

Drawing Inspiration from the World of Fine Art in the Battle Against Predatory Publishing

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Abstract

Peer review underpins the integrity of the scientific archive and has done so for over 350 years. Over the past ten years or so, this integrity has come under pressure due to the introduction of predatory publishers and journals. Papers in predatory journals have, typically, not gone through robust peer review, if any at all. If these papers enter the scientific archive, its integrity will deteriorate. Moreover, legitimate journals will cite papers from predatory journals, which further dilutes the integrity of the scientific archive. The scholarly community has struggled to address the problems brought about by predatory publishers and journals. In this paper, we propose an approach, which draws on the fine art world. They use the concept of a catalogue raisonné to list all the validated work by a given artist and, by extension, identify fakes. A scholarly version will have some differences to the art discipline, but the central idea is the same. A publisher is analyzed, through a peer reviewed paper. This catalogue can be used by authors, and other stakeholders (e.g. librarians, promotion panels and hiring committees), to make more informed decisions.

Keywords Predatory publishing \cdot Publication ethics \cdot Catalogue raisonné \cdot Open access \cdot Peer review

Introduction

'Predatory Publishing is in Danger of Destroying the Scientific Archive in the Same Way That Climate Change is in Danger of Destroying the Planet'

The Royal Society was formed on the 28 November 1660. They published the world's first science journal, *Philosophical Transactions*, in 1665, establishing the

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concept of peer review, which remains the central tenet of scientific publishing to this day. If we do not address the issues raised by predatory publishers/journals we are in danger of undermining, if not destroying, a system that has stood the test of time for the past 350 years.

In the *traditional* scientific publishing model, the reader, either through direct payment or (more usually) through institution subscriptions, pays to access a given article. The copyright of the paper is transferred by the author to the journal. The *open access* model requires the author (or its stakeholders) to pay to publish the article. The copyright remains with the author, but the journal provides free access to anybody who wishes to read the paper.

Predatory publishing exploits the open access model by establishing a journal, seeking contributions from authors, publishing their papers and charging them an Article Processing Charge (APC). The key element that is missing is robust, if any, peer review. This means that papers that enter the scientific archive will gradually invalidate that archive.

Authors face a particular challenge in that it is often difficult to determine whether a journal is predatory or not. There are services available that can help. These include Beall's List, Scopus, Web of Science and Cabells, but these are either outdated (Beall's List), not really designed to identify predatory journals (Scopus and Web of Science) or are subscription services, so not accessible to all (Cabells).

Check lists may also help, some of which we mention below, which have been published in peer reviewed papers. There are also online resources such as Think, Check Submit (https://thinkchecksubmit.org/, last accessed 17 August 2022), which asks a series of questions, and it then assesses the journal for you. The issue with checklists is that there is a certain amount of work that has to be done and some authors may not want to put in that effort. It would be a lot easier if there was a binary choice as to whether a journal was predatory or not, just by searching for the ISSN or the title. Indeed, this is what services such as Beall's List and Cabells are designed to do.

Other organizations exist, such as the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ, https://doaj.org/, last accessed 17 August 2022), the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE, https://publicationethics.org/, last accessed 17 August 2022) and the Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association (OASPA, https://oaspa.org/, last accessed 17 August 2022). These are all valuable resources and will help inform your view as to whether a journal is predatory or not, although they are not definitive.

It is not only authors that need to be able to identify predatory journals, but also those who are validating CVs for reasons such as promotion, job interviews, grant awards, offering editorial positions and keynote/plenary speaking engagements.

One way that the problem of predatory publishing could be addressed, and largely eliminated, is to make it easy for others to check somebody's CV, so that it is apparent, if not obvious, when somebody has published in a predatory journal. This would remove the author's motivation to publish in a predatory journal as the paper would not add to their CV and, very possibly, detract from it.

In this paper, we propose a new way to tackle the issues posed by predatory publishers and journals. It draws on the world of fine art, which faces similar problems in the form of forgeries. It also draws on the process that underpins scientific publishing, that is peer review. By combining these two principles it should be possible to eliminate predatory publishers/journals by enabling authors, and other stakeholders, access to a trusted repository which enables them to make a judgement as to whether a publisher/journal is predatory or not.

Related Work

Predatory Publishing

In 2009, Beall [1] analyzed the publisher Bentham Open, saying that the 236 journals they published were of questionable quality and that they exploited the Open Access model. Beall investigated a further 17 publishers in three follow up articles [2–4], concluding that all the publishers were predatory apart from one. Kendall and Linacre [5] have looked at these publishers again, ten years after the original analysis. The legacy left by Beall is discussed in Kendall [6], which includes a discussion of Beall's List and some of the criticisms levelled at Beall.

The number of predatory journals and articles appears to be increasing, rather than decreasing [7]. This view is supported by Downes [8] who says that we have not heeded the warnings given by Beall. Linacre [9], states that the Cabells database holds information on approximately 15,000 journals, with about 150 journals being added to their Predatory Reports database each month.

It is not only the number of predatory articles that are increasing, but the scholarly community is also paying more attention to this topic. Figure 1 shows the number of papers that have been published by Web of Science and Scopus using the search term "Predatory Publishing" (the quotes are part of the search). It shows that Web of Science has indexed 267 papers and Scopus has indexed 296 papers. We have excluded 2022 from this graph, as the year is not yet complete but for completeness, in 2022, Scopus has indexed 35 papers and Web of Science has indexed 28. Perhaps of more interest are the trend lines that show the number of papers being indexed by both bibliographic search engines is rising.

It is worth noting that, in 2021, both Scopus and Web of Science indexed the highest number of papers on "Predatory Publishing" than in any previous year.

If papers, that have not been subject to robust peer review, enter the scientific archive, this damages the integrity of the archive. Moreover, if legitimate papers cite predatory papers, this can provide false legitimacy to the predatory journal, enabling them to say that their papers are being cited by legitimate, high impact journals. The risk to research integrity has been highlighted by Angadi and Kaur [10] who say that the need to publish has reached new pinnacles, leading to a new threat to academic integrity in the form of predatory journals.



Fig. 1 Number of papers published by Web of Science and Scopus that discuss Predatory Publishing (Data collected 27 July 2022)

Addressing Predatory Publishing

Scientific Literature

There have been several suggestions as to how the issues presented by predatory publishing can be addressed.

Al-Khatib [11] comments that "*It is painfully evident that the scientific community is not taking sufficient measures to selectively cull predatory publishers or curb their deceptive practices*" and proposes five actions that should be taken to reduce, if not remove, predatory journals. These include having an agreed definition of predatory journals and publishers, institutions not using the quantity of publications as a measure of academic performance and reputable publishers blowing the whistle on predatory publishers, even if that leads to legal action.

Dadkhah and Bianciardi [12] suggests a ranking approach for predatory journals, based on 14 criteria. They suggest that young editors could use this ranking mechanism to improve their journals.

Ksciens's list of predatory journals and publishers has been proposed by Kakamad et al. [13]. A committee of 23 young researchers maintain a list which aims to expose the tactics of predatory publishers. One of their aims is to fill the gap left by Beall's list [14, 15] and to provide more objective evidence than was present in that list.

Kisely [16] provides advice on the dangers of predatory journals, how to use lists to spot predatory and legitimate journals and to raise awareness of the warning signs that may indicate that a journal or publisher is predatory.

Lopez and Gaspard [17] developed a set of tools to empower librarians to make informed decisions when appraising journals, websites and conferences. Focused on medical librarians, the tool could be developed so that it can be used across different disciplines.

One tactic that has been employed to demonstrate that a journal is predatory is to carry out a *sting* operation. One of the most well-known is a paper that was submitted (and accepted) that simply repeated the phrase "*Get me of Your Fucking Mailing List*". Kendall [18] investigated the journal that accepted this paper, showing that it has published more papers since accepting the spoof paper, demonstrating that submitting spoof papers is ineffectual.

Frandsen et al. [19] suggests that librarians can play an active role by identifying questionable journals which are then used in the consideration of tenure and promotion applications. The focus of the paper was to get feedback from academics on their perceived fairness of this system. Two thirds of the respondents were satisfied with the process, although it was noted that the sample size was small (57 completed questionnaires, of the 211 invites sent out).

Frandsen et al. [20] discouraged publishing in questionable journals with the aim of increasing your number of papers in the hope of being promoted to professor. KNUST university in Ghana implemented a verification process for all professorial applications. Since 2019, 221 researchers have applied for promotion, with 20% not meeting the criteria.

Commercial Services

There are commercial services that enable the quality of a journal to be validated. These can be used to ascertain the impact factor of a journal, with Scopus and Clarivate (Web of Science) being the most well-known and most reputable. Even these services have indexed (potential) predatory journals [21], many of which have been removed but it remains an ongoing issue.

Cabells offers a subscription service where you are able to access Predatory Reports, which provide an analysis of journals which are considered predatory. Their database holds over 15,000 journals [9].

Other Options

Beall's List [6] is still widely used but it was criticized even before it was taken down and now, over four years after it was removed, it is gradually getting more and more out of date. There have been some efforts to maintain the list, but the resource is inevitably less useful than it was. A recent paper has suggested how the 55 criteria in the 2015 version of Beall's can be updated by retaining 9, eliminating 24 and correcting the remaining 22 [22].

Think, Check Submit (https://thinkchecksubmit.org/, last accessed 17 August 2022) is another resource and, whilst useful, it is not the definitive go-to place for all researchers.

Catalogue Raisonné

Before an auction house or dealer buys or sells a work of art, they may refer to the *catalogue raisonné* for a given artist. This catalogue is a comprehensive, annotated list of all the known, authentic works for a given artist. Occasionally, the catalogue may also list known fakes/forgeries.

The catalogue raisonné is the definitive resource. If a work of art is not in the catalogue, then an auction house or dealer is much less likely to accept the work as being by the artist and essentially, it is a considered a probable fake, or least they are not willing to take the chance.

The catalogue provides details such as, the title of the work of art, its size, when it was produced, the medium, its current location, its owner, the provenance, its exhibition history, its last known condition, citation(s) to where it has been discussed, a full description of the work, any reproductions that are known about and any other relevant attributes.

Realizing that this paper is not aimed at the art discipline, some readers may be unfamiliar with the idea of catalogue raisonné. We encourage readers to search for the term catalogue raisonné at their preferred book seller. This will bring up the catalogues for many artists, with many of them running to several volumes.

The term *catalogue raisonné* is believed to have originated in Paris in the 1720's [23], with the first catalogue being produced for Rembrandt in 1751 [24, 25]. Even though the idea of a catalogue raisonné is mostly associated with the art world, the concept of a catalogue raisonné does exist in scientific disciplines.

In 1837, a catalogue raisonné of the 12,000 volumes in the Library of the Medical Society of Edinburgh was published [26]. The preface to this 378 page volume says (edited, just to draw out the pertinent points):

'The collection of books now consists of upwards of 12,000 volumes. Of these a catalogue has long existed, arranged according to the authors' names in alphabetical order. But though perfectly adapted to facilitate the labours of the Librarian, it is obvious that to the Student, such a catalogue does not afford any means of ascertaining what sources of information the Society has to offer him, or what are the standard works on any subject to which he may wish particularly to direct his attention.'

'The formation of a Catalogue Raisonné has been attempted on various occasions since the commencement of the present century, but from causes which it is difficult to trace, the undertaking hitherto has always been unsuccessful.'

In the winter of 1835, a few members of the Society renewed the attempt, and the Society, anxious to render its Library as much as possible available to the Students of the Medical School, strenuously encouraged the design, and at length resolved that the Catalogue Raisonné should be printed at the expense of the Society.

In 1855 William Ogle [27], in a letter to the Association Medical journal, said:

'Every student of his profession must have felt the want of a catalogue raisonné to the works of medical writers. I have often felt this want, and, but for the expense of the undertaking, would have endeavoured to supply it, believing that it would be a boon to the profession. From an experiment that I have made, I judge that the work, though arduous, would not be Herculean.'

'Would it not be possible to allow a corner of the Association Journal for such a purpose?'

The editor responded:

'Such a work is very much wanted. A 'corner' of this journal would not suffice; and, by the vast majority of readers, the catalogue would not be appreciated in proportion to the space occupied and the expense incurred.'

The editor went on to mention the catalogue raisonné of the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh [26] and the London Journal of Medicine as containing useful classified catalogues of contemporary writings.

The library of St Bartholomew's Hospital and College produced a catalogue [28]. It was not labelled as a catalogue raisonné, but the 460 page volume is a complete catalogue of the library. Looking through this volume it is apparent that many libraries produced these type of volumes, given the number of entries with "catalogue" in the title.

Another example of a scientific catalogue raisonné is York and Steinberg [29, 30]. These two related papers present an introduction to the life and work of John Hughlings Jackson and a catalogue raisonné of the writings of Jackson, which covers his work from 1861 to 1909.

Khedkar et al. [31], although not a catalogue raisonné, is an example of a peer reviewed publication that considers, in this case, a specific journal, reaching the conclusion that it is a cloned journal and, by extension, should be avoided. It is this type of information (peer reviewed and evidence based) that this paper is proposing.

There is no standard methodology for writing and maintaining a catalogue raisonné. They could be written by scholars, the artist themselves, the artists family, committees; indeed, any collection of individuals. This can lead to controversy such as multiple catalogues, where one item appears in one but not in the other, resulting in debates whether a particular work should appear with pressure being applied from interested stakeholders; perhaps even resorting to court cases. However, there is often one definitive resource, or one which is more respected than another. Moreover, having a catalogue raisonné, even if there are two (or more), is much better than not having one at all as much of the artists pieces will be non-controversial as it is only a small number of items that may require further investigation.

A Catalogue Raisonné for Scholarly Publishers?

In the same way that an artist can have a catalogue raisonné, we suggest that a similar approach be adopted for *any* scholarly publisher. We emphasize "any" as one of the shortcomings at the present time is the focus on identifying predatory publishers, whilst simply accepting that other publishers are legitimate. To provide a level playing field it is important all publishers are open to critical examination, in the same way that all artists can have a catalogue raisonné.

Unlike an artistic catalogue raisonné, it would not be appropriate for just *anybody* to develop a publishers' catalogue raisonné, for one simple reason. A predatory publisher could produce its own catalogue raisonné, perhaps even disguising the fact that they were behind its production, and then use that as validation of it journals. This would simply make the situation that we find ourselves in now, even worse.

As well as being a way that others can validate a given publisher/journal by accessing the catalogue raisonné, these catalogues, published in the peer reviewed, scientific literature, will form an important historic record for a given publisher/journal as it will reflect a particular status, at a given point in time and it will provide an important resource for future researchers, as well as current researchers who wish to carry out immediate checks.

A scientific catalogue raisonné should be published in the peer reviewed scientific archive. This removes one of the criticisms that was levelled at Jeffrey Beall, especially with regard to his list, that he was solely responsible for including the journal/publisher in his list, with little transparency as to why it had been included.

Transparency

In publishing a publisher's catalogue raisonné, there must be a set of checks and balances to ensure the integrity of the catalogue and to guard against predatory publishers producing their own catalogues. We propose that the following items, as checks and balances, be an integral part of the catalogue raisonné.

Where Will the Catalogue Be Published?

The catalogue raisonné for a publisher cannot be published in a journal that falls within their portfolio or is otherwise associated with any journals managed by that publisher.

Author Details

The author(s) of a catalogue raisonné should include the following information about themselves.

- A photograph
- Their name(s)

- Any unique identifiers they have such as ORCID, Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, ResearcherID, Researchgate, LinkedIn. These can be used by the reviewers/readers to validate the authors.
- Their email address(es)
- Their affiliation
- A link to their home page(s)
- Any conflicts of interest should be declared.

An author (in addition to a photograph) might provide the following, using the author of this paper by way of an example:

Name

Graham Kendall

Unique Identifiers

- ORCID ID: 0000–0003-2006–5103 URL: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2006-5103
- Google Scholar ID: VjJm3Zyaaaaj URL: https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=VjJm3zYAAAAJ
- Scopus ID: 7,006,008,493 URL: https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=7006008493
- Web of Science ID: 15,523,227 URL: https://www.webofscience.com/wos/author/record/15523227 (requires login to Web of Science)
- Web of Science ResearcherID: ABJ-5150–2022 URL: http://www.researcherid.com/ (enter ID when prompted)
- Researchgate ID: Graham-Kendall URL: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Graham-Kendall
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Conflict of interest

None.

Peer Reviewers

The catalogue raisonné must be subject to peer review and the reviewers must be listed in the catalogue.

The catalogue can be anonymously peer reviewed and, if rejected, the authors will not know who the reviewers were. Once the catalogue has been accepted, the details of the peer reviewers should be added to the camera-ready version of the manuscript.

It is recognized that publishing the names of the reviewers, for a specific paper may not be usual practice, but a catalogue raisonné should be treated as a special case and the readers have the right to know not only who wrote the catalogue but also who validated/verified its contents.

This will enable readers to check the background of all those who were involved (authors and reviewers) in publishing the catalogue, which is a vital check/balance that that catalogue has not been published by predatory publishers themselves.

The information provided by each reviewer should be the same as provided by the authors.

What Should Be in a Scientific Catalogue Raisonné

For an artist's catalogue raisonné, the structure and the information it contains is at the discretion of the author. We believe that the same should be true for a scientific version, leaving the actual contents up the authors and the peer reviewers.

It is important that anything that appears in the catalogue raisonné is evidenced based and can be verified. The only exception is the "reflections" section (see below).

In the rest of this section, we suggest what authors might want to include, but this is not prescriptive. Indeed, for some of the suggestions, it may not be applicable, or the data may not be available. There will also be information that authors wish to include but which is not suggested here.

Introduction

It would be useful for the reader, and for future reference, to provide details of the date when the data was collected, together with the process that was adopted in stud-ying the publishers/journals.

The date is important so that, as other catalogues are produced for this publisher/ journal, there is a timeline, not only when the paper itself was published but also when the data was collected.

The adopted process may also be useful to others who are considering writing a catalogue for another publisher, or even looking to adopt a similar process for a revised catalogue for the same publisher.

Publisher

Details about the publisher may include (but not be limited to):

- The legal status of the publisher. For example, is it a company, is it a charity; or some other type of organization?
- In what country does the publisher operate from? Do they solely operate out of this country, or are do they have other offices?
- Any business information that can be presented without breaching confidentiality. This could include (but not be limited to), links to annual reports, links to financial statements, company structure, members of the board and shareholdings.
- What details are available about the publisher's web site, by looking at services such as https://who.is/?

Journals published

Details about each journal that the publisher publishes could include:

- The title
- Its aims and scope
- The ISSN(s)
- When the journal was first published
- The current Editor-in-Chief, and their predecessor(s). Details could include their email address, their home page, the start and end dates of their tenure, and any unique identifiers they have, such as ORCID, Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science etc.
- The current Associate Editors' details, and their predecessors. The details listed could be the same as for the Editor-in-Chief.
- A list of the volumes and issues that have been published.
- A complete list of papers that the journal has published. These should not be in a bibliography, as it would not be appropriate to have them considered as citations and included in calculations such as those for impact factors.
- Have there been any retractions, probably with reference to Retraction Watch (https://retractionwatch.com/)?
- It may be appropriate just to list any retractions, but it may also be sensible to give more details, depending on the circumstances.
- Where is the journal indexed?
- What is its impact factor history (from providers, such as Scopus and Clarivate). Are other impact factors claimed? Can these be verified?
- Is the journal printed, on-line or both?
- Is the journal open access, traditional or hybrid?
- If the journal is open access, what are the Article Processing Charges (APC's), or any other charges?

- Is the journal a member of bodies such as COPE (Committee of Publication Ethics), DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals) and/or Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association (OASPA)?
- Has the journal received any media coverage?
- If available, what is the average review time, however this is expressed (e.g. time to first decision, time to publication etc.)?
- When a paper is published, who holds the copyright to the paper?

Other Details

There are other details that a catalogue may want to note. Many of these details may be informed from the other resources referenced in this paper (and others) referenced in this paper that suggests how predatory publishers and journals can be identified, or at least things that authors might like to consider when deciding whether to submit to a specific journal or not.

Some suggestions as to what might be noted include:

- Do the journals provide named contacts for its staff?
- Do the staff have emails specifically for them, or are they generic email account (e.g. info@, editor@ etc., rather than jane.doe@publisher.com)?
- Are the email accounts used by the journal/publisher generic email accounts (e.g. gmail) or are they related to the domain of the journal?
- When you submit a paper to a journal, is this done through a page to which every journal links to? That is, does each journal have its one submission web page, rather than a generic page at the level of the publisher?
- If you pay an article processing fee, is this done through a web page related to the journal, or a page that services all journals from that publisher?

None of the above, on their own are necessarily a reason to conclude that a journal is predatory, but the information can be used to inform others to arrive at their own conclusion.

We recognize that some of the data above could be voluminous, especially the list of published papers, if the author wishes to include this data. It will be appropriate, necessary even, to publish some of the catalogue as supplementary data, so that the core of the catalogue can be presented in a way that meets the requirements of the target journal.

Reflections

All the information in the previous sections should be evidence based and verifiable. In a reflections section, the author(s) are invited to provide their thoughts and opinions on a journal and/or publisher, should they wish to do so. These opinions should be informed by the evidence that has been presented, but it affords the author(s) an opportunity to be more subjective. For example, the author(s) may wish to state whether they believe whether the publisher is predatory, or not, providing reasons to support their view. This is akin to an artistic catalogue listing a painting that has not been authenticated and stating that it is possibly a forgery. This is not the norm in an artistic catalogue. If a painting is not in the catalogue, it is considered a forgery or, at least, not yet verified to be by the artist.

A scientific catalogue is different. It will list all the journals from a given publisher and the reflections sections provides the opportunity, should the author wish to express a view, whether the publisher and/or its journals are predatory.

The author(s) may also wish to draw up some positive aspects of the journal/ publisher, rather than reserving the reflections purely for negative thoughts.

Web Site Archive

It is recommended that the publisher's web site is archived so that the scientific community have not only the peer reviewed paper to refer to, but also the web site at that point in time. The most frequently used tool to do this is Wayback Machine (https://archive.org/web/).

Peer Reviewing a Scientific Catalogue Raisonné

When peer reviewing a scientific catalogue raisonné, peer reviewers should review the catalogue as they would any other paper. We would also suggest that particular attention is made to the following.

- The author(s) of the catalogue should be critically appraised. Their credentials should receive particular attention. The reviewers should satisfy themselves that their various profiles reflect who the author(s) claim to be and that they also have a publication/scholarly track record which qualifies them to be the author of a catalogue.
- Much of the catalogue should be evidenced based and the reviewer should satisfy themselves that the catalogue truly reflects the publisher and the journals it publishes.
- If there is a reflections section (or whatever the author(s) have named it), this is more subjective, but the reviewers should satisfy themselves that the opinions being given are fair and are supported by the evidence base.

Concluding Remarks

It is time for the scholarly community to come together, with an agreed plan, to tackle the issues that arise from predatory publishing. Predatory publishing is a growing concern and has been for at least ten years. The scientific community does not appear to be capable of stemming, let alone reducing, the increase in the number of predatory publishers/journals, despite peer reviewed publications and several initiatives proposing ways to do this. The community must act in a coherent, coordinated way, to stop this increasent rise.

This issue needs to be addressed with some urgency. Failure to do so will result in the scientific archive becoming so infected that we will no longer be able to rely on it as we will not know which papers are in predatory journals and, even if we know a given paper has been published in a legitimate journal, can we have confidence that the papers it cites are in legitimate journals?

We hope that the scholarly community will publish scientific catalogue raisonné's, so that there is a critical, but fair, analysis of the journals by a given publisher so that authors, librarians and other stakeholders can make an informed judgement about a specific journal.

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