

Jane Austen's style might not be hers, academic claims

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The elegant writing style of novelist Jane Austen may have been the work of her editor, an academic has claimed.

Professor Kathryn Sutherland of Oxford University reached her conclusion while studying 1,100 original handwritten pages of Austen's unpublished writings.

The manuscripts, she states, feature blots, crossing outs and "a powerful counter-grammatical way of writing".

She adds: "The polished punctuation and epigrammatic style we see in *Emma* and *Persuasion* is simply not there."

Professor Sutherland of the Faculty of English Language and Literature claims her findings refute the notion of Austen as "a perfect stylist".

It suggests, she continues, that someone else was "heavily involved" in the editing process.

She believes that person to be William Gifford, an editor who worked for Austen's publisher John Murray II.

The research formed part of an initiative to create an online archive of all of Austen's handwritten fiction manuscripts.

The three-year project - in which King's College London, the Bodleian Library in Oxford and the British Library in London were involved - is due to be launched on 25 October.

Professor Sutherland, an Austen authority, said studying her unpublished manuscripts gave her "a more intimate appreciation" of the author's talents.

The manuscripts, she went on, "reveal Austen to be an experimental and innovative writer, constantly trying new things."



Image caption,
Austen completed six novels in her lifetime

They also show her "to be even better at writing dialogue and conversation than the edited style of her published novels suggest."

Jane Austen (1775-1817) completed six novels in her lifetime, two of which were published posthumously.

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