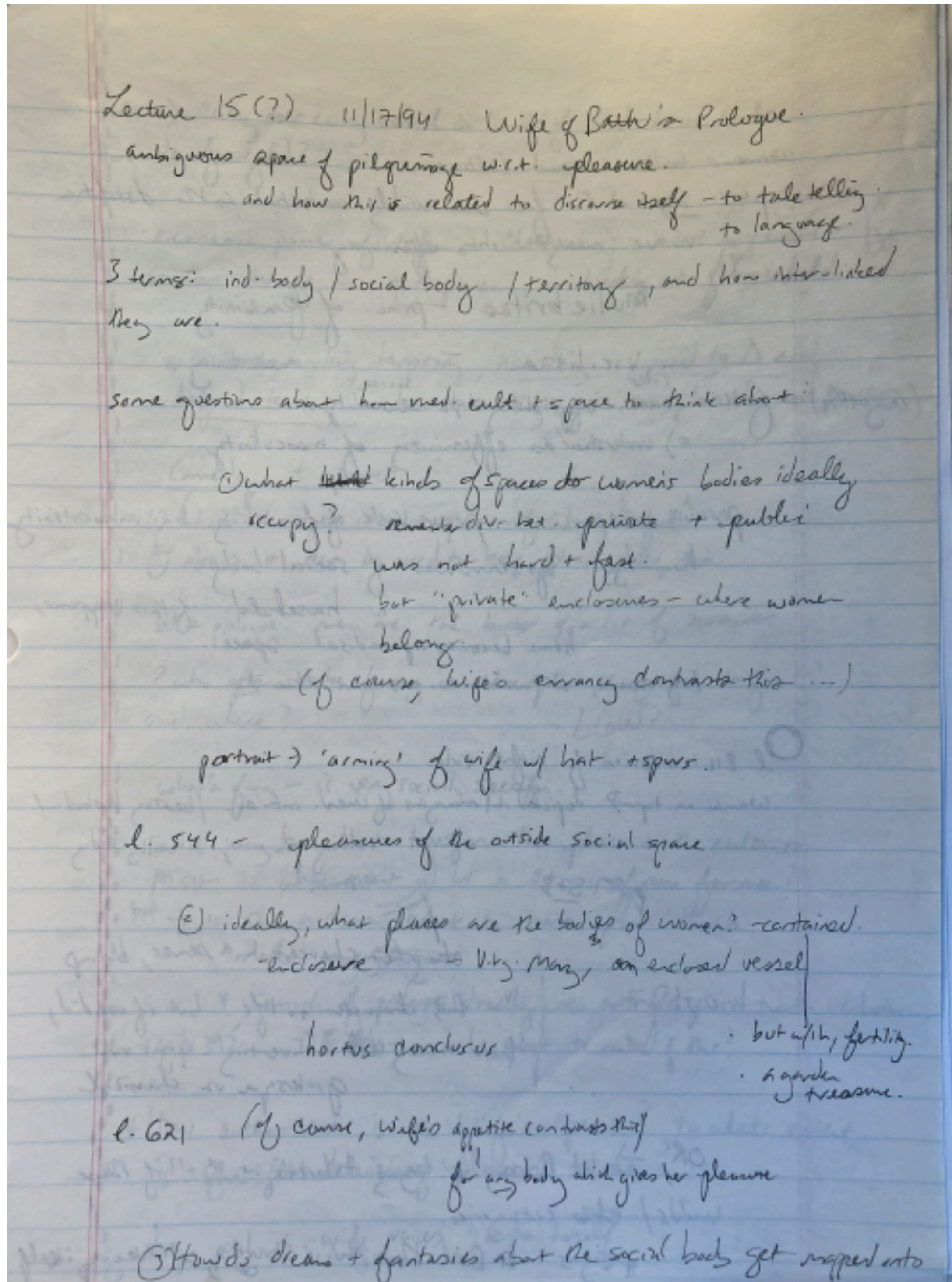
Lecture 15 (?) 11/17/94 Wife of Bath's Prologue.
ambiguous space of pilgrimage w.r.t. pleasure.
and how this is related to discourse itself – to tale telling.
to language.
3 terms: ind. body / social body / territory, and how inter-linked they are.
some questions about how med. cult + space to think about:
① what kinds of spaces do women's bodies ideally occupy? div. bet. private + public
was not hard + fast.
but "private" enclosures – where women belong.
(of course, Wife's errancy contrasts this ...)
portrait → 'arming' of wife w/ hat + spurs.
l. 544 – pleasures of the outside social space
② ideally, what places are the bodies of women? contained.
enclosure – V.g. Mary, an enclosed vessel
hortus conclusus
· but w/ its fertility.
· a garden treasure.
l. 621 (of course, Wife's appetite contrasts this)
for any body which gives her pleasure
③ How do dreams + fantasies about the social body get mapped onto

Figure 1. *Lavezzo's notes on Fradenburg Joy's November 1994 lecture on* The Wife of Bath's Prologue.

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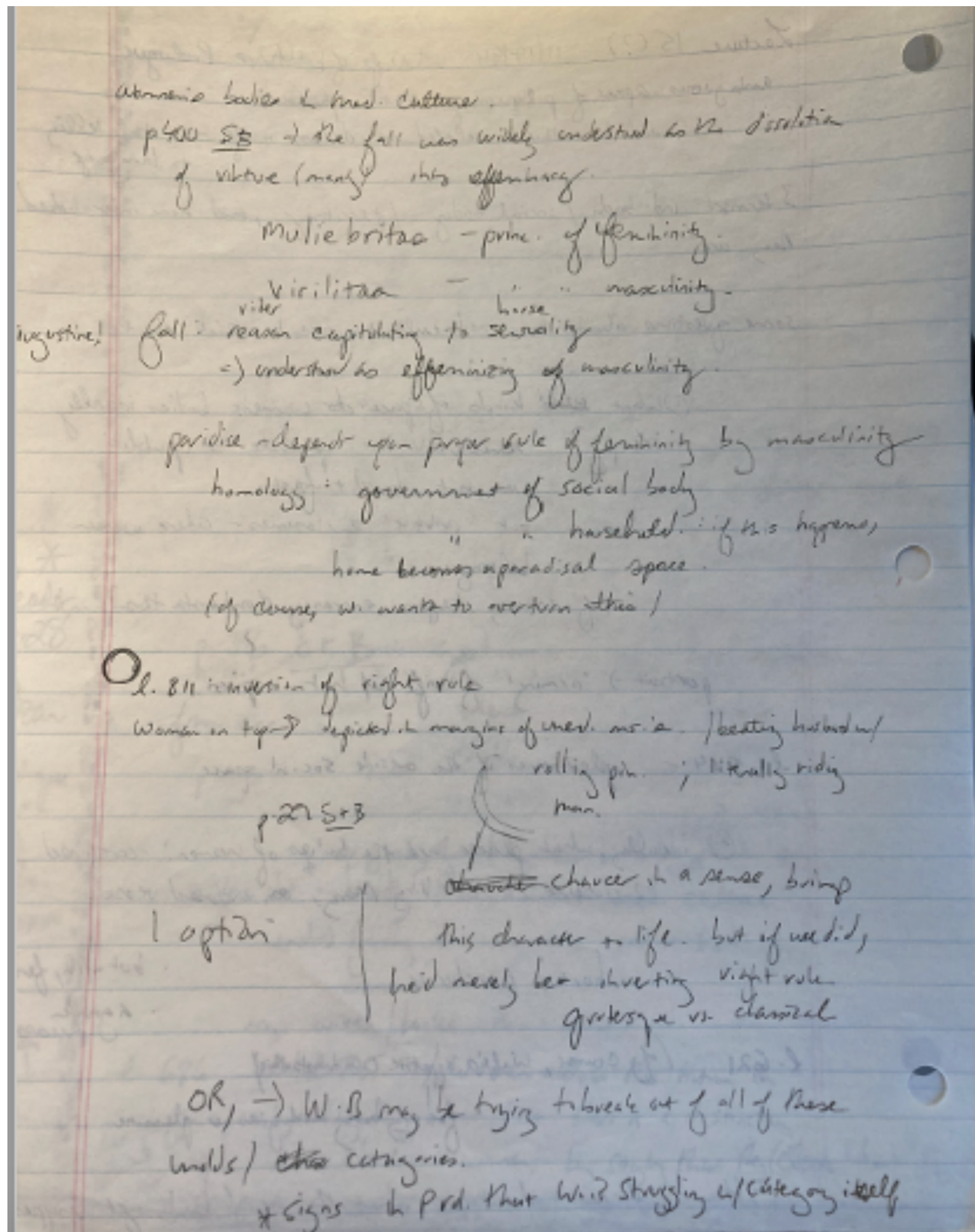
abnormis bodies & med. culture.
p400 SB → the fall was widely understood as the dissolution of virtue (manly) thus effeminacy.
muliebritas – princ. of femininity.
virilitas – " " masculinity.
vir horse
Augustine! fall: reason capitulating to sexuality
=) understood as effeminizing of masculinity.
paradise – depends upon proper rule of femininity by masculinity
homology: government of social body
" " household: if this happens,
home becomes aparadisal space.
(of course, W. wants to overturn this)
l. 811 inversion of right rule
Woman on top → depicted in margins of med. ms's. / beating husband w/ rolling pin. ; literally riding man.
p.221 S+B
Chaucer in a sense, brings this character to life. but if we did, he'd merely be inverting right rule
grotesque vs. classical
1 option
OR, → W.B may be trying to break out of all of these molds / categories.
* signs in Prol. that W.? struggling w/ category itself

Figure 2. *A page from Lavezzo's notes for a section meeting on the Wife of Bath.*

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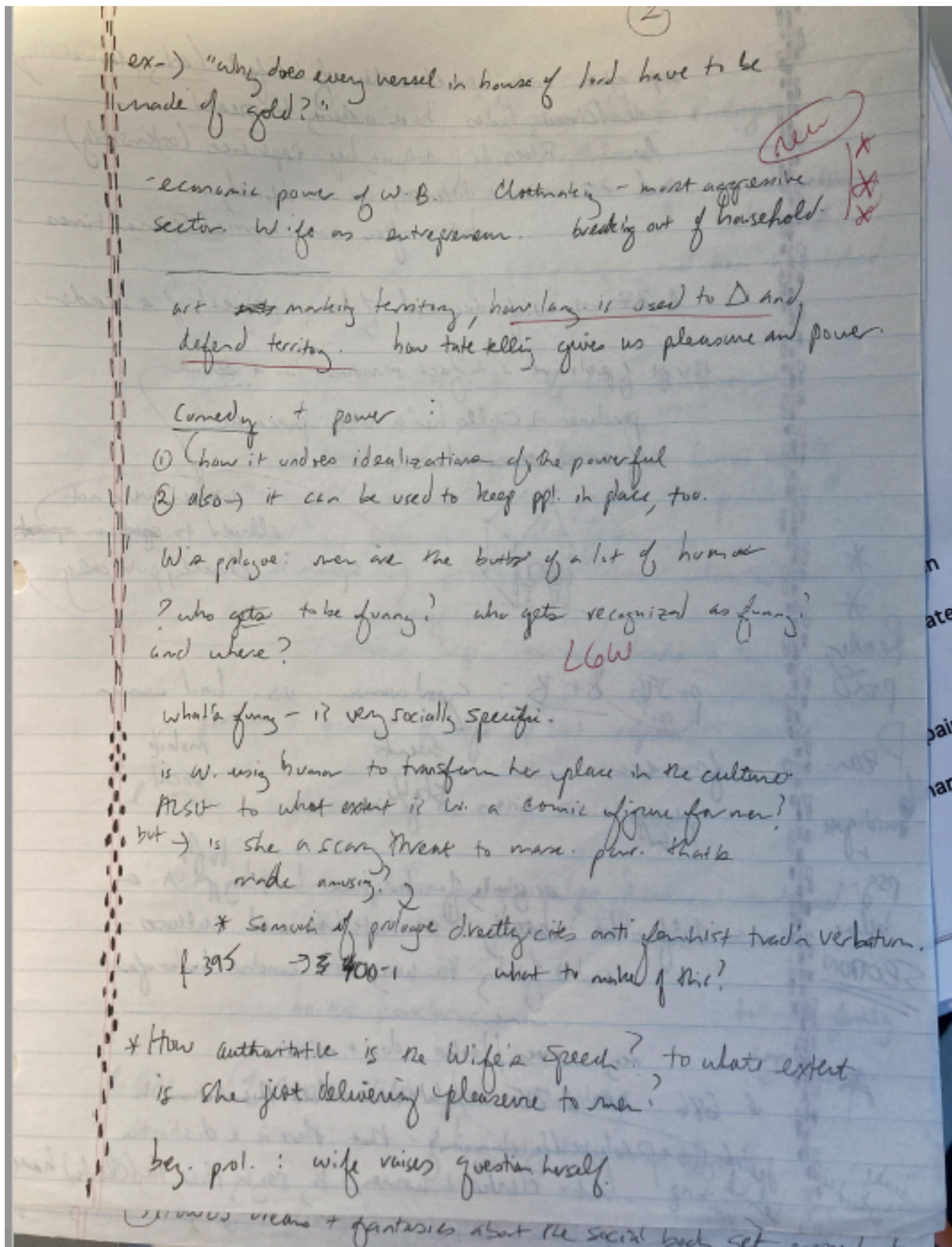
ex-) "why does every vessel in house of lord have to be made of gold?"

new

-economic power of W.B. Clothmaking – most aggressive sector. Wife as entrepreneur. breaking out of household

art ~~[illegible]~~ marking territory, how lang. is used to Δ and defend territory. how tale telling gives us pleasure and power

Comedy + power:
① how it undoes idealizations of the powerful
② also → it can be used to keep ppl. in place, too.

W's prologue: men are the butts of a lot of humor

? who gets to be funny? who gets recognized as funny? and where?

LGW

what's funny – is very socially specific.
is W. using humor to transform her place in the culture
ALSO to what extent is W. a comic figure for men?
but → is she a scary threat to masc. pwr. that's made amusing?
* Some of prologue directly cites anti feminist trad'n verbatim.
l. 395 → 400-1 what to make of this?

* How authoritative is the Wife's speech? to what extent is she just delivering pleasure to men?

beg. prol.: wife raises question herself

[illegible] dreams + fantasies about the social body set [illegible]

Figure 3. *Lavezzo's notes on Fradenburg Joy's lectures on the Wife of Bath.*

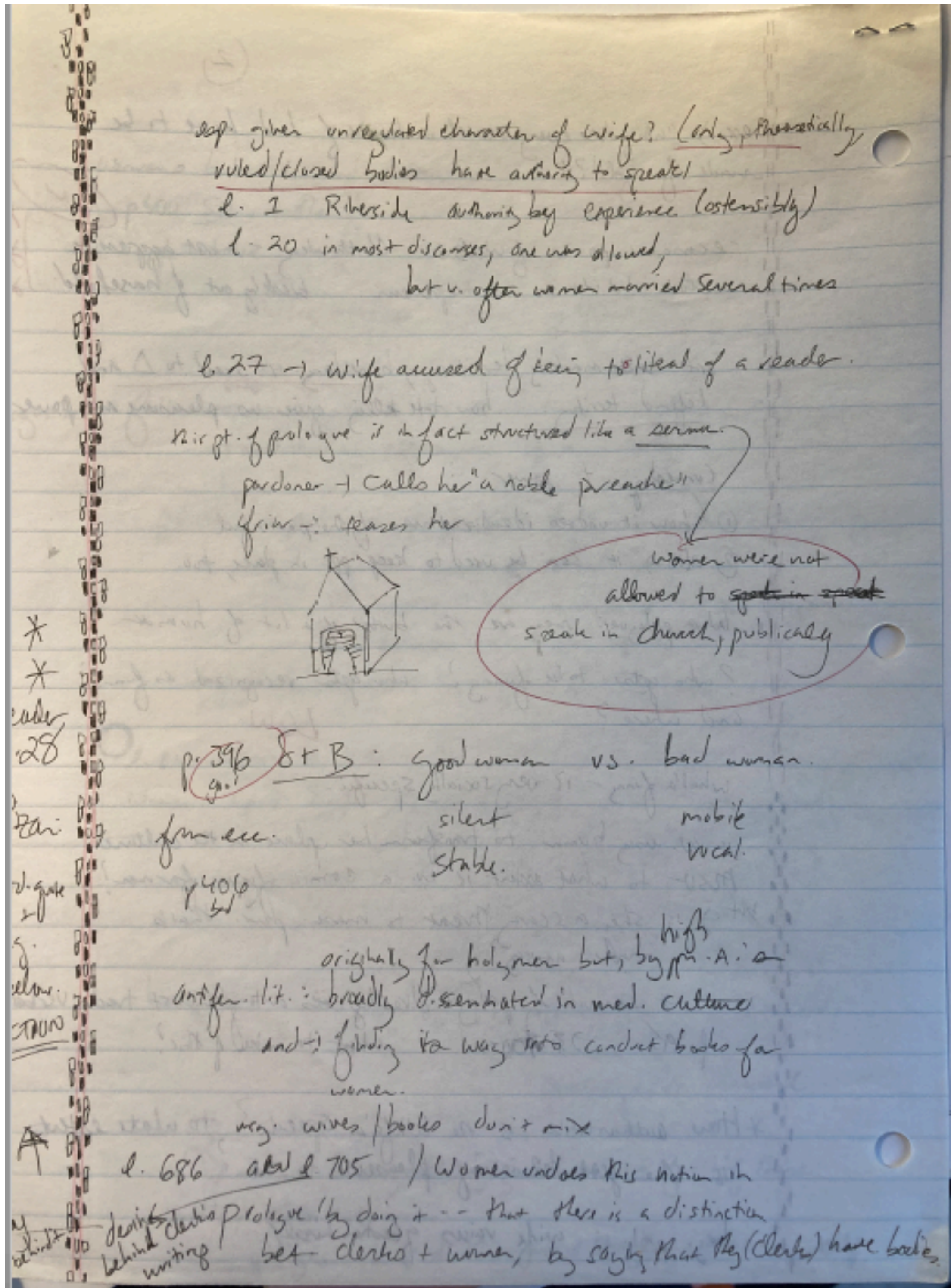
esp. given unregulated character of wife? (only, theoretically, ruled/closed bodies have authority to speak)
l. 1 Riverside authority by experience (ostensibly)
l. 20 in most discourses, one was allowed,
but v. often women married several times
l. 27 → wife accused of being too literal of a reader.
1st pt. of prologue is in fact structured like a sermon.
pardoner → calls her "a noble preacher"
friar → teases her
women were not allowed to ~~speak in speak~~
speak in church, publicly
p. 396 G + B: good women vs. bad women.
fr. ecc.
silent
stable.
mobile
vocal.
p. 406 bad
originally for holymen but, by high M.A.
antifem. lit.: broadly disseminated in med. culture
and → finding its way into conduct books for women.
e.g. wives / books don't mix
l. 686 and l. 705 / Women undoes this notion in
prologue by doing it -- that there is a distinction
bet. clerks + women, by saying that they (clerks) have bodies
denies clerks behind writing

Figure 4. *Lavezzo's notes on Fradenburg Joy's lectures on the Wife of Bath.*

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