

Enchantress of Numbers [B1]

Ada Lovelace, pioniera dell'informatica, ha sfidato le convenzioni sociali e personali per rivoluzionare la scienza. La sua straordinaria storia di talento e determinazione continua a ispirare ancora oggi.

Ada Lovelace was an extraordinary woman who made crucial contributions to science at a time when women were expected to simply stay at home and raise children. Her childhood was lonely and hard. Determined to protect her daughter from her father Lord Byron's influence, Ada's mother did not allow her to see his image until she was twenty years old. She was given lessons by Cambridge University lecturers while being forced to lie on a reclining board to perfect her posture. If she fidgeted, her hands were put in black bags and she was shut in a closet — at the age of five!

EARLY LIFE

Aged nineteen, Lovelace married the aristocrat William King, with whom she raised three children. When he was made Earl of Lovelace in 1838, she became Lady Ada King, Countess of Lovelace. King actually helped her in her scientific research. He copied out articles in journals in libraries, as women were not permitted to enter university or scientific libraries. Astonishingly, Ada did all her calculations in her head with the help of just a pen and paper.

MAGIC SPELL

Charles Babbage, known as “the father of computers”, described Ada as “that enchantress who has thrown her magical spell around the most abstract of sciences and has grasped it with a force which few masculine intellects could ever have exerted over it.”

ODD CHARACTER

Ada may have had a complicated character. According to one biographer, she was manipulative, aggressive, a drug addict, a gambler and an adulteress. Another described her as self-centred obstinate, charismatic, enchanting and forceful — but lacking in character! She was also possibly bi-polar.

ADA LOVELACE DAY

On a global scale, there is now, since 2009, an Ada Lovelace Day, on the second Tuesday of October. This is an international celebration of the achievements of women in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM). In the Pentagon in the USA, there is a network of computers controlling the US military, and they in turn are controlled by a programming language called Ada. In London, you can visit the plaque in St James's Square which proclaims “Pioneer of Computing Lived Here”. And since 2015, all British passports contain an illustration of Lovelace and Babbage.

Glossary

- **raise** = crescere, educare
- **shut** = chiudere
- **spell** = incantesimo
- **to lie** = giacere
- **grasped** = comprendere
- **self-centred** = egocentrica
- **lacking** = mancare
- **achievements** = conquiste
- **reclining board** = tavola reclinabile
- **fidgeted** = non smettere di muoversi
- **enchantress** = incantatrice, seduttrice
- **Earl** = conte
- **gambler** = giocatrice d'azzardo
- **forceful** = forte, con energia