hardly a surprise: parallelism of this sort is among the most characteristic features of Middle English alliterative verse.

Each of the major syntactical and lexical requirements of the Chambers construal of lines 101–2, then, is very difficult taken on its own, and all the more so when combined with the others. Yet we have access to a straightforward reading that adheres nicely to the conventions of Middle English alliterative poetry – one that happens, it seems, to violate many readers' preconceived notions of what But could be saying. It is difficult to grant that this simple meaning – Will wrote works other than *Piers Plowman* – would have so thoroughly disappeared had not Henry Bradley seen an opportunity to contribute to a then-exciting and new conversation about the authorship of this poem. Easier to understand is the way in which Chambers's construal has come to seem 'natural' to readers today, just as the interpretation of 'þat here is wryten' as Dowel and the 'oþer werkes' as the two parts of the *Visio* did to Bradley. Habit and the lack of any new entrants to the Langland œuvre have reinforced the mistaken sense that these lines were telling us what we already knew.

There is no point, however, in now treating lines A XII 101–2 as testimony to an external truth about Langland's career. If we wish to speculate about such a possibility, we do not need support from But; and conversely, if such writings were to be identified there could be no way of knowing whether they were what Will's commemorator had in mind anyway, even if we assume he had such knowledge. John But, as others have well shown,[30] is interesting not so much for whatever his words might point to as for what he does and says, in their own right, and for what these writings and actions might indicate about the earliest audience of the poem. His 'Wille' is identical to our 'William Langland' insofar as he wrought this work we call *Piers Plowman*; but he is nothing like our single-minded figure, entirely committed to that work, and entirely constituted by it.[31]

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[30] See especially the important essays by Middleton and Scase, though the former's relies to a great degree on the assumption that But equated the life of Langland with the 'works' of *Piers Plowman* only. See n. 8 above.

[31] I thank Tom Burton, Andrew Cole, Andrew Galloway, Scott Lightsey, and George Russell for helpful advice on this essay.

AVALANCHE: ANTEDATING THE ENTRY IN *THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY*

OED states the first record of the word *avalanche*, meaning 'A large mass of snow, mixed with earth and ice, loosened from a mountain side, and descending swiftly into the valley below' as 1765, appearing in its Italian form *valanca*:

> [1765 *Nat. Hist.* In *Ann. Reg.* 86/1] The Clergyman . . . percieving a noise towards the top of the mountains, looked up, and descried two valancas driving headlong towards the village.[1]

The word appears, however, nearly two decades earlier in an English translation of Swiss mountaineer and geologist Peter Martel's study of glacial action in the Alps: '. . . a violent wind brought down a most terrible *Avalanche*'.[2] Martel was the first to note that observation of rock materials on or within the ice demonstrated the ability of glaciers to move very slowly over time.

Moreover, Martel's use of the word *avalanche* was put to poetic use and acknowledged some two years before the *OED*'s reference in George Keate's poem *The Alps*.[3]

[1] *OED*, *avalanche*, 1.
[2] Peter Martel, *An Account of the Glaciers or Ice Alps in Savoy* (London: Peter Martel, 1744), 7.
[3] George Keate, *The Alps* (London: R&J Bailey, 1763).

In the midst of the poem, a mountaineer experiences one of these events:

> The snowy Piles o'erwhelm him; frequent now, (332)
> At dead of Night, remote their sullen sound
> Strikes on the startled ear . . .

Keate appends a footnote to line 332, providing some technical detail:

> This ball or mass of Snow is called the *Avalanche*; it is frequently of a prodigious size, and rolls from the *Alps* in particular seasons, rendering the passages very dangerous. Historians who have written of these countries, mention innumerable instances of the ravages and mischiefs produced by it.[4]

Acknowledging one of the 'Historians' he refers to, Keate then briefly cites Martel's *Account* of 1744.

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[4] Keate, *Alps*, 20.

EMMA, HARRIET MARTIN, AND PARLOUR BOARDERS

In the third chapter of *Emma*, Harriet Smith is introduced as 'the natural daughter of somebody': 'Somebody had placed her, several years back, at Mrs. Goddard's school, and somebody had lately raised her from the condition of scholar to that of parlour-boarder.' Modern editors of *Emma* have been content to repeat or to paraphrase the *OED* definition of the term, parlour boarder: 'a boarding-school pupil who lives in the family of the principal and has other privileges not shared by the ordinary boarders'.[1] A survey of advertisements appearing in *The Times* shows that this is certainly one of the senses that the phrase may bear. A notice in *The Times* for 8 September 1786, for example, for a boys' school in Buckinghamshire (for the term parlour boarder, though it is much more often used of young women, may apply to either sex), gives the fees as twelve guineas a year, fifteen 'if taught Latin, Greek, French, and the various Branches in the Mathematics', and twenty-five guineas for parlour boarders. One advantage enjoyed by parlour boarders is their sleeping accommodation. In this case, each parlour boarder 'sleeps apart; and the rest Two in a Bed'. Similarly an advertisement of 14 September 1807 promises that young ladies will be 'accommodated with separate beds, in airy rooms' and adds that in this respect they will be 'considered and treated as parlour boarders'. A notice of 20 June 1815 that advertises a vacancy for one parlour boarder 'or two sisters' also points to sleeping arrangements, for sisters might be expected to share a room, and even, as in the case of Jane Austen and Cassandra, a bed. Martha Sherwood, on the other hand, then Martha Butt, who was a parlour boarder at the Abbey House school in Reading that Jane Austen briefly attended, despite her status shared a dormitory with five other girls.[2] More usually, a parlour boarder might expect a room of her own, so that on 29 October 1814 a vacancy for a parlour boarder is advertised, 'terms low, provided she would not object to a bed in a room with another lady'. An additional inducement in this case is that the young lady would 'have the use of a piano-forte'. So, on becoming a parlour boarder Harriet might be expected to be given her own room at Mrs Goddard's school, or, at the very worst, to share a room with Miss Bickerton who enjoys a similar status at the school.

She would also, as the term itself implies, enjoy the privilege of sharing a parlour with Mrs Goddard and her assistant teachers rather than spending her evenings in the schoolroom

[1] For example, Stephen Parrish (New York and London: Norton, 1972); Alistair Duckworth (Bedford and Boston: St Martin's, 2002); Adela Pinch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, World's Classics, 2003).

[2] *The Life and Times of Mrs Sherwood*, ed. F. J. Harvey Darton (London: Wells Gardner, Darton, 1910), 124–5. She later moved to a room that she shared with only two other pupils.