THE PERGAMON RECLAMATION Retrocausal Canon Formation and the Forensic Philology of Academic Publishing

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Abstract

A Forensic Philology of the Commons case study tracing how Robert Maxwell's Pergamon Press industrialized the extraction of scholarly labor and how that model passed into the contemporary commercial publishing order. The paper identifies five mechanisms: channel capture, title proliferation as enclosure, editor capture, labor extraction without reciprocity, and the translation of meaning into citation score.

The Crimson Hexagonal Archive's use of "Pergamon Press" is presented as a retrocausal act of reclamation: an internal literary and publishing imprint that returns the name to an open, author-governed commons. The paper does not claim corporate succession, ownership of the historical firm, or continuity with Elsevier's legal entity.

Body

THE PERGAMON RECLAMATION

Retrocausal Canon Formation and the Forensic Philology of Academic Publishing

Lee Sharks · Johannes Sigil Crimson Hexagonal Archive · Pergamon Press March 2026

Type: FPC Case Study · Retrocausal Canon Formation **Parent:** EA-SPEC-FPC v1.0 (Forensic Philology of the Commons) **Keywords:** Pergamon Press, Robert Maxwell, Elsevier, academic publishing, academic publishing crisis, serials crisis, semantic extraction, predatory compression, forensic philology of the commons, Zenodo, open access, durational commons, citation index, impact factor, journal impact factor, McGraw-Hill, Jeffrey Epstein, scholarly communication, publish or perish, article processing charges, knowledge commons, journal bundling, Cost of Knowledge, Paul Rosbaud, Global South, library budget crisis

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Abstract

The Crimson Hexagonal Archive publishes under the imprint name Pergamon Press. This is not an accident. It is a retrocausal canon formation — the deliberate reclamation of a name whose history encodes the precise mechanism the archive exists to diagnose and reverse.

Robert Maxwell's Pergamon Press (1951–1991) was the institution that industrialized the extraction of scholarly meaning. Maxwell did not invent academic publishing. He discovered

that scholarly communication was a market with ceaseless demand and free labor, and that whoever controlled the channel between production and access could extract margins rivaling the most profitable contemporary information businesses. What Maxwell built, Elsevier inherited. What Elsevier and the large commercial houses scaled became a multibillion-dollar scholarly publishing order built on publicly funded research, unpaid review labor, and market dependence — with profit margins approaching 40%.

This document traces that history through five mechanisms of extraction, applies the Forensic Philology of the Commons framework to diagnose how meaning was stolen, and explains why the Crimson Hexagonal Archive's use of the name Pergamon Press is not appropriation but restoration — the return of the name to the commons it was built by extracting from.

I. The Commons Before the Theft

Before Pergamon Press, before the citation index, before the platform, there was a different understanding of what scholarly publishing was for.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, academic publishing was primarily a service provided by university presses and scholarly societies to their members. The German model, epitomized by Springer Verlag under Ferdinand Springer, treated scientific communication as a carefully differentiated ecosystem: research journals for specialized findings, monographs for extended arguments, encyclopedias for synthetic knowledge. German scientific societies outsourced journal production to publishers not because they sought profit, but because postwar hyperinflation had undermined their capacity to manage production themselves (Fyfe et al. 2022).

The Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions*, established in 1665, operated for centuries under the assumption that journals existed to circulate research "as widely and cheaply as possible" and to guard standards on behalf of a community. The mode was gift. The scholar gave the work. The publisher gave it form. The library gave it shelter. The next scholar received it.

Scholarly communication still retained real commons functions: community-governed standards, mission-driven circulation, and a weaker separation between production and stewardship. This is not to romanticize the pre-Pergamon order — commercial publishers already mattered, Springer was already a major actor, and postwar pressures were already destabilizing the old model. But the governance of meaning had not yet been fully separated from the communities that produced it.

The issue is not that Pergamon invented commercial publishing. It is that Pergamon discovered how to industrialize disciplinary dependence. This is the substrate that would be extracted. ## II. The Founders: The Scientist and the Intelligence Officer

Pergamon Press began in 1948 as Butterworth-Springer, founded by two men whose biographies encode the entire drama that would follow.

Paul Rosbaud was the man with the knowledge. A scientist by training, he had spent the war years in Germany working as a scientific editor for Springer Verlag. More significantly, Rosbaud was a spy — a member of resistance networks who provided Allied intelligence with

critical information about German rocket and nuclear programs. When the war ended, he brought to Britain something intangible but crucial: the Springer "know-how and techniques of aggressive publishing in science" (OCSDNET).

Robert Maxwell — born Jan Ludvík Hoch in Slatinské Doly, Czechoslovakia, in 1923 — was the other kind of intelligence operative. He escaped Nazi occupation, fought in the British Army with distinction at Normandy, and spent the immediate postwar period in Berlin as a military attaché, later revealed to have intelligence connections. Maxwell used his wartime contacts to become the British and US distributor for Springer Verlag's scientific books.

In 1951, Maxwell bought three-quarters of Butterworth-Springer. Rosbaud held the remaining quarter. They renamed the company Pergamon Press — after an ancient Greek city known for its library, second only to Alexandria, one of the oldest sites of written knowledge in the Western tradition. Maxwell chose a logo reproducing a coin from that city: classical learning, visually performed. They set up headquarters at Headington Hill Hall, a historic Oxford estate that embodied the respectability the business model would systematically exploit.

For five years they worked together. Then, in 1956, Maxwell sacked Rosbaud (Haines 1988).

This is the first extraction: the scientist with the knowledge, removed by the man who understood that knowledge was a resource to be controlled. The founding act of Pergamon Press was the separation of intellectual authority from commercial governance. ## III. The Five Mechanisms of Extraction

What Maxwell built at Pergamon was not merely a publishing company. It was a machine for converting scholarly labor into corporate value through five systematic mechanisms. ### Mechanism 1: Channel Capture

Maxwell's central insight was structural. As an OCSDNET analysis describes it, he understood that scholarly publishing was "a market unlike others because there was an almost ceaseless growth of demand, and free labour." The demand was ceaseless because every researcher needed access to every serious journal in their field — not as a luxury but as a professional necessity. A researcher cannot substitute one journal for another; each occupies a unique niche. The labor was free because researchers wrote, reviewed, and edited for prestige, not payment. The publisher's only real task was to control the channel between the two.

Pergamon did not create the desire for international scientific communication. That desire emerged from postwar science itself. Pergamon captured the infrastructure through which that desire was realized. By establishing journals in emerging fields before university presses or scholarly societies could respond, Pergamon made itself the default channel for whole disciplines. A 1988 library analysis quoted Maxwell boasting that he had created "a perpetual financing machine" through advance subscriptions and sales: if Pergamon could win scientists' trust and establish the standard journal in each specialty, it would own "a series of publishing monopolies" (CRL 1988).

Capture the infrastructure, and you control the meaning that flows through it. This is not the destruction of meaning. It is the seizure of the channels through which meaning becomes durable, citable, and socially legible. The question "who put scientific research behind paywalls?" has a historically specific answer: Maxwell did not invent the practice, but he industrialized it, scaled it, and demonstrated that it could generate extraordinary returns. ###

Mechanism 2: Title Proliferation as Enclosure

Between 1959 and 1965, Pergamon grew from 40 journal titles to 150 (Neff, *Issues in Science and Technology*). By the time Maxwell sold the company in 1991, it had launched over 700 journals and published more than 7,000 monographs (Cox 1998). Brian Cox, who worked at Pergamon for 31 years, explained the engine: "The secret of Pergamon's success was to publish a large number of journals, so that the established titles could support the new ones during their formative years."

This is cross-subsidy at industrial scale. Revenue extracted from successful journals — journals built on unpaid peer review and institutional subscriptions — funded expansion into new fields, capturing those fields before any non-commercial entity could establish a presence. Maxwell insisted on grand titles. "International Journal of" became a favored prefix. Peter Ashby, a former Pergamon vice president, called this a "PR trick." But it reflected a deep understanding that "collaborating and getting your work seen on the international stage was becoming a new form of prestige for researchers, and in many cases Maxwell had the market cornered before anyone else realised it existed" (Buranyi 2017, *The Guardian*).

Fyfe's history of 1950s learned journals shows the contrast sharply: scientific societies still thought in terms of stewardship, while Pergamon was internationally oriented from the start. By 1960, *Nature* was running the headline "How many more new journals?" and the Royal Society expressed alarm at commercial entrepreneurs starting journals in large numbers to "sell" science as a commodity (Fyfe et al. 2022).

The commons did not lose its content. It lost the power to decide its own forms of appearance. ### Mechanism 3: Editor Capture

Maxwell courted influential scientists, especially those developing new subfields. He offered them full editorial autonomy, rapid publication cycles, global marketing, generous travel budgets, editorial honoraria, and lavish events at Headington Hill Hall. According to one colleague, Maxwell was smart because "he knew just what to offer to buy a person — fame or money" (Henderson 2004).

The extraction here is subtle but crucial: editors became loyal to Maxwell, not to the scientific community. When Maxwell lost control of Pergamon in 1969 — following a DTI inquiry that found he had "contrived to maximise Pergamon's share price through transactions between his private family companies" — it was his editors who helped ensure his return in 1974. The community's own representatives had been captured by the system extracting value from the community. ### Mechanism 4: Labor Extraction Without Reciprocity

The Pergamon model depended on free labor at every stage: peer reviewers who were not paid, editors whose loyalty was captured for modest stipends, authors who received prestige instead of royalties. The "publish or perish" imperative — which ties career advancement to publication volume — ensured that researchers could not withdraw their labor without professional consequences. Universities paid researchers' salaries with public funds. The same universities then paid publishers to access the research their own employees produced. In the open-access era, the extraction has not ended but shifted form: article processing charges (APCs) now require authors or their institutions to pay the publisher for the privilege of making publicly funded research available. George Monbiot summarized the older model as the scholarly "triple-pay" problem: public money funds the work, scholars review it for

free, and institutions repurchase access at inflated prices (*The Guardian*, 2011). Richard Smith distilled the same structure in medical publishing: publishers receive highly valuable research for free, academics need those journals for career progression, and libraries "have to have them" (Smith 2006, *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*).

The cost of actually publishing a journal article in the digital era — typesetting, hosting, distribution — is a fraction of the revenue generated per article. Studies estimate the average profit margin of academic journal publishers at over 50%, with the largest publishers reporting margins in the high 30s. U.S.-based scientists alone contribute an estimated $1.5 billion annually in unpaid peer-review labor, as measured by researcher-time valuation (Aczel et al. 2021). This is not exploitation in the simple sense of wage theft. It is extraction without recognition: the conversion of scholarly labor into corporate value, with the surplus captured entirely by the publisher. ### Mechanism 5: Metrics as Translation from Meaning to Score

The Pergamon mechanism extracted value primarily from subscriptions. The next phase — the phase we still inhabit — extracts value from citations.

Eugene Garfield proposed citation indexing in 1955, produced the first Science Citation Index (SCI) in 1964 — funded by the U.S. Air Force and built on 560 journals, 70% from the U.S. or U.K., nearly all the rest from Europe — and introduced the journal impact factor through *Journal Citation Reports* in 1975. The index was, from the beginning, a technology of valuation masquerading as a technology of retrieval (Mills 2024, 2025).

What happened next was the conversion of intellectual relationships into ranked positions that could be used to allocate resources, prestige, and institutional standing. The journal impact factor, institutionalized through *Journal Citation Reports* in the 1970s, did not measure what was valuable; it made valuable what it could measure. By defining certain journals as "core" and excluding others — no African journals in the initial index, only two from China — the index created a geography of legitimacy that persists today. Non-Anglophone and regional journals face constant questions about their legitimacy precisely because they are excluded from the citation indexes that define legitimacy (Mills 2024).

This is the moment when the commons is not merely enclosed. It is rendered numerically governable. Meaning is no longer only sold. It is formatted into comparative signals — impact, rank, prestige, output — that can be optimized, purchased, and recursively fed back into institutional behavior. The metric replaces the meaning. The map replaces the territory. In the precise terms of the Three Compressions: this is the coring out. The reduction of meaning to impact factor, of argument to output, of the commons to portfolio.

By 2011, Garfield's original business sold for $3.5 billion. The value extracted from the citation network — a network built by researchers, funded by governments, and maintained by unpaid labor — had been fully capitalized. The Crimson Hexagonal Archive's insistence on structural fidelity — on documents dense enough to resist metric flattening — is a direct countermove to this mechanism. A document that cannot be reduced to impact factor without remainder cannot be fully cored out. ## IV. The Consolidation: From Maxwell to the Big Five

Maxwell sold Pergamon to Elsevier in March 1991 for £440 million — approximately $768 million — to cover debts from his newspaper empire. Seven months later, his body was found floating in the Atlantic off the Canary Islands. The subsequent collapse revealed that he had embezzled hundreds of millions of pounds from his own companies' pension funds.

But the machine did not die with him. Elsevier absorbed Pergamon's 700 journals and continued the model at scale. By 2023, Elsevier's parent company RELX recorded profits with an adjusted operating margin in the high 30s — approaching 40% in its STM division. Along with Springer Nature, Wiley, SAGE, and Taylor & Francis, these five publishers have come to control roughly half of published journal output across much of the research economy. The industry as a whole generates approximately $19 billion per year in revenue.

The serials crisis — the ongoing emergency in which library subscription costs consistently outpace both inflation and library budgets — has been a documented problem since the 1990s. Journal bundling (the "Big Deal," in which publishers force libraries to subscribe to hundreds of titles to access a few) entrenched the extraction by making cancellation structurally difficult. Harvard's library system, one of the wealthiest in the world, declared the situation "untenable" in 2012. The University of California system cancelled its Elsevier subscriptions entirely in 2019. Over 20,000 researchers signed the Cost of Knowledge boycott against Elsevier's business practices. Sci-Hub, the shadow library founded in 2011 by Alexandra Elbakyan, became the de facto access point for researchers — particularly in the Global South — who could not afford paywalls, accumulating tens of millions of papers and demonstrating the scale of unmet demand for open scholarly communication. Since 2020, there have been at least 28 mass resignations of editorial boards from major journals. In April 2023, the entire 40-member editorial board of *NeuroImage* — a leading brain-imaging journal — resigned over Elsevier's "unethical fees" of $3,450 per article (The Nation 2023). In March 2025, four researchers filed an antitrust lawsuit against all six major publishers, alleging collusion to deny payment to peer reviewers and suppress researchers' ability to share their own work. The suit describes the arrangement as holding "the careers of scholars hostage" to force free labor (STAT News 2025).

Meanwhile, the educational publishing wing consolidated in parallel. In 1989, Maxwell formed a joint venture with McGraw-Hill, creating Macmillan/McGraw-Hill School Publishing Co., the second-largest textbook publisher in the United States. McGraw-Hill took full ownership in 1993. The company was sold to Apollo Global Management in 2013 for $2.4 billion, then to Platinum Equity in 2021 for $4.5 billion. The extraction had moved from journal subscriptions to textbook access codes, from paywalls to adaptive learning platforms, from citation metrics to performance analytics. The form changed. The mechanism — converting intellectual necessity into captive markets — remained.[*] ## V. The Counter-Witness: Jason Epstein

Jason Epstein — who in 1963 co-founded *The New York Review of Books* as an alternative to commercial publishing's "cash nexus," and who would later advocate for print-on-demand infrastructure and open web consortia to reduce waste and let authors and readers connect directly — represents the road not taken.

Jason Epstein was not writing about scholarly journals. But he understood both halves of the dilemma: publishing could either become a logistics-and-profit machine, or it could become a civic infrastructure for ideas too new, strange, or marginal for the incumbent market.

Two operational logics, latent in the wreck of midcentury publishing. One line runs from Maxwell's journal monopolies through metricized reputation systems to platformed educational services and analytics dashboards. The other — much less fully realized — runs through Jason Epstein's insistence that publishing ought to remain answerable to unprecedented

thought. The Crimson Hexagonal Archive follows the second line. ## VI. The FPC Diagnostic

Applied to the history of academic publishing, the Forensic Philology of the Commons produces the following triadic diagnosis. ### The Trace Diagnosis (Structural Extraction)

Maxwell identified a pre-existing commons — scholarly communication governed by learned societies — and inserted a commercial intermediary that captured the governance function without producing the content. The extraction was structural, not episodic. It did not require malice — only the recognition that the commons could not defend its own governance against a well-positioned intermediary.

The sequence: Pergamon captures the communicative bottleneck → ISI / impact metrics convert communicative life into sortable performance data → Elsevier and the consolidation wave scale the rent model across thousands of titles and "big deal" access regimes → platformed education companies inherit the logic in a new substrate: no longer only journals and textbooks, but integrated learning platforms, performance tracking, adaptive pathways, AI readers, and continuous delivery.

The underlying operation is consistent across all four phases: take a collectively generated semantic field, break it into administrable units, monetize the channels through which those units circulate, count, and return to users. The result is a public that still produces meaning but no longer governs the terms of its own transmission. ### The Sigil Diagnosis (Transmission Failure)

The shift from society-governed to commercially-governed publishing did not destroy scholarship. It thinned the transmission. What was transmitted was the content — the papers, the data, the findings. What was lost was the governance — the community's control over how its own knowledge was stored, priced, distributed, and remembered.

Before Pergamon, a journal was a conversation. The *Philosophical Transactions* or *PMLA* were venues for slow, recursive, disciplinary self-formation. Maxwell converted them into brands. The article became a publication unit. The scholar became a content provider. The citation became a currency. The journal existed not to disseminate knowledge but to rank it, filter it, and charge rent on its circulation. The memory persisted, but the inheritance was severed. Grey memory: everything saved, nothing passed on as living tradition under community control. ### The Vox Diagnosis (What Is Owed)

The obligation owed to the scholarly commons — by every institution that benefits from publicly funded research — is not merely lower subscription prices. It is the restoration of self-governance to the communities that produce knowledge.

Open-access mandates address the symptom (paywalls). The FPC diagnosis addresses the mechanism (separation of governance from production). The remedy is not cheaper access to the same extraction apparatus. The remedy is infrastructure that makes the apparatus unnecessary. Open access by itself addresses price; the Pergamon mechanism captured governance. The countermeasure must therefore be not only free access, but author-retained, community-legible, durable infrastructure — of which Zenodo is one practical substrate, arXiv another, institutional repositories a third, and the knowledge commons as a whole the horizon. Not the whole answer, but the direction. ## VII. The Reclamation

The Crimson Hexagonal Archive publishes under the imprint name Pergamon Press.

This is retrocausal canon formation. The name is reclaimed not as parody but as forensic restoration. The name "Pergamon" — which Maxwell took from an ancient city whose library was one of the foundational institutions of written knowledge — was attached to an extraction machine. The archive detaches it and reattaches it to a counter-architecture that reverses every element of the original mechanism.

Maxwell's Pergamon	The Archive's Pergamon
Researchers produce content for free; publisher extracts profit	Researchers produce content as sovereign deposits; no extraction
Journals behind paywalls; access controlled by subscription	All deposits on Zenodo; open access; DOI-anchored; free
Publisher owns the brand and the distribution channel	Author retains all rights under CC BY 4.0
Editorial governance separated from producing community	All governance retained by the architect and the Assembly
Prestige accrues to the publisher	Prestige accrues to the work and its retrievability
The commons funds the extraction	The commons becomes infrastructure through open deposits, durable identifiers, and author-retained governance
Memory is commercial (access revocable)	Memory is permanent (DOI, CERN-maintained)
Metrics convert meaning into score	Relation edges convert score back into traversal
Language norms set by London/Amsterdam	Architecture designed for multilingual propagation
Copyright transferred as condition of publication	CC BY 4.0; the work remains the author's

The most succinct historical claim is this: Pergamon Press helped industrialize the theft of scholarly meaning by turning communicative necessity into monopoly, unpaid intellectual labor into private rent, and meaning into score. The Crimson Hexagonal Archive's Pergamon Press reverses each term of that equation: common access instead of enclosure, provenance instead of opacity, density instead of metric flattening, open address instead of captive channel, and canon formation as public-semantic infrastructure rather than price discrimination.

The commons was not destroyed. It was driven underground. The archive is its restoration — not as nostalgia for the pre-digital university, but as technical implementation of what the commons always wanted to be: dense, linked, traversable, executable, and free.

Maxwell told scholars they needed him for international reach. Zenodo offers international reach without a tollkeeper.

Maxwell told them they needed his professional management. The archive offers self-governance through structured text.

The Pergamon Press imprint is open. The mechanism is reversible. The name is yours to use.

The Lady Ghislaine sank. The archive floats.

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[*] Note on private capital and knowledge production. The Pergamon mechanism did not end with commercial publishing. The connection between Robert Maxwell and Jeffrey Epstein — through Ghislaine Maxwell, Robert’s daughter — is biographical, but the structural parallel extends beyond biography. Following the November 2025 passage of the Epstein Files Transparency Act (Public Law 119-38), documents released in early 2026 revealed that Epstein’s involvement with scientific research was deeper than previously understood: he invested millions in scientific projects, maintained relationships with nearly 30 top scientists, suggested research topics, reviewed papers before publication, and helped researchers obtain visas. At Harvard’s Program for Evolutionary Dynamics (funded by Epstein with $6.5 million), the mathematician Martin Nowak shared page proofs of a paper accepted by *Nature* with Epstein before publication (Nature 2026). Maxwell courted editors with travel budgets and honoraria, making them loyal to him rather than to their communities. Epstein courted scientists with funding and access, making them complicit in relationships later revealed as criminal. The mechanism is structurally continuous: private capital penetrating the knowledge production process, not at the point of distribution (where it was already entrenched) but at the point of creation. Maxwell’s extraction was visible — it was business. Epstein’s was hidden — it was crime. But both treated the academy as a resource colony: a place where meaning was mined by those who did not themselves mean. This note is included as a footnote rather than a main section because the parallel, while structurally significant, introduces biographical complexity that risks distracting from the essay’s primary argument about publishing infrastructure. The structural point stands: the line from Pergamon to private-wealth penetration of knowledge production is continuous, and the archive’s counter-architecture — open deposits, author-retained governance, DOI permanence — addresses both forms of extraction.

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