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Technological Advances during Mary Shelley’s Life

            Ever wonder what it would be like to live like Mary Shelley, use only what technology she had? Some technologies of today may have come from centuries ago, while some are still in the works. Many technological advances occurred in Mary Shelley’s life. Many advancements and important people were made during her life, some of which she saw, some she didn’t.

           In Mary Shelley’s life technology would have been limited. Some tools available to Shelley would be: the Mechanical Reaper, Semi-Improved bicycle, Steamboats, and in her last years a peek of the upcoming 3-d Stereoscopy technology. The mechanical reaper was a complex device that was made solely to cut/harvest grain. The reaper was improved upon and reinvented several times by both Robert and Cyrus McCormick, and may have even been the basis for modern combines. –(“Cyrus H. McCormick”) The most advanced/improved bicycle that Shelley would have known is the “Draisienne” Bicycle, which looks almost exactly like the bicycles we use today. The“Draisienne” was one of the first bicycles that the rider would not have to push against the ground. Even though it was vastly improved, the “Draisienne” never became really popular. – ("Bicycle.") Made only because of necessity, Steamboats were constantly evolving; Shelley probably saw several innovations with steamboats throughout her life. Many of the innovations for steamboats were to make people’s lives easier. – ("Steamboats.") Even though wthe 3-dStereoscopy technology of her time was not very powerful; it was popular (especially with the queen). 3-d stereoscopy was so popular only because TV and Radio did not exist. – ("Steamboats.")

           In Shelley's life, many now famous people were born. On Shelley’s 12th birthday Cyrus McCormick was born, who eventually made the mechanical reaper and improved farming technology, making food easier to collect. On Shelley’s 50th birthday Thomas Edison was born. It would be another 31 years before the first light bulb, another 30 before the phonograph. – ("Thomas Alva Edison.") On Shelley's 66th birthday (she lived until 54) Henry Ford would be born. It would be on her 99th birthday that ford made his first car.-(FORD) Several more years until the assembly line was used. –("Assembly Line.")

           Light bulbs, Phonographs, Rubber, electric dynamos, movies, Ford’s Cars, & elevators all have one thing in common; Shelley never saw them. While being major advancements right after her life, they are still considered inventions of the time. With his Birth on her 66th birthday, many technological advances advances occurred right after her time period. Shelley missed the lightbulb, which was a marvel of the time, impressing even Edison himself, “He was so confident that customers would prefer his light, “better, cleaner, purer, and more wholesome” that he could charge $1.50” -(WIZD). Shelley missed almost every principle of Henry Ford: his cars, His principles, even his assembly line. Ford’s Cars are still among the most popular cars in America today. Ford’s Principles, although weird, helped the workers. He wanted to keep the employee’s wages high and the work convenient for the workers using ford’s greatest invention, the assembly line. Elevators, while it may not seem like it, are old technology, less complicated versions of elevators (or “Vertical Hoisting Devices” – ("Otis Elevator Company, Inc.")) were in common use during Mary Shelley’s life. While they were extremely common, they were not widely advanced or very safe for humans. It was the more modern advancements (or commodities) that made them suitable for humans.

Shelley may have been alive for all these inventions, but she probably actually used little of them. Shelley probably used the Mechanical Reaper (indirectly), she may have had a bike, .and she could have ridden a steamboat. Shelley probably bought wheat from a market where farmers had brought it to sell. The farmer may have used the reaper to cut and more collect his crops in an efficient way. –("Cyrus H. McCormick.") While it might not have been the “Draisienne” it is likely that she had a bicycle or had seen them. Bicycles were a highly popular invention that was improved *Several* times. –("Bicycle.") With reasonable popularity, Steamboats were practically everywhere. Steamboats being strong and powerful could be used to conveniently transport people, goods, and luggage. Steamboats were used to take anything almost anywhere

Understanding what it may have been like for Mary Shelley helps understand her position in her stories and writings. While many major advances occurred after her life, Mary lived without much technology. Next time anyone reads of Mary Shelley, make notice of how little technology she had. Many advancements were made during and after Shelley’s life.

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