Computer helps assemble 'Paradise Lost' concordance

WACO—Traditionally regarded as a complicated tool for solving mathematical or scientific problems, the computer is a versatile machine that recently was used by a Baylor University English instructor to compile a concordance of Milton's "Paradise Lost."

Mrs. Gladys W. Hudson utilized the university's Honeywell 1250 computer and computer programs created by her husband, Jack W. Hudson, to compile "'Paradise Lost': A Concordance." The Gale Research Co. of Detroit has published the concordance of the English poet's masterpiece.

The concordance is an alphabetical listing of all the words in the 12 books of "Paradise Lost." After each word cited is a list of the books and line numbers in which the word is found. In the case of some words, such as "heaven," this list is several hundred entries long.

The concordance also includes a word count of how often a word is used in "Paradise Lost." Its primary use will be by researchers studying Milton.

The Hudsons spent the greater part of the fall semester working on the book in their spare time. Mrs. Hudson first became interested in the project while taking a Milton course taught by Dr. Jack Herring, professor of English and director of the Armstrong Browning Library at Baylor. What started out as a class project developed into a book when Mrs. Hudson decided to create the concordance.

Herring said the concordance "will make it possible for scholars studying 'Paradise Lost' to find references under these words and also to study variations in Milton's spelling. It will be helpful in studying not only his ideas but his use of the English language."

Hudson, director of management information systems in the data processing department at Baylor, said the entire text of "Paradise Lost" had to be transcribed onto computer cards.

"We used the computer to come up with a format for scanning and separating the words," he said.

"There are more than 88,000 words in the entire text of "Paradise Lost" and separating them was quite a task. I had to create programs to regard such words as 'a' and 'the' as insignificant and had to formulate a way to make 'invisible hyphens' so that certain words, which are not usually hyphenated, would be separated out as one word and still be printed out as an unhyphenated word," he explained.

Other difficulties were encountered. Hudson said he had a problem in "trying to get the computer to read the word 'may' differently from the month 'May.'"

The Hudsons said they are pleased the total project shows that computers are not limited just to bookkeeping and solving scientific problems.

"We used the computer as an aid in compiling a piece of literature," Hudson said. "The computer can be used to fulfill various needs if the individual can simply communicate what needs to be done."

Mrs. Hudson now is preparing "An Elizabeth Barrett Browning Concordance," which will include the complete poetry of Mrs. Browning. It will be similar to the way in which "Paradise Lost" was indexed. The new work is due for publication in about nine months.

Mrs. Hudson also recently was appointed editor of a new concordance being produced by Drexel University in Philadelphia. The concordance will cover the complete prose works of Milton. Mrs. Hudson will edit one volume of the 14-volume work.

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