The following index lists the major topics in the audio recording and the approximate point when they occur in the recording according to an analog cassette recorder’s tape counter. This tape counter index (TCI) has not been edited for accuracy by Archives and Special Collections.
Bevis talks about when he first arrived in Missoula and tells a couple of stories about how the west is still alive. He makes some introductory remarks about this radio broadcast course in literature. The course is officially titled English 479 Montana Writers. Bevis runs down the list of the six books that will be read in the class and also stating their authors. Bevis has divided the books into two groups, one group talking about the Old West and the second group a more modern version of the west.

Bevis returns to talking about the antagonism between the eastern part of the country and the west. Bevis talks about the French purchase of New Orleans in the year 1800. The French closed the port to western settlers. Thomas Jefferson immediately sought to buy New Orleans from the French and he ended up getting Louisiana with it. Bevis raises the question of why Jefferson did this. Bevis quotes from The Uncommon Land that Jefferson knew the people in the west didn't exactly love the east and so to keep the country together he made the purchase.

Bevis notes that Jefferson sent Lewis and Clark to explore the west not only to discover new things but to also make sure the west was really still bound with the east. He talks about where the money, in the form of furs and gold, went. It went to Europe and back east.

Bevis turns from talking about the economic divisions between east and west to the cultural divisions between the two. Bevis talks about the problems that Jefferson had in the early 1800s. He was seen by the westerners as a proper eastern type gentleman representing eastern interests but at the same time, the Europeans were looking at him as a rough, unmannerly, barbarian.

Bevis reads part of a paper about Jefferson having to defend all of the US against the verbal attacks of the Europeans. Bevis raises the question of what this all meant. In simple terms it meant that all of the US began as the "west".

He then raises the question of what the "west" really means. The West is identified with something rude, crude, barbarian and savage. Therefore, since the position of the West keeps moving around, American culture is always under close scrutinization.
It was thought, and still is, to some extent, that nothing of any real value could possibly be going on in the West. Bevis talks about the need to keep the values that people have placed on the East and the West in their proper places. For example, if a writer is going to write about the West he or she shouldn't use a lot of artistic, refined ways of describing the West but instead use crude, barbaric terms etc.

Bevis turns to talking about American literature between 1860 and 1900. Most of the writers were wealthy or at least of established families and they had very good educations. After the Civil War, however, most of the writers came from the lower middle class. This is when most of the Western literature came about. The writers were now coming from families that were not on the Eastern seaboard.

Mark Twain can be considered this country's first Western writer. He talks about Twain's first stories, which were about mining camps and the California gold rush. When one looks back on Mark Twain's life and his writing it appears that he was culturally schizophrenic. By this, Bevis means that Twain loved the things that the West stood for and all of the things that go on in the West but at the same time he wrote in a style that the people in the East liked.

Bevis reads a passage from one of Twain's book. He makes the point that the writing is Western in thought and Western in dialect but he reads another passage in the same book that is the very proper English dialect that one would encounter in Boston or London. He notes that Twain liked to travel in the best circles, know all of the important people etc. but at the same time he would relish shocking those same people by saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, drinking too much etc.

So Twain is sort of a meeting between East and West. Bevis talks about Twain's feeling throughout his life that he was culturally inferior because he came from the West, although he knew that a man's life in the West was just as important as someone living in the East.

So there has always been a need in the West for it to defend its culture. Bevis talks about Vernon Lewis Parrington's book on critical realism in America, 1860-1920. Parrington really wasn't an Easterner. When he wrote the book he was a professor at the University of Washington in Seattle, in 1920. However, Parrington wrote one of the most critical books ever about Western culture. Bevis reads a couple of passages from the book.
Bevis summarizes his comments that he has made by saying that all of these things written about culture are not correct. He says that culture can not be described by a bunch of words that represent materialistic things because that is not what culture is.

Bevis says that the first three books that the course will consider were written at a time when writing was still looking toward the East and still had the distinctive style of the East stamped upon it. In the last three books for the course Bevis sees a very different change in style. The writing is distinctly Western and Montanan.

Bevis considers some of the advantages that Western writers have had over their Eastern counterparts. The first advantage is the vernacular style. Much of this consisted of slang and vulgarity. Many groups in the East were opposed to this sort of writing, however. Bevis mentions that some of the great authors wrote with such a style occasionally, such as Dante and Shakespeare. Many other authors have written in common language rather than the stuffy literary dialect.

The second advantage that Western writing has is that the West represents the American spirit. Bevis mentions that the West now is surrounded by the thoughts from the past when all of America was known as the West. Bevis reads a passage from Sewel, 1698, describing Plum island off the east coast. The writing has the distinctive American spirit that is now alive in Western writing. An so Western writers have now inherited this way of thinking.

There are a number of questions that one should ask about Western literature. First, is the literature good and did we enjoy it? Is the book good because it is good in comparison with an Eastern model or is it good because it represents its own time and place well. Bevis says that a true regional literature is a state of mind and that is one of the things that he wishes to bring out by the end of the course, whether or not the Northwest has a distinct literature of its own.

Bevis now turns to the first book in the course, Andrew Garcia's A Tough Trip Through Paradise. Andrew Garcia was born of Spanish-American descent on the Rio Grande around 1853. He came up to Montana about 1876. He
followed some soldiers around for a year, went trapping with an old trapper. While trapping he met some very unsavory characters. After this he became an Indian trader. All of this happening in the Musslesheesh country.

The book accounts about a year and a half of Garcia's life, from the time he started trading with the Indians until he marries a Nez Perce squaw. The book ends with his wife being killed by Blackfeet. Garcia stayed in Montana and died in 1943. He started writing down some of these experiences about 1920. So the book was written from 1920-1943 about events that had happened in Montana from 1876-1878. Garcia was living on a ranch in Alberton, Montana when he wrote the book. The book has claims to being a historical document because it is a first hand account of the life of a person who was an Indian trader for a year and a half.

It also has the character of a novel because having written the book forty years after the experiences the conversation is likely to be invented somewhat. Bevis reads from the book about an incident Garcia had with a bad man whom he probably should have shot but he didn't.

Garcia holds all of the stories about gunslingers and bloody battles to the writers back East. He didn't hold with that at all. Bevis notes that the book has some shifts in style but they are the same shifts that are seen in Twain's writing. Bevis quotes a passage from the book that has an example of the more Eastern style of writing.

When Garcia seems to be embarrassed or uneasy about some of the material he slides into the proper English that he feels has a high literary style. Bevis mentions that the book was never put in its finished version by Garcia. A guy named Ben Steyn found the manuscript and edited it. Bevis says that the book is very good but Garcia really wasn't in control of the material when it was written.

One of the problems that some people have with the book is that it is sometimes difficult telling where Garcia is coming from. The book has "strange" passages and they are difficult to understand. They are not like the strange passages such as you would find in Poe's writings because there you know that the author is controlling the strangeness of the writing.

Bevis talks about the panel that will discuss Garcia's book in the next session. The panel will be made up of Ross Toole and Ed Gallagher, both of whom like the book. So they will discuss whether the book is
accurate, from a historical standpoint, which is very important since the book was written of a first hand account.

501-586 Bevis reminds the listeners that the course will cover six books, by Garcia, Guthrie, Johnson, Hugo, Welch, and DeMarinis. He talks a little more about the course and then signs off.

[END OF TAPE]