

Carla Harryman

Carla Harryman (born January 11, 1952) is an American poet, essayist, and playwright often associated with the Language poets.^[1] She teaches Creative Writing at Eastern Michigan University and serves on the MFA faculty of the Milton Avery School of the Arts at Bard College.^[2]



Carla Harryman in *Speaking Portraits*, c.2004

Life and work

She was born in Orange, California. Harryman earned a Bachelor of Arts in Literature from the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1975, studying in the College of Creative Studies. She later completed a Master of Arts in Creative Arts Interdisciplinary Studies at San Francisco State University in 1978.^{[3][4][5]}

Academic career

Harryman has served as Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at Eastern Michigan University since 2008, where she has held tenured faculty appointments in creative writing and literary studies.^[6]

Prior to joining Eastern Michigan University, she taught at Wayne State University from 1996 to 2008, first as Lecturer and later as Senior Lecturer in the Department of English.^[7]

She has also held numerous visiting and teaching appointments, including as MFA Summer Faculty at Bard College's Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts from 1998 to 2019^[8], Senior Consulting Artist in the MFA Program in Poetics at the University of Washington Bothell^[9], Visiting Writer at Ohio University, MFA faculty at Goddard College, and teaching appointments at Naropa Institute, the University of California, San Diego, and California College of Arts and Crafts.^[10]

Her teaching and scholarship have been noted for integrating poetry, performance, philosophy, experimental prose, and dramaturgy, with particular emphasis on interdisciplinary forms of textual and performative composition.^[11]

Literary work

Harryman emerged as an important figure in experimental American writing through her association with Language poetry, although her work frequently extends beyond the movement's formal concerns through performance, fiction, theatrical writing, and philosophical inquiry.^{[12][10]}

Her writing explores the instability of voice, narrative fragmentation, feminist critique, political discourse, and the performativity of language. Her texts frequently challenge distinctions between poetry, prose, criticism, and drama, often employing procedural constraints and collaborative structures.^[13]

Her notable works include *Memory Play* (1994)^[4], *There Never Was a Rose Without a Thorn* (1995)^[14], *Gardener of Stars* (2001)^[15], *Adorno's Noise* (2008)^[16], *W—/M—* (2013)^[17], *Artifact of Hope* (2017)^[18], *A Voice to Perform* (2020)^[19], and *Cloud Cantata* (2022).^[20]

She is also known for collaborative writing projects, most notably *The Grand Piano*, a ten-volume collective autobiography written with writers including Lyn Hejinian and Rae Armantrout documenting the San Francisco Language poetry community.^{[21][22]}

Several of Harryman's works have appeared in French translation, reflecting sustained international engagement with her writing.^[1]

Performance and interdisciplinary practice

Harryman's work frequently incorporates performance, opera, sound composition, and multimedia collaboration. Her theatrical and operatic texts explore the relationship between embodiment, language systems, and conceptual performance.^[23]

Her long-form poem *Open Box (Improvisations)*, originally published in 2007, was republished in an expanded second edition in 2026. The work also exists as an audio realization released on the Tzadik Records label.^[24]

Her interdisciplinary collaborations have involved composers, visual artists, performers, and sound artists across the United States and Europe.^[3]

Awards and honors

Harryman received the Foundation for Contemporary Arts Award in Poetry in 2004 in recognition of her contributions to experimental literature.^[12]

In 2016, she received the National Performance Network Principal Artist Award for *Gardener of Stars*.^[11] In 2019, she was awarded the Ronald C. Collins Distinguished Faculty Award in Creative Activity from Eastern Michigan University.^[25]

She has also received grants and residencies from organizations including the Foundation for Contemporary Arts and the Headlands Center for the Arts.^[26]

Personal life

Harryman is married to the poet Barrett Watten.^[4]

Publications

- *Percentage*, 1979, Tuumba (Berkeley, CA)
- *Under the Bridge*, 1980, This Press (Berkeley, CA)
- *Property*, 1982, Tuumba (Berkeley, CA)
- *The Middle*, 1983, Gaz Press (San Francisco, CA)
- *Vice*, 1986, Potes and Poets (Hartford, CT)
- *Animal Instincts: Prose, Plays, Essays*, 1989, This Press (Berkeley, CA)
- *In the Mode of*, 1992, Zasterle (Tenerife, Spain)
- *Memory Play*, 1994, O Books (Oakland, CA)
- *There Never Was a Rose Without a Thorn*, 1995, City Lights (San Francisco, CA)
- *The Words: After Carl Sandburg's Rootabaga Stories and Jean-Paul Sartre*, 1994, O Books (Oakland, CA)
- *Gardener of Stars*, 2001, Atelos (Berkeley, CA)
- *Baby*, 2005, Adventures in Poetry (New York, NY)
- *Tourjours L'épine Est Sous La Rose*, 2006, Ikko (Paris, France) Translation of *There Never Was a Rose Without a Thorn*. Translated by Martin Richet
- *Open Box (Improvisations)*, 2007, Belladonna Books, (Brooklyn, NY)
- *Lust for Life: On the Writing of Kathy Acker*, 2006, Verso (New York, NY and London, England): co-edited with Amy Scholder and Avital Ronell.
- *Adorno's Noise*, 2008, Essay Press (Ithaca, NY)
- *The Wide Road* (with Lyn Hejinian), 2011, Belladonna Books (New York, NY)
- *W--/M--*, 2013, SplitLevel Texts (Ann Arbor, MI)
- *Artifact of Hope*, 2017, Ordinance Series, Kenning Editions (Chicago, IL)
- *Sue in Berlin*, 2018, "To" Series, PURH (Rouen, France)
- *Sue á Berlin*, 2018. Translated by Sabine Huynh, "To" Series, PURH (Rouen, France)
- *A Voice to Perform*, 2020, SplitLevel Texts (Alexandria, VA)

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7. "Carla Harryman" (<https://www.emich.edu/english/faculty/c-harryman.php>). *www.emich.edu*. Retrieved 2026-04-24.
8. "To Write Within Situations of Contradiction: An Introduction to the Cross-Genre Writings of Carla Harryman" (<https://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/issue.905/16.1hinton.html>). *pmc.iath.virginia.edu*. Retrieved 2026-04-24.
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 - [Carla Harryman at EPC \(http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/harryman/\)](http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/harryman/)
 - [From *Gardener of Stars* - a novel \(http://jacketmagazine.com/14/harryman.html\)](http://jacketmagazine.com/14/harryman.html)
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