

STUDIES**“From Geographic Night”: Reading
the Cartographic in Adam Hood
Burwell’s *Talbot Road*****by Sarah R. W. Krotz**

At the heart of topographical poetry¹ lies a concern with geography that, it has been suggested, connects the genre with its “parallel art”: cartography (Bentley, *Mimic* 30). Perhaps nowhere in Canadian poetry is this parallel more clear or relevant than in Adam Hood Burwell’s *Talbot Road* (1818). This is a topographical poem that, to borrow one of Burwell’s own metaphors, celebrates the bringing “to light” from “geographic night” of the famous Talbot settlement along the north shore of Lake Erie in what is now Southwestern Ontario (94, 93).² As D.M.R. Bentley has argued, “the ‘numbers,’ symmetries, and topographical focus of *Talbot Road* make it the literary equivalent of a map of the Talbot Settlement or, moving closer to home, one of [his brother] Mahlon Burwell’s surveys of the Talbot Road” (Introduction xxxvi). It would indeed seem that, in addition to the aesthetic traditions of the picturesque and the sublime, Burwell drew from the conventions and concerns of mapping in the production of his textual landscapes. In fact, the poet invites a reading of the poem as if it were itself a map, indicating in the “Argument” that he will provide “a connected survey of Talbot Road, from its eastern to its western extremities.” This paper probes the implications of such a reading, considering *Talbot Road* as a poetic articulation of a cartographic impulse to define and orient oneself in space. Not only does the poem generate its own particular mapping of the region, it also concerns itself with various ways in which forms of surveying, both official and unofficial, take place—and, most importantly, create a sense of place—in the settler landscape. In the process of conjuring not one, but several overlapping surveys of the region, the poem foregrounds the creative power of the cartographic imagination, memorializing not *what the settlement actually was* so much as *how it came to be* in the minds of those who built it. The result is a text that not only guides readers

through the territory, but also constructs that territory in ways that are crucial to the poem's significance as a colonial artifact.

Talbot Road takes as its subject a region that, at the time of the poem's composition, was in the midst of being surveyed and settled. Colonel Thomas Talbot, whom the poem commemorates, was "one of the most outstanding colonizers of British North America"—he initiated and facilitated an impressive surge in emigration to Upper Canada, thus ending a period of decline in Canada's settlement history (Thomson 236). While Burwell dedicates the poem to Talbot, however, his heroic portrait remains only indistinctly sketched, with the land, the road, and the developing settlement taking precedence in the poet's attentions over individual men. Nonetheless, in its imaginative evocations of surveying and mapping, *Talbot Road* also implicitly commemorates the poet's elder brother, Mahlon Burwell, whose name "will always remain closely linked" with Talbot's (Thomson 239).³ As the Colonel's land surveyor in chief, Mahlon Burwell "was instructed to lay out the Talbot Road (or Street), an important element in Talbot's strategy for developing his lands and settlement schemes" (236).⁴ The narrative of *Talbot Road* all but fuses the lives of the two figures, resonating as much with the course of Mahlon Burwell's life as it does with Colonel Talbot's. The surveyor's role in opening the land for settlers, the interruption of the survey by the War of 1812, and the surveyor's return to the settlement to watch it grow and prosper are landmarks both in the poem and in the life of Mahlon Burwell (232).

Moreover, to read this poem closely is to feel, in the background of the poet's topographical descriptions, the presence of Mahlon's surveys of the region. As if taking formal cues from these cartographic projects, the broad scope and spare order of Burwell's visual and spatial imagery lend the poem a distinctly cartographic aesthetic. If its attention to the area's unique character is perhaps regrettably sketchy,⁵ *Talbot Road* is nonetheless specific in ways that suggest not a poet's, but, rather, a mapmaker's eye for detail. Lists of place-names and geographical features, organized along the cardinal lines of two-dimensional space, abstract living landscapes into aerial views and geometrical plans. The image of "The Talbot Road unbroken and complete" that the reader is thus urged to "see, as on a single sheet" toward the end of the poem is just one of a number of poetic maps that emerge from its lines (485-86). Moving between glimpses of the region's past, present, and future geographies, *Talbot Road* surveys and re-surveys the changing features of the settler landscape, emphasizing as it does so the map-maker's role in the creation of colonial space.

The extent and implications of this aesthetic strategy are far-reaching. The interplay of real and imaginary topographies that gives the poem its unique texture showcases the creative power of maps. This power, as many have noted, is political as well as aesthetic. In the words of John Pickles, “maps provide the very conditions of possibility for the worlds we inhabit and the subjects we become” (4-5). Turning to the colonial context, J.B. Harley points out that over the course of western history, maps have served as

dictators of a new agrarian topography [that] introduced a dimension of ‘space discipline’;...in the ‘wilderness’ of former Indian lands in North America, boundary lines on the map were a medium of appropriation.... Maps entered the law, were attached to ordinances, acquired an aureole of science, and helped create an ethic and virtue of ever more precise definition. (285)

A cartographic aesthetic might be seen as serving the needs and desires of colonialists in several ways in *Talbot Road*. Encompassing a wide expanse of land and laying claim to extensive knowledge of the terrain, Burwell’s cartographic description fosters feelings of familiarity with what might otherwise have seemed a terrifyingly vast and alien country. Favoring a God’s-eye view, his cartographic gaze⁶ reinforces the human observer’s sense of mastery over the territory. Telescoping expansive surveys to fit the compact frame of the poem, his cartographic aesthetic mimics the map’s efforts to render land in “a miniature and thus accessible form” (Lee 145), thereby reducing immense tracts of territory to an apparently manageable size. Finally, representing unmapped land as vacant and/or wild, *Talbot Road* marks areas as available for colonization, in effect inviting settlers to invade, inhabit, and cultivate them. Like the maps that linger behind some of its most arresting images, Burwell’s poem—to borrow the words of Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin—“textualiz[es]” the expansive area of the Talbot Settlement “in a symbolic and literal act of mastery and control” (30-32). Alongside imperial cartographers, who performed an “allegorization of space,” their maps “embodying as geographical fact European attitudes about the nature of the world” (33), Burwell set out to represent Canadian land neither neutrally nor mimetically, but, rather, in ways that polemically “embody as geographical fact” the values and aspirations of colonial and imperial Britain. In the process, *Talbot Road* both highlights the power of mapping in the colonial acquisition and development of land and, by implication, foregrounds literature’s role in creating and sustaining territorial imperatives as well.

The most obviously central figure and unifying principle of Burwell's poem is not, of course, a map, but a road. Yet the road is itself a richly suggestive subject that relates both materially and conceptually to the motif and perspective of the survey. Pickles reminds us that the "practices and technologies of vision" upon which modern mapping are based "depended on being able to range far and wide across space" (81); and as Michael Williams has pointed out, "[t]he interior of the [Talbot] settlement could only be opened up if a road was built which would connect the settlers with each other and the rest of the country" (34). As the "injectors through which the seeds of ecological transformation entered pristine Upper Canada," roads became primary instruments of the settler landscape (Wood 120). The prominent place that Burwell gives to the road (as well as to the natural "highways" of rivers and streams) registers his concern with the figures, designs and infrastructures that facilitated settlement and helped to transform the Talbot tract from wilderness into agrarian land. With its many intersections, the Talbot Road becomes a symbol not so much of mobility as of accessibility, the settlement emerging as a network of destinations inviting readers *in* rather than *through*. The pattern of orthogonal lines that the road generates underscores the mapping over of "a wilderness, scarcely known" (114) with a neat grid of towns and farms, the symmetry of which spatially manifest the virtues of "greatness," "reason," and "order" that the poem ultimately celebrates (548-63). Because the particular character of the settlement sustains less attention than does the question of how it got there and how it will continue to grow and change, the road serves both as an indicator and an instrument of the territory's (re)inscription.

In particular, *Talbot Road* foregrounds the surveyor as the creative agent of this transformation. Near the beginning of the poem, the poet accordingly asks, not who built the Talbot Road, but "what master hand / This work *projected*, and its order *plann'd*?" (11-12, my emphasis). Burwell's primary interest—and the foremost element of his poem's "noble... theme" (5)—is not the actual construction of the settlement and its network of roads (although he devotes considerable attention to the clearing of land), but their *imaginative* conception. Having "canvass'd" the land, "its importance weigh'd / And, in his mind, its future state survey'd" (95-96), Talbot is celebrated as the progenitor of a newly habitable region, his map a mental construct reflecting the surveyor's prophetic designs. Throughout the poem, Burwell's emphasis on the future—an emphasis that becomes especially prominent in his "Apostrophe to Hope and Anticipation"—highlights the power of mental maps in charting the way for territorial development. Lending credence to the now ubiquitous idea that "[m]aps

and mappings precede the territory they ‘represent’” (Pickles 5),⁷ Burwell underscores that before it was ever a real place the Talbot Settlement was a “Great scheme” that “spontaneous flow’d” from Talbot’s “mind” (24).

This imaginative and prophetic power is not given to Colonel Talbot alone; the paradigmatic Talbot settler also forms mental maps of what his land will look like in the future: formulating “[n]ew schemes for future happiness,” he “dwells” on “each prospect,”

And portions out, for the ensuing year,
A barn to build, or some new land to clear;
Or plants an orchard on the sunny hills,
And with judicious hand a garden fills;
Rich waving harvests reaps from off the fields,
And all the golden treasures Ceres yields.

(301-308)

The settler’s visions do not reflect the present state of his land; they are, rather, a series of imagined future “schemes,” superimposed upon the present-day “cabin rude, of humblest form” (227) and the surrounding “dubious maze” (287) of “tow’ring pines” (212), much as a township plan would lay its designs over the wilderness.⁸ Far more than merely idle distractions, such schemes, like Talbot’s, provide and maintain the impetus for land-development, and thus literally precede the man-made territory that will, someday, follow. The settler, then, stands alongside the surveyor in Burwell’s poem as a God-like figure who redesigns the world and makes a garden of the wilderness.

If Burwell’s image of Talbot as part God, part Adam forging a new Eden in Upper Canada captures the creative power of the map, it also attempts to legitimize the settler’s presence on the land. Such imagery draws on what J. Edward Chamberlin calls the “myth of entitlement,” or “creation story,” by which settlers claimed an original relation to the land and, by implication, a sense of rightful belonging on, and possession of, it (28). This myth “match[ed] their myth of discovery” (28); once again, *Talbot Road* provides a case in point: Burwell credits Talbot with having “found” a land “Remote from man,” and thus endorses Talbot as the discoverer of an uninhabited region—as the “first who trod this desert ground” (27, 20, 91). In so doing, Burwell erases any trace of aboriginal presence or history in the area, depicting instead a vacant, virgin territory that is, for Talbot and his settlers, an open frontier—quite literally a blank slate. Here the “rudest forms” of nature lie in wait as raw materials from which the colonizer will create “beauty” (13-14). The “wild woods” and

“hoarse and hollow” winds (13, 22) which at first seem to be the only features of this unmapped land, only deepen its apparent loneliness, and help to abstract the terrain from any social or historical significance. Neither the Chippewa lands to the north nor the Six Nations territory that bordered the settlement to the east finds a place in Burwell’s description of the region. Failing also to mention Tecumseh (although he memorializes the “dauntless spirit” of his white ally, General Isaac Brock [374]), Burwell draws on the map’s capacity to “foster the notion of a socially empty space” and thus “lessen...the burden of conscience about people in the landscape” (Harley 303). The erasure of aboriginal peoples and history from the terrain of his poem may well conceal a measure of anxiety about the relationship between colonial and First Nations peoples on the land. Not many years later, Anna Brownell Jameson would designate Tecumseh as the region’s “historical hero,” and acknowledge the presence of aboriginal peoples in the area and their oppressive treatment by colonists (305, 306-12). As a traveler rather than an inhabitant of the land, however, Jameson could arguably represent the fraught demographics of settler territory without having to personally address the consequences. Burwell had no such luxury, and so appears to have avoided the difficulty altogether by creating a poem that unmitigatedly “celebrates possession” on the part of emigrants and their descendants (Fowler 39).

In the interest of inviting emigration, Burwell inscribes the apparently blank space of his “desert” wilderness with images of “a land by nature’s bounty blest” (Burwell 14, 27). Almost immediately, references to “Pure...waters” and “the best” “soil” (28) begin to encode the territory as future farmland. Burwell then proceeds to map its advantages as if to advertise the region as ideally suited to agricultural settlement. Talbot’s territory is vast—“From east to west,” we read, it comprises “full fifty leagues or more” (32)—flanked by two significant waterways: Lake Erie and the Thames (31,33), and “divide[d]” by “some thousand rills” that provide additional possibilities for transportation and commerce (38, 36).⁹ Underscoring its accessibility, the surveyor’s “careless eye” “roves” “[u]ninterrupted” (69) over scenes of apparently inexhaustible beauty and fertility:

Productive nature smiles o’er all this land,
And strews her bounties with a lavish hand,
In wild profusion—soft meand’ring rills,
Deep woods, rich dales, smooth plains, and sunny hills,
Sylvan recesses, dark o’erhanging groves,
Where vocal songsters tune their throats to loves;

Where lurks the fox in crafty, sly career,
And in light gambols bounds the wary deer.
(77-84)

Although still “wild,” this land is “[p]roductive”: its lushness and variety of features make it “invit[ing]” to prospective settlers (86). The proliferation of plurals and superlatives throughout this passage (and in several others like it) suggests almost limitless prospects and advantages for the men and women that Talbot predicts will soon “swarm the ground”¹⁰ and turn it into a “beauteous zone” of farms and townships (105-108). The poem itself begins to partition the land into increasingly navigable “zones” by situating and naming township sites, and beginning to distinguish the “some thousand rills” that “divide” the expansive landscape into “vales,” “banks,” and “margins” (36, 38, 40). Otter, Catfish, and Kettle creeks, for instance, are named,¹¹ their distinctive (if idealized) features described as the poem—in a move that mimics the map’s guiding of prospective settlers into the region—shifts the reader’s attention from general to more specific characteristics of the terrain. The further the poem penetrates the landscape in this way, the clearer its inscription of territorial claims becomes.

As idyllic as his landscape appears in these early descriptions, Burwell wastes no time before proceeding to map its radical transformation under the apparently benevolent influence of colonization. The first ninety lines of the poem—which trace the region’s “general outline before settlement” and thus generate the first layer of Burwell’s poetic map (Argument)—register two contradictory views of pristine nature. On the one hand, the wilderness prior to colonization is appealingly picturesque and fertile; on the other, it is a “desert” space of “rugged wilds” in need of the improving influence of human industry (14, 89). Despite what might be perceived as a nostalgic view of the unpeopled landscape, the poet invites the reader to share Colonel Talbot’s eager anticipation of the moment when “Earth shall resign the burden of her breast, / And wear a richer, variegated vest” (103-104). The comparative effect of this image registers the change that is about to take place as unequivocally felicitous, not just for the settlers, but also for the land itself. What else, after all, could be expected from a “noble” and “philanthropic” plan (16) that is ordained by both God (125-26) and Nature (452)? Here the “protective colours” of religious philanthropy commonly employed by colonialists (J. A. Hobson in Said 12) allow Talbot’s colonial enterprise—the “pierc[ing]” of the woods by Talbot and his “thronging bands of men,” and the reduction of the wilderness, under the settler’s axe, to “a scene of terror” (Burwell 117, 159, 222)—to

be perceived not as a violent invasion, but as a providential mission that absolves the colonizer of any possible guilt.

Burwell deploys other common rhetorical strategies that equally glorify the work of transfiguring the landscape from wilderness to inhabited territory. In addition to the rhetoric of philanthropy,

[u]nderlying the various signs of progress in the settler colony—in demography, social structure, economy, communications, and urban germination—was the rhetoric of struggle with a vigorous, long-standing natural environment. In many ways, this rhetoric was the product of a technologically aggressive, exploitative culture, reaping resources in many parts of the world. It gave voice to the prevailing view that the changes wrought in Ontario between the 1780s and 1853 were the products of an epic victory of human ingenuity and effort over a challenging wilderness. (Wood 8)

Hence Burwell's characterization of the land-clearing work of settlers as "Herculean labors" (Burwell 271). Such rhetoric, as *Talbot Road* demonstrates, was also the product of the commonly held view that wilderness, no matter how dense with life, was merely "neglected...waste" (145) until it could be cleared, inhabited, cultivated, and thus rendered useful to an agrarian society. "[U]ntenanted," declares Talbot to his settlers, productive "nature work[s] in vain" (98, 97). The trope of vacancy combines, here, with the fiction of wasted productivity to justify colonization. Once again, this strategy was not new: "[t]he classification of land as idle—land that is not used for agricultural purposes or owned by someone," Chamberlin reminds us, "has provided the basis for countless colonial adventures in the settlement of aboriginal territory; and it is still invoked to justify the encroachment on so-called wilderness lands" (29).

Burwell's justifications aside, "encroachment" might not be an inappropriate term for the impact of the "swarming settlers" who, "in eager bands, / Sought out, and took, the unlocated lands," ultimately leaving "no vacant ground" (435-42). If the poem's subsequent mapping of farms, roads, and townships onto the landscape shows the literal effects of Talbot's metaphoric reclothing of the landscape from idle waste to productive farmland, it also evidences a swift and aggressive assault on the wilderness. Despite its idealization of the natural world, *Talbot Road* lends support to the claim that during the pioneering period "the general ethos in rural North-America was anti-nature" (Wood 9). The laborious task of clearing forest for farmland fuelled what Catharine Parr Traill described in *The Backwoods of Canada* as a "war" between man and wild nature (162).¹² In *Talbot Road*, that "war"—waged as much against the "hills, and

logs, and brooks” that make “conveyance rough” (165) as it is against the forest—is “charm[ed]” by the “Hope of reward” that allows the settler to transcend his present “drear confines” and dwell instead in his imagined visions of “future happiness” (278, 277, 288, 301). Such visions do not eradicate trees altogether, but, rather, replace wild forest with a domesticated woodland that assumes the forms of the cultivated “orchard,” the “stately row / Of shady trees” that will someday flank the road, and the “arching arbor” and “willow grove” that will inspire future poets and lovers (305, 621-22, 647). The containment and symmetry of these highly regimented, man-made plantations suggests the equivalent in landscaping of Mahlon Burwell’s 1810 map of Delaware (fig. 1), which diagrams the subjection of wild land to artificial designs. Like his brother’s maps, Adam Hood’s poem illustrates the claim that “[a]ll facets of the settlement of early Ontario by Euroamericans were gradually transforming a forested landscape into an open landscape that was regimented by the straight lines and right angles of the geometry imposed by humans” (Wood 12). In addition to the symmetry of planned arbors and orchards, the geometrically exact “cross-way[s]” and “connect[ions]” (Burwell 450, 451) that the Talbot Road lays over the Upper Canadian topography replace the “dubious maze” (287) of a wild, organically variegated forest with a navigable man-made pattern “dropped like a horizontal portcullis on the landscape” (Wood 20).

Further guarding against the potential for chaos that Burwell’s “swarming settlers” introduce into the landscape, *Talbot Road* captures in written form a cartographic vision by which the wilderness was reorganized not only into a neatly readable territory, but also into clearly defined tracts of property. To read this poem is to witness the transformation of a “wilderness, . . . scarcely known” into an “animating scene” of pioneers staking their claims on every navigable tract of land (Burwell 114, 210):

Now, ceaseless, crowd the emigrants along,
And moving families the country throng;
The fertile banks of Otter Creek, some take;
Some Talbot Road, and some prefer the lake;
While others claim’d a midway space between,
And all produced an animating scene.

(205-210)

With each of its tidy quadrants of property inscribed with the name of its resident settler, Mahlon Burwell’s map of Delaware illustrates the “animating” of the land with families much like the ones described here by his poet

brother. Staking their claims on every available piece of ground, the “ceaseless” stream of emigrants that “crowd” the landscape of *Talbot Road* suggests no limits to the settlement’s expansion.¹³ By dividing the settlers into distinct geographical areas, however—here, “The fertile banks of Otter Creek,” “Talbot Road,” “the lake,” and “a midway space between”—the poem neatly arranges and contains the crowd, finding a place for everyone.



Figure 1. Mahlon Burwell’s December 1810 map of Delaware Township. Reproduced with permission from the Archives of Ontario

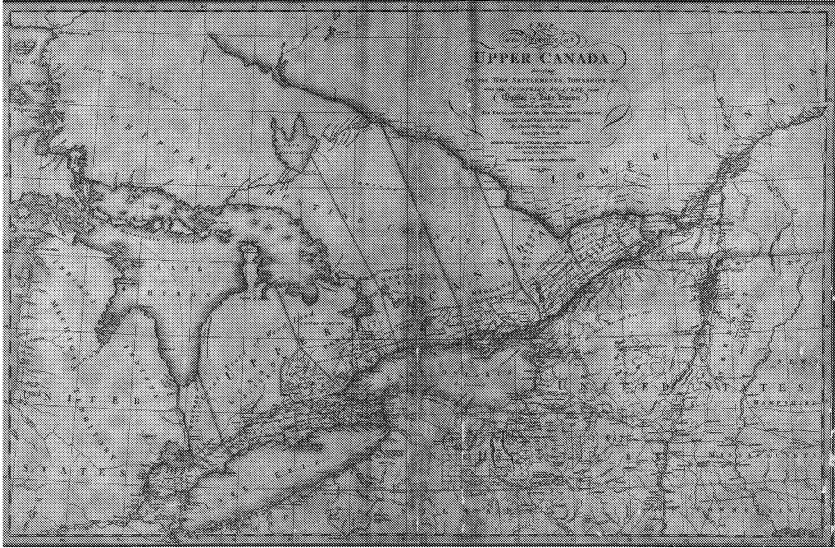


Figure 2. David William Smyth's *Map of the Province of Upper Canada, Describing all the New Settlements, Townships, &c. with the Countries Adjacent, from Quebec to Lake Huron*. 1818. Reproduced with permission from Library and Archives Canada.

The war that the poem wages against chaos of various kinds is both paralleled and interrupted by the War of 1812, an event that stalls the progress of the settlement by turning Talbot's "wood[men]" into "soldier[s]" (395) and exposing the settlement to invasion and devastation (411-18). The interruption is brief, however; its only lasting effect is that post-war devastation spurs each settler to work with renewed vigor and pride to complete Colonel Talbot's designs (429-42). Perhaps surprisingly, given the region's vulnerability during the war, Burwell's representation of the Talbot Settlement bears scant resemblance to one of Northrop Frye's "garrisons." The area's distance from more populous parts of the colony may have been enough to inspire surprise in Cornwall Bayley that "cultivation even travels *there!*" (qtd. in Bentley, Introduction xi), yet the settlement as Burwell portrays it shares few characteristics with those "[s]mall and isolated communities" of which Frye writes that are "surrounded with a physical or psychological 'frontier,' separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources," and "confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting" (227). In its insistence that every remaining piece of ground be surveyed, Burwell's poem downplays this formidable setting by effectively pushing its frontier well

beyond the margins of the textual map.¹⁴ *Talbot Road* ultimately inscribes a uniform and homogeneous territory against which even the wilderness—quite literally pushed off the edge of the map—poses no threat.¹⁵ Moreover, it produces a model of colonial space that is open to the world, not isolated from it. References to shipping on Lake Erie and to a “copious tide of Emigration” that supplies the settlement’s population connect the territory to international markets and places of origin (444, 454). Ignoring the immense natural obstacle of Niagara Falls,¹⁶ and eliding the danger and expense of boat travel on the lake,¹⁷ Burwell implies the kind of fluid navigational route that made possible the easy communication of goods and people. Such a gesture registers a cartographic sensibility that “transcend[s] parochialism of place and locality” (Pickles 78) and positions the settlement within a larger imperial geographical imaginary.

The incoming tide of emigrants generates a humanized landscape that Burwell charts in the most map-like section of his poem, which traces the network of roads along an “order[ed]...list” of counties and townships (487-523). These are named, oriented according to the division of the Talbot Road into East and West sections, and occasionally distinguished by landmarks and topographical description. The list begins with “Norfolk county,” in which

first the Talbot Street
East, marks its course thro’ Middleton complete;
Thence, into Middlesex, thro’ Houghton Gore,
And thence, thro’ Bayham, (where was mark’d before
A bridle path)—thence Otter Creek comes down
From Norwich, lengthwise, nearly thro’ the Town

...

(487-92)

The passage continues in like manner, ordered by a series of “thences” and “nexts,” indicators of sequence that propel the reader along a determined route through the country. To a more precise effect than that which is achieved by the customary “heres” and “theres” of picturesque description (that loosely divide landscapes “into left and right, foreground, middle-ground, and background” [Bentley, *Mimic* 35]), Burwell specifically locates the Talbot Road and the position of towns and landmarks along it. He also creates the illusion of travel in much the same way that a finger guiding the eye from place to place on a map makes an imaginative journey: “now the reader must be sent,” he continues,

From Middlesex into the County Kent:
Then follows Orford; Orford, Howard join,
Harwich and Raleigh range along the line;
Tilb'ry, and Romney East and West, which past,
Mersea remains, on Talbot Road the last.
Mersea's in Essex County.

(517-22)

The skeletal sparseness of this list, particularly in these final lines, is worth remarking on. If some parts of it are fleshed out by descriptions of particular features of the landscape or of certain towns, here that flesh falls away, leaving only the bare bones of place names located along the stark “line” of the road. In Bentley’s view, Burwell’s inability to produce a detailed description of each town, combined with the “stock, eighteenth-century diction” to which he succumbs when he does venture to do so, means that the poem ultimately fails to convey the “local colour” or “uniquely Canadian specificity” of his environs (*GGM*203). *Talbot Road* thus exemplifies the contradiction that Smaro Kamboureli has claimed makes colonial poetry “lose...sight of its immediate world” (17). But although this failing may well deprive the poem of some of its historical and regional immediacy, it simultaneously strengthens two aspects of the poem that relate to its cartographic inscription of colonial claims on the land. First, the poem’s abandonment of local description for a wider perspective that unites the towns under the generally approving conclusion “[t]hey all are beautiful, they all are good” (526) enhances its cartographic effect. As the towns blend together in Burwell’s vague but favourable description, they become even more like towns on a map: reduced to individually named but otherwise identical dots punctuating the territory. What the reader is finally invited to see is not this town or that town, but the many towns that together—and equally, in the poet’s estimation—have claimed for human activity an expansive and otherwise blank terrain. Second, Burwell’s derivative diction inscribes a British aesthetic and identity into the landscape, as, of course, do the place names he identifies, such as “Norfolk,” “Middlesex,” “Norwich,” and “Kent” (487-583). The “immediate world” of the Talbot Settlement, while it doubtless contained geographical and demographic features unique to Upper Canada, was also a world being written over in the image of Britain. It is this reality that *Talbot Road* above all seeks to map.

Much of *Talbot Road* registers, and arguably appeals to, a cartographic imagination more than a poetic one. Perhaps what emerges the most force-

fully in Burwell's list of towns and counties threaded together by the road is that his poem is

the product of a geometric cast of mind, a formatively spatial way of thinking that Burwell shared, not only with his surveyor-brother Mahlon, but also with many others who were responsible for the organization of Upper Canadian space in the nineteenth century. Like the Talbot settlement itself...*Talbot Road* was shaped by a survey mentality, by a mind that delighted in straight lines, 'proper angles' (200), and 'cross-way[s]' (450), in geometrical designs, architectural plans, and comprehensive schemes. (Bentley, Introduction xxxv).

Significantly, Burwell's "survey mentality" was not just a mentality that preferred the symmetries of eighteenth-century design to the asymmetries of untenanted nature, or that desired navigable roads in place of labyrinthine woods; it was a mentality that entrusted "designs...plans, and...schemes" with the creation of such spaces. Although "[a]t the time the poem was written, Colonel Thomas Talbot had only begun his plans for settlement" (Mazoff 76), Burwell's poem conveys no doubt that Talbot's designs will be fulfilled. Solitary though they may be, there is nonetheless a measure of certainty in the smooth, regular lines of the Talbot Road as they appear in the poem; their very existence seems to point confidently to the future, their seductive symmetries emblematic of the new order imposed on the land by European settlers. As if to add his own vision to the legacy of his various surveyors, Burwell superimposes over their mappings a final imaginary landscape whose prosperity is signaled by the architecture of commercial progress:

Beneath the blessings of their native skies,
The Town, the Village shall be seen to rise;
The stately mansion, and the costly hall,
The labell'd office, neat, convenient, small,
The ample warehouse, and the clean fireside,
Where friendship, love, and harmony reside.
The bustling town, the morn shall usher in,
And close the evening with a constant din,
The din of business—Wealth already stands,
And drops profusion from his open hands.

(573-82)

Gone from this scene are the crude log cabins and rugged pioneer clearings that appear earlier in the poem. The wilderness has been replaced by a

“constant chain of cultivated farms, . . . waving fields, . . . [a]nd orchards” that reflect the surveyor’s orderly patterns, and that suggest no end to his designs (607-611).¹⁸ The blank slate of unmapped land has given way to a mapped territory that is, above all, perpetually surveyable by each farmer who “commands” the “surrounding fields” from his own “stately mansion” (616, 615).

That Bentley characterizes these future farmhouses as “rural panopticons” (*Mimic* 107) registers the authority with which the ability to survey is endowed by Burwell’s poem. The map, now complete, generates more than a mere representation of a place now inhabited by affluent landholders; it registers (and, indeed, celebrates) a particular way of seeing¹⁹—a way of seeing made possible by cartography. Everyone becomes a kind of mapmaker in this poem: emigrant and farmer, poet and, ultimately, reader all join Colonel Talbot in imagining and understanding the region from the sweeping perspective of a cartographic gaze. Through the eyes of its surveyors, the settlement remains only vaguely defined, the particularities of place obscured by the generalities of a descriptive mode whose main point of interest is not, in the end, the land itself or even the experience of settling it, but rather the creation of an increasingly ordered and navigable territory. This territory has at once everything and nothing to do with the actual world, for in the service of its utopian vision *Talbot Road* erases at least as much as it represents. Perhaps above all Burwell’s poem must be read as an enduring example of what according to S. Tomasch all maps tend to be: that is, a “powerful statement [...] of belief in the world [...] that they help to create” (qtd. in Pickles 93).

Notes

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- 1 An original and enduring definition of topographical poetry remains Samuel Johnson’s description, in *Lives of the English Poets*, of John Denham’s “local” poem *Cooper’s Hill*. Such a poem, writes Johnson, is “a species of composition . . . of which the fundamental subject is some particular landscape, to be poetically described, with the addition of such embellishments as may be supplied by historical retrospection, or incidental meditation” (54). Elaborating more recently on the genre in his book *Topographical Poetry in XVIII-Century England*, Robert Arnold Aubin stresses that “‘topographical’ poetry aims chiefly at describing *specifically named actual localities*” (vii). This concern, as Susan Glickman reminds us, is the particular innovation of topographical poetry. She notes that, in particular, “[w]hat is new in *Cooper’s Hill* . . . is the poet’s

- insistence that he is describing a real and specific scene that speaks to him of his own time and space” (6).
- 2 The Talbot Road—actually a network of highways—was the main artery of the settlement. Built during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the road was designed by the spectacularly successful and industrious Anglo-Irish colonialist, Colonel Thomas Talbot; although the hardest work of clearing and construction was performed by his settlers (Williams 35). Eventually connecting Port Talbot, on Lake Erie’s north shore, “with Niagara to the east, Amherstberg to the west, and Westminster Township (near present-day London, Ontario) to the north” (Bentley, Introduction xii) the road was “nearly three hundred miles long” and “the best...of its length in the province” (Craig 143).
 - 3 Describing Mahlon Burwell as the “confidential friend of [its] all-powerful founder,” James Coyne suggests that he was “the strongest personality in the settlement after Talbot himself,” and insists that “none of the original settlers stood higher in the estimation of the community than Colonel Burwell, who possessed the respect of all” (189, 190).
 - 4 In the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, John Clarke specifies that Mahlon Burwell started his work of “laying out townships (most in the Talbot settlement) and beginning the Talbot Road” in 1809, and that “[b]etween 1814 and 1825 he surveyed all or part of 24 townships north of the Thames River and south of it, in the counties of Kent and Essex. As well, he resumed work on the Talbot Road, long considered the best road in Upper Canada” (<http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=37403>).
 - 5 Bentley admits that “[t]o modern taste, one of Burwell’s chief faults is that, by concentrating on the ‘beautiful’ and the ‘good,’ he left too little space in *Talbot Road* for the true, for vivid and accurate descriptions of things as they were in early nineteenth-century Canada”—although Bentley also acknowledges that to reproach on this basis “is to judge Burwell by a standard of social realism to which he only sporadically subscribed” (Introduction xxxviii). Nonetheless, this critical strain lurks behind Adrian Fowler’s emphasis on the “dissonance” caused by incongruities of form and subject in *Talbot Road*, and even, arguably, behind his praise for the “moments of sincerity and charm in Burwell’s glimpse into the lives and aspirations of the settlers” (33, 39).
 - 6 Although the “cartographic gaze” has a constellation of meanings, Pickles reminds us that “[i]t is, above all, a controlling gaze rendering the broad swathes of worldly complexity and enormity in miniature form for a discrete purpose” (80).
 - 7 See Baudrillard 2-3 for the most well-known modern articulation of this notion.
 - 8 The most imaginatively intriguing of these plans were the “paper towns” that Jacob Spelt describes in his study *Urban Development in South-Central Ontario* (21). Common in the early period of settlement under John Graves Simcoe, these town plans were mapped right down to the locations of public buildings and parks, and used as advertisements to emigrants prior to being built. Many of the towns never materialized, however—a fact which highlights the fictional as well as anticipatory qualities of maps.
 - 9 Moving water was required for the working of flour- and grist-mills, among other uses.
 - 10 If it might well be the case that, as Bentley suggests, the poet’s choice of the verb “swarm” (repeated at line 442) “partly undercuts his celebration of the new settlers” (Introduction xxxiv), it also arguably works to convey the dramatic effect of the sudden arrival of large numbers of emigrants in the landscape. See also its use in Howison 168 (quoted below).
 - 11 Or renamed, as was more likely the case. The mouth of Kettle Creek, for instance, where Talbot first settled, is thought to have once been called “Skitteewaabaa”—a name that inscribes a different history, a history of Ojibway habitation, onto the land (Gray et. al. 1; see also Coyne 28). This poem is a case in point of the extent to which “the naming of the country, the Englishing of half a continent and its contents, including its native peoples, altered and even destroyed what had been here before” (Bentley, *GGM* 125).

- 12 As Jameson bluntly put it, “[a] Canadian settler *hates* a tree, regards it as his natural enemy, as something to be destroyed, eradicated, annihilated by all and any means” (64).
- 13 This effect contrasts with Michael Smith’s framing of the same terrain in his *Geographical View of the Province of Upper Canada* (1813), a book with which Burwell must have been familiar, as he appears to have pasted a clipping of his poem into a copy of Smith’s text (see Bentley, Introduction xlii). Smith specifies that the London District “is bounded east by Indian land, on Grand River, [and] north by the wilderness” (5). The only boundaries that Burwell mentions in his poem are Lake Erie and the Thames—borders, to be sure, but also important natural conduits, and as such, borders that facilitate movement through, as much as they mark the limits of, the territory.
- 14 *Talbot Road* is largely missing the signifiers that, according to Graham Huggan, mark a region’s instability as much as its self-containment and protection (19). This omission is unusual; it runs against both the grain of the “garrison mentality” and the fictions by which territories are so often defined. “A group of people living on a few acres of land,” according to Edward Said,

will set up boundaries between their land and its immediate surroundings and the territory beyond, which they call ‘the land of the barbarians.’...Yet often the sense in which someone feels himself to be not-foreign is based on a very unrigorous idea of what is ‘out there’, beyond one’s own territory. All kinds of suppositions, associations, and fictions appear to crowd the unfamiliar space outside one’s own. (Qtd. in Huggan 19-20)

- 15 By contrast, David William Smyth’s *Map of the Province of Upper Canada*, the second edition of which was also published in 1818, registers the proximity of the “Great Tract of Woodland” to the north of the settlement (see fig. 2).
- 16 Construction would not begin on the Welland Canal until 1824.
- 17 See Bentley, Introduction xxv.
- 18 John Howison’s account of the Talbot Settlement in his *Sketches of Upper Canada* (1821) suggests that Burwell’s optimism was not unfounded, and that his predictions were being fulfilled: “[Talbot] encountered all those difficulties that invariably occur under similar circumstances, and was likewise strenuously opposed by some of the minions of the Provincial government,” Howison concedes; “however, he has accomplished his object; for that tract of country, which, ten or twelve years ago, hardly knew the foot of man, now swarms with thousands of active settlers” (168). Nonetheless, Howison saw room for further improvement; it was his hope “that its present occupants [would] henceforth gradually disappear, and be succeeded by a population of a superior kind. That this will be the case seems highly probable; for emigrants of some capital now begin to make their appearance in the Province” (171). Could it be that behind Burwell’s predictions of future commercial and cultural prosperity in the Talbot Settlement lie similar, if unarticulated, hopes for such a demographic turnover in the region?
- 19 I borrow this phrase from John Berger (see also Pickles 60).

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