Western Scenery: Extract of a Letter from a Western Traveller

N. Beverley Tucker
spurring to the top of an Indian barrow, placed himself
and me at the desired point of view.

We were on the spot that overlooks the confluence
of Salt River with the Mississippi. Having once travelled
an hundred miles to see the Natural Bridge, and having
heard from Mr. Jefferson that that sight was worthy of
a voyage across the Atlantic, I certainly did not grudge
the price I had paid for the view that opened on me.

The confluence of the rivers is nearly at right angles.
The hill descends with equal abruptness towards each,
and, at first glance, the apex seems to overhang the wa-
ter of each. But this is not so. The descent, perhaps,
wants two or three degrees of perpendicularity, and, at
the bottom, there is a narrow border of low-ground,
fringing the banks with loamy trees. The appearance
of these trees gave the only measure of the height of the
hill. To the eye they might be bushes. My guide as-
ured me they were of the tallest growth.

To the East, across the Mississippi, lay what is called
Howard’s bottom. This is, as its name imports, a body
of low ground. Its width is said to be, in some places,
not less than six miles, and to be nearly uniform for
a distance of sixty. Of this I could not judge. It seemed
that it might be so. I was nearly opposite the middle
of it, and overlooking the whole. Next the water was
a border of the most luxuriant forest, apparently some
half a mile in width, and beyond this, a Prairie reaching
to the foot of the hills, interspersed with masses of for-
est, and groves, and stumps, and single trees, among
which, here and there, were glittering glimpses of the
Chenal’llce corteze, which traverses the whole length of it.
You, who know the vegetation in which nature clothes
these fertile plains, need not be told how rich and soft
was the beautiful picture thus spread beneath my feet.
Its setting was not less remarkable. This was a perpen-
dicular wall of limestone, two or three hundred feet
high, which bounds the valley on the East. An occa-
sional gap, affording an outlet to the country beyond,
alone broke the continuity of this barrier. To the
North, lay the extensive plain through which Salt River
winds. I have no idea of its extent. It is a vast am-
phitheatre, surrounded by lofty and richly-wooded hills.
The plain itself is of wood and Prairie interspersed,
and so blended, that every tree seems placed for effect.

You are not to suppose, because I do not launch out
in florid declamation about the beauty, and grandeur,
and magnificence, and all that, of this scene, that it was
less striking than you would naturally suppose it must
be. You know that I have neither talent nor taste for
fine writing; so you must take the picture as I give it,
and draw on your own imagination for the garniture.
I have said nothing of the rivers, but to tell you they
were there, and flowing through a landscape of many
hundred thousand acres of the richest land on earth,
with the most beautifully variegated surface, all spread
out under my feet. I felt that the scene was sublime;
and it is well for your patience, that I have learned that
sublime things are best described in fewest words. It
is certainly the finest I ever saw. There may be others
equal to it, but the earth does not afford room for man-y
such. What will it be, when it becomes “a living land-
scapes of groves and corn-fields, and the abodes of
men”? As it is, if the warrior, on whose tomb I stood,
could raise his head, he would see it in nothing changed
from what it was when his last sun set upon it.