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.
Montana Writers Collection
Bill Bevis—"Dorothy Johnson"—Short Stories
OH #21-7

[SIDE A]

000-050 Bevis welcomes the listeners to the program and introduces Dorothy Johnson. Bevis asks Johnson what type of writing she likes doing the best. Johnson says that she started out writing short stories and she would still be writing short stories except for the fact that the market folded up years ago. Johnson says that she used to make good money writing short stories for the major magazines but they have went out of business now. For example, during the depression she made $400 on her first short story, which was the equivalent of four months pay.

051-100 They talk about some of the magazines that published short stories. Bevis asks Johnson if the magazines buying her stories influenced her writing. Johnson says that she continued to write short stories until she finally realized there wasn't any place to sell them anymore. After she stopped writing short stories she began writing books for young people.

101-150 Johnson talks about her book she wrote on the history of Greece. She condensed the history of Greece into 1500 words. Bevis mentions that Johnson wrote the Bloody Bozeman around 1971. Johnson says that the Bloody Bozeman was a nice change in style for her. Johnson says that she has many other books that she has written but they were never published and probably no one will ever get to read them.

151-200 Johnson mentions that here writing career fell off after her publication of her first major story in 1932. It wasn't until about 1943 that she published her second major story. She explains that she then was able to sell several articles at a time and began branching out into other stories.

201-250 Johnson talks about some of her early sequel stories and that she sent them all at once to the Post, which most writers would tell you never to do. Only send one of your works at a time to a magazine. Johnson says that these modern western stories were all written in the first person. After 1940 she decided to branch out and begin writing stories other than in first person.

251-300 She says that she usually didn't write through a narrator after that period of time. Bevis asks her in what way a narrator was limiting her writing. She says that one day she wrote a story that she just couldn't seem to use a narrator in and from that point on she
felt as though she no longer needed to use a narrator.

301-350 Bevis asks her how she considers her stories, whether they are action stories or character stories etc.. Johnson says that her stories are mainly character based but she does like a little action. Bevis asks her if she has always used Western material as her basis for writing. Johnson says, yes. Johnson says that her creative writing professor, who was also her advisor, always favored regional literature. Her professor taught them that the West is a perfectly respectable place to write about and it was easier for the students to write about the West because that is where they grew up.

351-400 They talk about writers and them being capable of writing about places although they have never been there. Bevis gives an example and then Johnson gives an example of Jack Schaefer, author of Shane, who had never been west of the Mississippi when he wrote the book. Bevis asks her why she has always used the Western material. She says that she was always doing a lot of research and while she was writing she was doing it about what she knew or what she wanted to know.

401-450 Johnson says that she came from New York several times to stay on ranches in Rosebud County so that she could get the information she needed to write about. Johnson talks about a couple of the learning experiences that she had when she stayed at the ranches.

451-500 Bevis comments that Johnson's stories are full of the romance of the West as well as the history of the West and he asks her if she views those things as an important part of the West's history. Johnson says that these sort of things happened and so she decided to use them. She says that the reason she didn't write more on things like prairie living etc. is because she thought they would be boring and she would rather read action stories.

501-550 Bevis asks her what her favorite Western novel is, written by anyone. She says that she admired Conrad Richter, but he wrote about a different part of the country. She says that she can't think of any Western writer she really looked up to however. Bevis comments that Johnson was publishing many of her major works around the late 1940s and early 1950s when Bud Guthrie was writing The Big Sky.

551-600 Johnson says that she was very excited when The Big Sky came out and she wrote a letter to Guthrie. Johnson explains a little story about her and Guthrie possibly meeting when the both went to school in Chouteau for a year. Bevis asks her what she thinks of the movies
that were made out of _A Man Called Horse and The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance_. Johnson says that a short story really doesn't have enough in it to make a full length movie so someone has to build it up. So there were things in both movies that shocked her because she wasn't aware that some events were going to happen at all.

601-650 Bevis wants to discuss _A Man Called Horse_. Bevis asks her what she thought of the movie. Johnson says that the bloody scenes in the movie are what made it popular. She says that man of the scenes were not representative of Indian life. There was a mixing of several Indian cultures and the ceremony that the man in the movie was put through, she had never heard of before or since and she was shocked to see it in there but she says that she realizes that is the sort of thing that draws people to the theatres.

651-700 Bevis asks if she would object to anything Hollywood did. She says that it would do no good to object because she had signed a contract and given up all of the rights to the movie. She says that she has never felt that she has had the right to complain about any of her movies because of the horrible job Hollywood did in making Bud Guthrie's _The Big Sky_ into a movie.

701-750 Bevis asks her what sort of audience she thinks of writing for or whether she really thinks about that at all. He also asks her what she would like them to get out of her stories. She says that she is probably writing for people who like adventure.

751-800 Johnson says that the main thing she tries to do is leave the audience with a feeling that they have been entertained and have gone through an important experience. Bevis asks if she especially thought of a Western audience when writing. She says that when she first started out she wrote about the West because she was homesick. Her early writings were done while she was in New York. She says that she really wasn't writing for a Western audience because people all over the world like Western books.

801-850 Johnson explains an incident when she was in Rhodesia and _A Man Called Horse_ was being played in a theatre. No one under 18 years of age was allowed in to see the movie and she wondered why. The Africans explained to her that the people of the area were already ritually inclined and this movie might allow them to dream up some new rituals.

851-906 Bevis asks Johnson if she has a favorite in her short story collection and why it is her favorite. Johnson says that she can't see one as being better than the
rest. She feels as though they were all "grand" by the
time she got them all revised. She says that the first
one in the book, Flame on the Frontier, she has always
been fond of because of the strange way it came to
her.

[END OF SIDE A]

[SIDE B]

000-050 She was reading a book and later on that night she
couldn't get to sleep so she thought about an Indian
fight she had read and pretty soon she starting
thinking about other scenes. Finally she got out of
bed and wrote down all of these disconnected violent
scenes. Later on she just put the scenes together and
the story was finished. She surprised herself because
she didn't have to think out the plot or the story, it
all fell into place.

051-100 Bevis reads a passage from the end of the story that a
feminist could very easily object to. Bevis says that
he has trouble "swallowing" the ending. He asks her
what she thinks of the ending of the story now.
Johnson says that she didn't think that it would
trouble anyone. It is perfectly reasonable to her.

101-150 Bevis says that the time is up and thanks Dorothy
Johnson for being on the program. Bevis begins the
second part of the program. Bevis notes that last week
he said Johnson's books were good for making movies
because they had the action and events that suit
movies. Bevis says that he now wants to talk about the
Unbeliever and in some detail. Bevis says that he
found the Unbeliever to be the most disappointing story
in the group because he liked it so much up to a point.

151-200 He wants to make the point that many of the stories are
more stories of action and not as much character.
Bevis says that the Unbeliever might have been the best
story in the book had the second half been written in a
different way. In the story an older guy is going to
try and do something perilous and thus regain some of
his youthful self-respect. Another factor enters into
the book when the man is called an Indian lover. This
implies that the story is also going to be of arrogance
and white supremacy.

201-250 Bevis then talks about the family relationships that
are brought up in the book. The man has also murdered
one of the Crow Indians and he begins to leave the area
and questions begin to pop into the readers head of
whether the guy will escape or not. Bevis brings up a
couple of other questions the reader might ask at this
point in the story.
Finally the reader finds out that the man is poisoned. Then two startling things hit the reader. One is that when the man looks up at the Crow Indian, after being poisoned, he sees the look of compassion on the face of the Indian and the reader immediately asks why the Indian is showing compassion for the man. The man then asks the Indian why he killed him. The answer is very shocking to the reader and what we get is on O'Henry ending to the story. O'Henry being a writer who liked to point a twisted ending onto his stories. With this strange ending in Johnson's book, Bevis feels that she has lost the chance to tie everything together.

The character in the story could have been tied all together but instead it isn't. Bevis feels that this proves that the story wasn't concerned as much with character as it was with action. Bevis feels that some of these problems like this went on in all of the stories although to a lesser degree. Bevis sums up by saying that he finds Johnson's short stories very interesting although he feels her best work is in her history writing. Bevis signs off.

[END OF TAPE]