

# The Experience of *CLC Web* With an Interview with Brittany Murray

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## Abstract

This article aims to propose some reflections on the impact of open access publications in the field of comparative literature and cultural studies. The publishing experience of the open access journal *CLC Web* will be reviewed in dialogue with its Editor-in-Chief, Brittany Murray.

## Keywords

Open Access; Digital Humanities; Open Journal System; Online Academic Publishing

# The Experience of *CLC Web* With an Interview with Brittany Murray

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*CLC – Comparative Literature and Culture*, <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/> first appeared on the website of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Alberta in 1999 and moved to Purdue University Press - within the repertoire of Purdue University Libraries – in 2000. As a journal, it has long been one of the major contributors to the dissemination of comparative literature and cultural studies worldwide. It is an open access journal, free of publication costs, with a Creative Commons By-Nc-Nd license, which adopts double-blind peer review and publishes four issues annually. *CLC Web* is indexed in the most important directories: Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Clarivate Analytics), Humanities Index (EBSCO), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), MLA and Purpose. The journal is a member of the Council of Editors of Learned Journals (USA), is listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals, and is archived in the Electronic Collection of Library and Archives Canada.

Attempting to draw up the balance, twenty-four years after the first issue appeared, can serve two general functions. The first is to draw attention again to an academic journal which, although less consulted today by scholars pertaining to the Italian field of study, offers an editorial perspective of great international impact. To illustrate the nature of this impact, I will summarize the history of *CLC Web* by comparing it with the most recent editorial policy that was formulated by the current director of the journal, Brittany Murray, during our interview. The second function of this report is to reflect on the open access editorial model proposed by a journal of literary and cultural studies which coexists alongside a non-humanistic

editorial production within a broad and inclusive university press project.

In its declaration *CLC Web* proposes itself as the site where the production of comparative literature and cultural studies is recognized under the label of “comparative cultural studies”. Its theoretical and methodological reference framework is built on principles borrowed from the discipline of comparative literature and from the field of cultural studies, in which the following ones are privileged: the theoretical and methodological approach, the global and intercultural context with its relative plurality of methods, interdisciplinarity, the paradigms of communication of culture and lastly, the ways and processes of cultural production. The topics, the theoretical-critical questions and the research fields considered of interest for the publication of individual articles or for the proposal of curatorship of special issues are listed on the “About” page of the journal and comprise more than twenty items, ranging from the canonical Translation studies or Diasporic, exile, (im)migrant and ethnic minority writings to innovative tendencies such as Studies on New Trends in the Study of Literature and Culture. A look at the two most recent Call for Papers – *Western Theory’s Chinese Transformation; Comparative Approaches to the Prison Literatures of the Middle East, North Africa, and their Diasporas* – helps to highlight the broad, not strictly Western, approach that distinguishes the magazine (as confirmed both by the heterogeneity of the composition of the board and by the editorial policies).

To enrich one’s knowledge concerning the chronology of *CLC Web - Comparative Literature and Culture*, the site offers numerous material on the history of the journal and on the activities of its founder, Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek (<https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/clcwebhistory/>). The *CLC Web* cultural project was originally conceived in the late 1990s and focused on several research fields: comparative literature, cultural studies, communication and media studies, theory of culture and literature, interdisciplinary studies and comparative cultural studies. Since its foundation, the intellectual direction of the magazine has been interdisciplinary, pluralistic and holistic - Tötösy de Zepetnek stated at the end of the 1990s - embracing both consolidated traditions of comparative studies and contemporary trends in the humanities. Already during the magazine’s early years, some selected issues were published in the Purdue Series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies.

In Italy we had to wait until 2018 - twenty years after its foundation - to see *CLC Web* become part of the ANVUR repertoire of band A reviews for area 10. While remaining a journal currently less by Italian scholars of comparative studies and cultural studies, *CLC Web* continues to be a real asset for this field of study. It is probably a journal more familiar to those who took their first steps in the world of comparative literature at the end of the last century, when in Italy humanities journals were mostly printed on paper and communication between scholars in the sector occurred above all via mail, telephone and fax. The Web and personal computers weren't within everyone's reach. Research often meant time-consuming trips to libraries and research centers around the world and long hours spent while leafing through paper catalogues and piles of photocopies of books and articles that one had necessarily to take home.

*CLC Web* entered this pre-technological landscape of the late 90s as an editorial novelty. Its first diffusion took place by word of mouth among scholars and students. In particular, the Italian professors that were part of the first board, fulfilled the task of cultural mediators: Remo Ceserani, Armando Gnisci and Aldo Nemesio. Among them, Gnisci, then professor of the comparative literature course at La Sapienza, had offered his graduates, myself included, a floppy disk, the ancestor of the USB stick, which he had received by post from Tötösy de Zepetnek. That square blue plastic floppy disk contained a database of international bibliographies and directories on comparative literature and cultural studies that seemed endless to us at the time. That long list of titles, authors and various material that appeared on the screens of our PCs, was the result of the incredible work of Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, a scholar of Hungarian origin active in the universities of Alberta and then Purdue, author of numerous and important volumes in the field of comparative and cultural studies, tireless promoter of the entire editorial and cultural project, of the Comparative Cultural Studies series, of the database and of *CLC Web*, of which he was the founder and director since 1998 to 2016.

Tötösy de Zepetnek's choice to use the Internet and the Web as platforms for the dissemination of knowledge in the field of comparative literature and culture was crucial. As associate director of the Research Institute for Comparative Literature (RICL) at the University of Alberta, he developed a comprehensive website in 1995, featuring an international

listing of comparative scholars, bibliographies, and information on the university's Department of Comparative Literature. From the amount of data published on the website, he would have drawn those floppy disks that made his work circulate, also overseas.

Tötösy de Zepetnek's extensive experience in academic publishing enabled him to play a crucial role during his tenure as assistant and then associate director of the Research Institute for Comparative Literature (RICL). Initially, he managed the publication of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* (CRCL / RCLC), implementing innovative desk-top publishing techniques to streamline production and reduce the costs. He also oversaw the publication of a series of related monographs in CRCL magazine. Over the years, material from the RICL website moved to the Library of CLC Web. The Department of Comparative Literature website joined the Faculty of Arts of the University of Alberta, as part of the academic curriculum comprising interdisciplinary studies.

In 1997, Tötösy de Zepetnek ventured into the creation of a new peer reviewed journal available online, *CLC Web*, which made him among the first to inaugurate a new editorial mode. His goal was to provide a platform that adhered to the principles of open access and allowed global access to knowledge in the field of the humanities. The journal was launched in March 1999 and was hosted on the server of the University of Alberta.

It quickly became clear that the launch of an online journal would make a significant contribution to publishing policies in the humanities, particularly in the field of cultural studies, comparative literature, media studies and communication. Subsequently, an international editorial board was formed, and the National Library of Canada granted the magazine an ISSN number (1481-4374). At this stage, initial arrangements with the National Library of Canada (now the Library and Archives Canada) were made concerning the archiving and mirroring of *CLC Web*. In this way, it was possible to publish the first issue of the magazine in March 1999, thanks to the server of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Alberta, which provided the necessary space on the academic server.

The magazine quickly established itself both thanks to the active col-

laboration of numerous scholars from around the world and because of the valuable contents that were made available: in addition to the publication of articles and reviews, *CLC Web* has a Library section with bibliographies, research material, study programs, an international directory of scholars and a mailing list. The structure of the journal is articulated through a team of advisory board members and associate editors, who are actively involved in evaluating and soliciting proposals, promoting the journal, and enhancing its functions.

Regarding the funding of the journal, which is an issue that continues to fuel the debate on open access in academia around the world, *CLC Web* had to face various difficulties during its first Canadian phase. In order to obtain financial support from SSHRC, it would have been necessary to guarantee two hundred paid subscriptions, even though the magazine was freely accessible online. The proposal reflected an idea of the academic publishing market based on subscriptions from university libraries, without taking into consideration that the large online traffic generated by the journal and the free use of downloads of published material would bring about a new type of attention to the University Press website. At the time, the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Alberta recognized the journal as a praiseworthy enterprise, but still saw it as part of a 'personal interest' endeavor. Although the Department expressed its intellectual and moral support, it did not, however, provide the magazine with the financial and technical support granted to the other existing journal, CRCL/RCLC.

in January 2000, this led to the decision to transfer *CLC Web* from the University of Alberta to a university publishing house that would legitimize its presence in the academic community. After exploring various options, Purdue University Press approved the move and publication of *CLC Web*, making an extraordinary and sagacious decision. Unlike other publications which insisted on a paid subscription model, Purdue recognized the importance of maintaining the journal in open access mode to ensure the principles of social responsibility, the democratization of knowledge on the Internet and academic communication, also claiming that the high web traffic generated by *CLC Web* would bring prestige and attention. From the 2.3 issue onwards, which appeared in September 2000, *CLC Web* was therefore published by Purdue University Press and supported by Pur-

due University Libraries, with new technical assistance provided by media technologists at the University of Halle-Wittenberg.

When it comes to the technological interface of this magazine and the IT panorama wherein it is located, it is interesting to dwell on some significant editorial options. *CLC Web* is equipped with many features made available by its current host, Purdue University Libraries, and in particular by Purdue's online publications that can be found on the Purdue e-Pubs website. Among these functions there is Real-time Readership tool - <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/>: it concerns a world map which shows the download locations of the extensive University Press repertoire, ranging from journals to conference proceedings to graduation theses. At the end of May 2023, total downloads exceeded twenty-nine million, of which around two and a half million only in the last year. By activating the Play function, one can observe in a video how dark dots appear on the screen, exactly in those places where texts are currently being downloaded. The exact bibliographic indication of the text being downloaded appears at the top of the screen (Fig. 1).

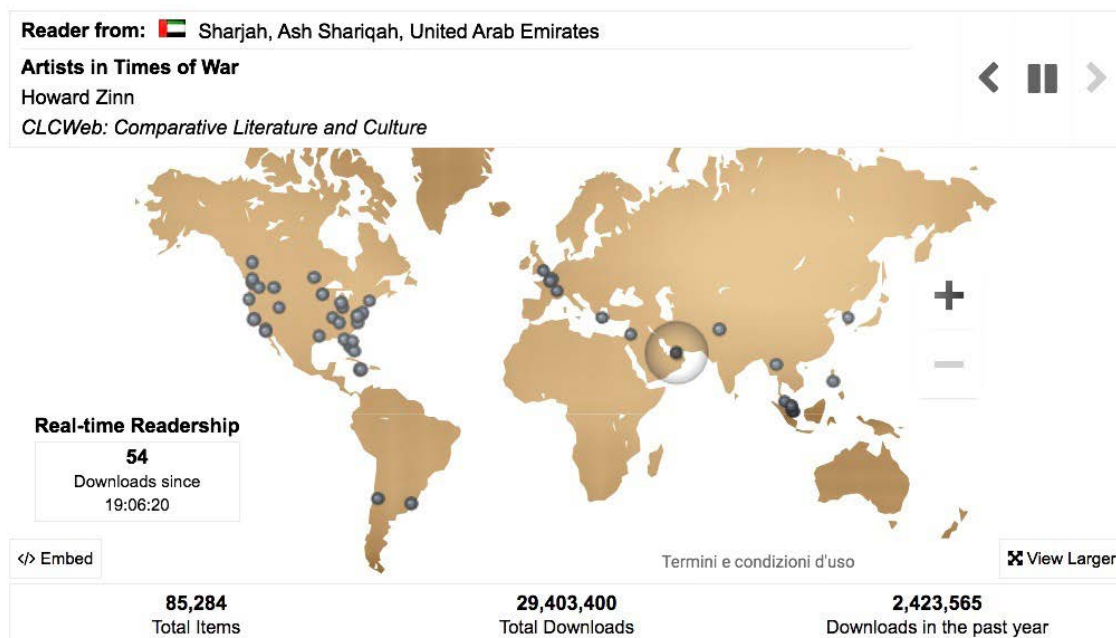


Fig. 1 The Real-time Readership feature of Purdue e-Pubs.

It is an elementary but hypnotic technological tool for it draws our attention to the fact that there are other scholars who are simultaneously performing our same gestures somewhere in the world.

Real-time Readership, as well as the statistical columns of downloads provided by more and more Italian and international open access journals, is a useful tool for studying the phenomenon of open access publishing, and for investigating its flows and the areas of greater or lesser dissemination that concern editorial products. From this quantitative point of view, the other tools provided by the Purdue e-Pubs editorial website are also interesting. Just to mention a few: Most Popular Papers, based on the total number of downloads of the full texts starting from the publication date; Paper of the Day, a sort of daily *repêchage* within the entire catalogue; Most Recent Additions; Activity by Year, a monthly updated graph of the total papers published by Purdue e-Pubs from 2005 to the present, clearly showing the upward curve of their publications from zero to approximately ninety thousand. The impact and the large number of publications depend on the set of different disciplines represented, research centers and departments which, overall, are involved in the large open access publishing project of Purdue University.

Since one of the aims of this article is to compare this North American editorial reality with the Italian situation, we can take Milano University Press (<https://milanoup.unimi.it/>) as a case study, as it currently represents one of the best editorial enterprises for its efficiency and editorial design. It started in 2008 with a first nucleus of magazines, which today are more than 50, and in 2020 it launched its first book series. Today, Milano University Press publishes a good number of periodicals and books in many disciplines. The statistics page refers only to journals and offers a graph of the approximately seven million views of the entire OJS corpus and a static map, Site views – Geographical Spread <https://milanoup.unimi.it/ita/statistics.html>, on which the areas of the world are colored with ever darkening shades of red, depending on the place that reaches the greatest number of views.

The quantitative and qualitative differences between these university publishing enterprises highlight the path traveled by university presses such as Purdue, which we are addressing here (without making compar-



isons with even more competitive North American realities). An aspect that requires further reflection concerns the editorial component in which international humanities and literary journals are placed alongside journals of social sciences, law or the STEM area: the publisher guarantees and supports all research areas and is so doing guarantees large-scale publishing services. The hope is that synergy with the overall service offered by university presses, will also promote the employment of existing technologies and stimulate the potential offered by open access in Italian journals within the humanities.

### **Three questions to Brittany Murray**

*1. How does CLC Web respond to changes occurring in Comparative Literature studies around the world?*

Our contributors bring so much vitality and critical acumen to the field, work that I see as imperative at present.

Collectively, their articles flesh out the principles Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek [outlined in his definition of comparative literature](#)-- – to break through the limiting silos of national boundaries, to defy Eurocentrism, to define culture inclusively, to be rigorously grounded in language and culture, to build nuanced and evidence-based interpretive practice, and to foster dialogue across disciplines, languages and cultures.

His vision also included a word of caution about “the troubled intellectual and institutional situation of the humanities in general.” The warning about the fragility of this enterprise seems especially salient now, as we strive to protect the institutional infrastructure to support this kind of scholarly inquiry. All the more reason to continue our scholarship based on this vision of dialogic, border-crossing, culturally grounded and nuanced attention, especially in contexts where regressive social and political tendencies would threaten those very qualities.

If anything, these difficulties only strengthen our sense of commitment to comparative studies. Now, more than ever, it is important to support the socially responsive, methodologically rigorous, and intellec-

tually inventive scholarship that characterize the work published in *CLC Web*.

2. *Do you consider the CLC Web open access journal a still suitable editorial tool or do you have a new editorial project in mind (for example for visual culture, for multimedia, or for video essays)?*

To my mind, the open access model is still a powerful editorial tool; our team of editors, Oded Nir, Shareah Taleghani, Fang Yan, Thomas Waller, and I are constantly looking for ways to bring in inclusive, innovative, expansive projects. To this end, guest editors have generously lent their expertise to enrich the journal with emerging fields and new insights. The journal is open and constantly evolving, so scholars with creative ideas for special issues or contributions should absolutely contact us!

3. *What is the open access policy of CLC Web with respect to the current debate on Open access? (2020 Open Access Manifesto for Freedom, Integrity, and Creativity in the Humanities and Interpretative Social Sciences <https://commonplace.knowledgefutures.org/pub/y0xy565k/release/2> (We commented upon the Manifesto on «Between» 20/2020, <https://ojs.unica.it/index.php/between/article/view/4445/4554>)*

The manifesto's call for «a more accessible, ethical, transparent, and creative form of scholarly communication» is important. The manifesto's characterization of a «labour of love» resonates, with all the ethical and political dilemmas that the term implies. As the manifesto's authors state, at present, Open Access publishing largely relies upon «unremunerated, off-work time that is freely given as a result of political, emotional and otherwise idealistic investment». Our editors and authors contribute tremendous energy, scholarly insight, and creativity to the journal. That said, this does not automatically resolve ethical or political concerns, including the pressing problem of how to justly recognize labor. I am lucid about both the possibilities of the OA model and the dangers of hyper-exploitation in a neoliberalized academic framework. I would also like to add that exploitation in academic publishing is variegated by race, gender, class, precarized labor, and other factors; scholars are unevenly exposed to deeply entrenched patterns of inequity and interlocking oppressions. With clear-eyed assessment of the challenges, I cautiously look toward «a practical

politics of hope». That is to say, the journal is committed to the possibilities of Open Access publishing, and always scanning for opportunities, models, and infrastructures to justly support the labor that makes the journal possible.

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She teaches Comparative Literature, Theory of Literature and Theory and tools of editorial work at the University of Cagliari. Her fields of research concern the theory of rewriting and adaptation, women's literature, cartography and literature, the literary and visual representation of domestic spaces or confinement, the relationship between psychiatry, total institutions and the production of the imaginary. Another field of her research concerns Italian publishing and open access. She co-directs *Between*.

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