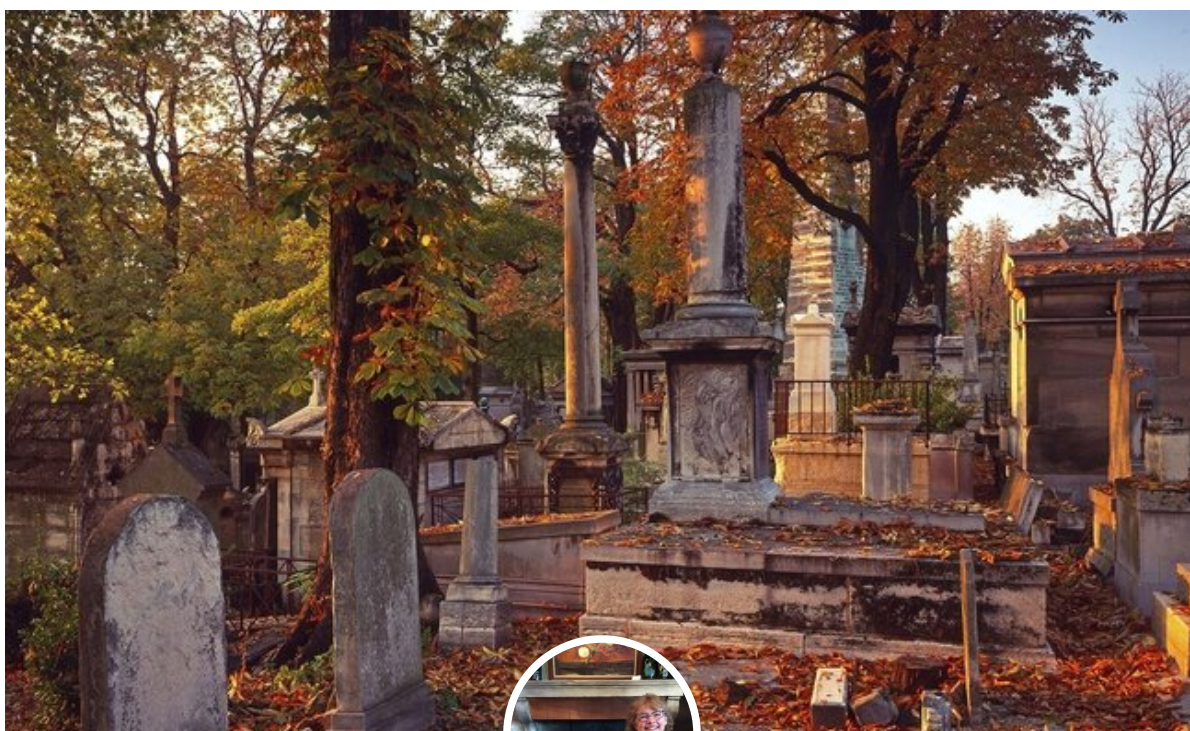


Author Carolyn Campbell on City of Immortals, Père-Lachaise Cemetery

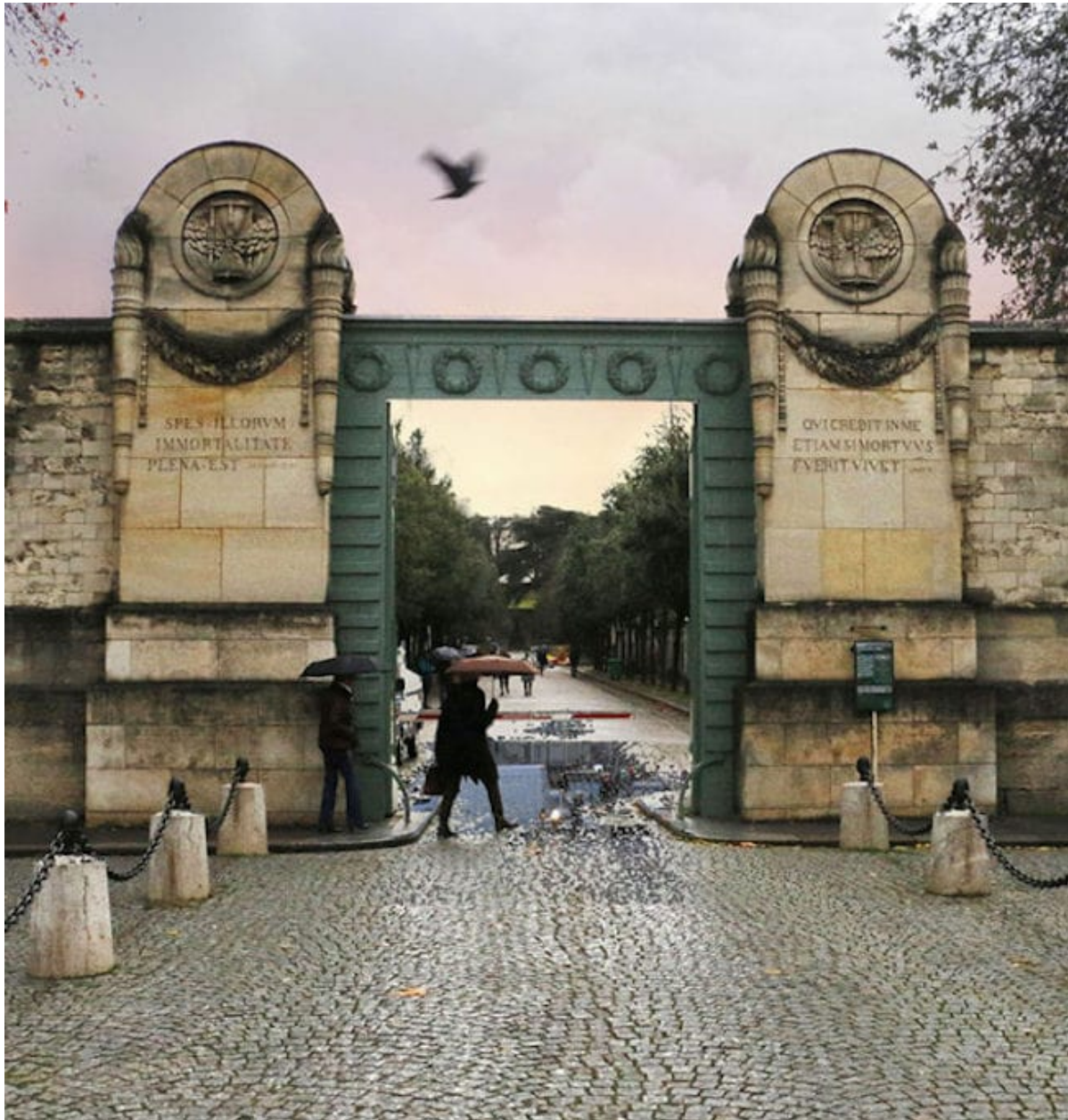
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By [Janet Hulstrand](#)

Carolyn Campbell is a writer, photographer, and arts and communications specialist who was born and raised in Washington D.C., has lived in Paris, and is now is a resident of Los Angeles. Her book, *City of Immortals: Père-Lachaise Cemetery, Paris*, is a lavishly produced “armchair visit” to this famous Parisian landmark. The text is beautifully illustrated both with the author’s own photographs and those of renowned landscape photographer Joe Cornish. A labor of love that took more than 30 years to complete, *City of Immortals* is a deeply affectionate, intimate exploration of this [world-famous cemetery](#),

among the most visited in the world. In addition to three proposed walks through the cemetery, one chapter consists of the author's "conversations" with a handful of the many famous people buried within its confines. A handy map that can be carried separately from the book is provided. There is also an app with a GPS tour. Campbell recently took the time to answer Janet Hulstrand's questions about *City of Immortals* in this exclusive interview for *Bonjour Paris*.

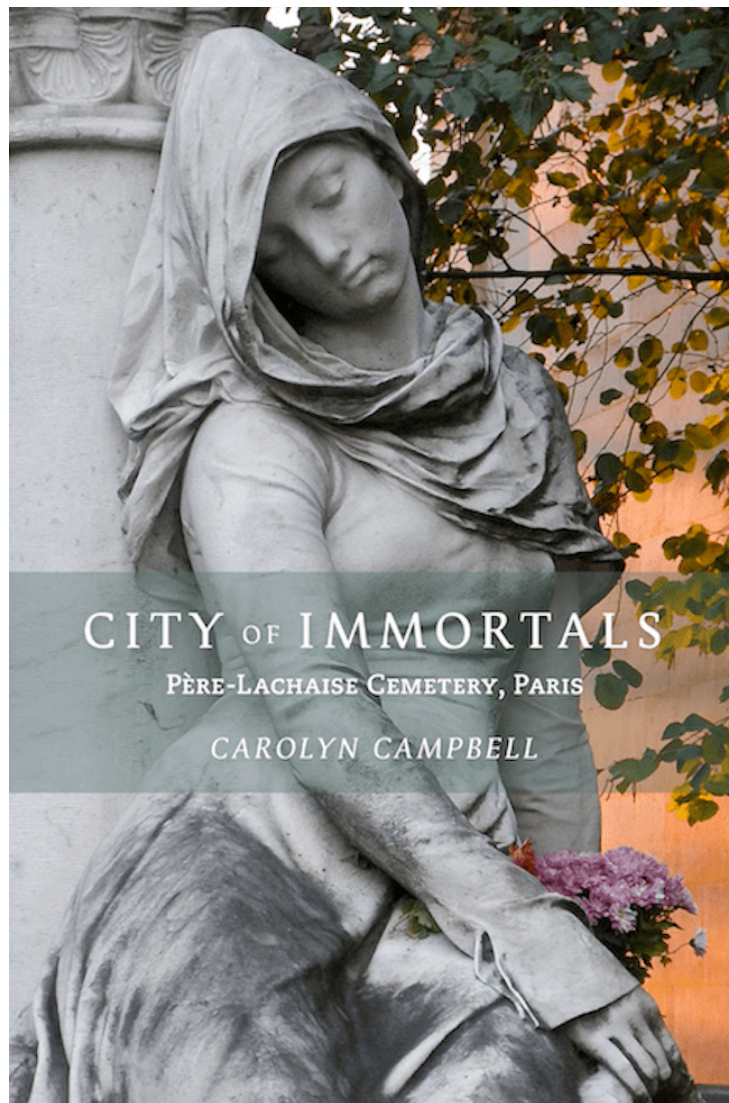


Père Lachaise entrance. Photo © Carolyn Campbell, Cityofimmortals.com

Janet Hulstrand: What inspired you to create this book?

Carolyn Campbell: Back in 2018, I was having a cup of tea with L.A.-based architecture and design author Michael Webb, who was writing about the genesis of my illustrated map of the cemetery, and the beta model for my GPS tour app. He asked me, “Why don’t you create a book with all these great images and material?”

My focus from the very beginning has always been to share my knowledge with others. How that would exactly come about I left to the fates. I was just doing the work and not thinking about the results. It was Michael’s generous introduction to his publisher, Gordon Goff, that set things in motion. After a whirlwind month of emails and conversations, I was offered a publishing deal. Kismet. And here we are.



City of Immortals book cover. Photo © Goff Books Publisher

Janet: *What do you think is the most common misconception about cemeteries?*

Carolyn: I think some people would normally consider a cemetery an unpleasant or even scary place. That was certainly society's perception up until the founding of Père-Lachaise in 1804. Thanks to its revolutionary garden-style design, all that changed forever. It became the model for many beautiful European cemeteries, like Highgate in London, as well as many in the United States, including Mount Auburn in Massachusetts.

Janet: *What is the most interesting thing you learned in the process of researching your book?*

Carolyn: It was fascinating to discover that we have the 19th century architects to thank for the pantheistic view of a cemetery that reflects a more peaceful concept of a sweet rest. After all, the earliest interpretation of the word *cimetière* was “a place where one sleeps.” Étienne Louis Boullée, one of the most admired architects of the period, and the mentor of Alexandre Brongniart, who designed Père-Lachaise, considered the commission to design a cemetery crypt one to covet. Boullée was also a proponent of the pre-Romantic celebration of nature. This view led to the changes in the image of a cemetery. It became a site of divinity, no longer a frightful place filled with dead bodies.



Author Carolyn Campbell with contributing photographer Joe Cornish at Père-Lachaise Cemetery, Paris. Cityofimmortals.com

Janet: *What is your favorite thing to do at Père-Lachaise? Also, do you have a favorite spot there, a place to which you always return? And maybe a favorite grave?*

Carolyn: So many of my visits have been focused on my ever-present “to-do” list for research and documentation. However, I make sure I also schedule equal time for just

wandering. Pausing as I stroll, listening, watching as the cemetery reveals something new. Even after 30 years, Père-Lachaise never disappoints. I always come back to Division 11 off Avenue DeLille, the oldest area, called the Romantic Section, luxuriating in the scent of rich loamy earth in this original 16 acres of the cemetery. It includes a hilly, tree-lined path to the graves of composers Vincenzo Bellini, Luigi Cherubini, and Frédéric Chopin. Overhead is a lush, green latticed canopy filled with a steady trill of songbirds.

There are about 5,000 trees throughout Père-Lachaise. I always make a pilgrimage to **Oscar Wilde's tomb** at the northernmost edge of the cemetery. In 1981, a friend at an art opening heard that I was planning my first trip to Paris. He told me that his ancestor, Sir Jacob Epstein, had sculpted the monument marking Wilde's burial place. Wilde had long been a literary hero of mine, so I had my first destination. The story behind how Wilde came to be buried there, as well as the scandal around the creation of his monument prompted an amazing chain of events that I include in the book.



The finger on the lips in this funerary sculpture signifies respect and silence.

Photo © Cityofimmortals.com

Janet: *I love how we learn interesting things about the lives and personalities of some of the famous people buried in Père-Lachaise through your “conversations” with them in Chapter Three of your book. It was really interesting to learn some of the details you pulled out through these imagined conversations with Colette, Chopin, Jim Morrison, Balzac, Oscar Wilde, Piaf, Modigliani, and Isadora Duncan. How did you choose the people you chose to “interview,” and who would be next on your list to interview?*

Carolyn: There were so many fascinating people to choose from. It was not easy to trim my conversations down to just those eight. There is no question that I would also include Rosa Bonheur, the most famous woman painter of the 19th century and the first renowned painter of animals. I have long admired one of her best-known works, “The Horse Fair,” which hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. I would also include Théodore Géricault, and his good friend Eugène Delacroix. Both were leading painters of their time and many of their major works are in the collection of the [Louvre Museum](#). All three of these artists led fascinating personal lives outside of their art-making. I would thoroughly enjoy exploring a conversation with their spirits.



Relief representing Immortality by sculptor Henri Chapu on the tomb of French philosopher Jean Reynaud. Photo © Cityofimmortals.com

Janet: *What is your most important piece of advice for someone who is about to visit Père-Lachaise for the first time?*

Carolyn: Allow yourself a minimum of two hours, and wear comfortable footwear, as the terrain rises up to a 1,000-foot elevation in certain divisions. A map is a must if you have specific destinations, and it will help you navigate this 107-acre labyrinth. I suggest arriving early in the morning, or closer to dusk (in fall and winter) for the best light if you plan to shoot photos. Take time to look closely at the significant sculptures and features on each tomb, as well as their settings in this breathtaking garden atmosphere. The cemetery is, in fact, the largest public green space in Paris.

Père-Lachaise Cemetery taps into several of my passions: learning about history through the lives of artists, a lifelong interest in architecture and design, plus a commitment to savoring the moment. I hope that visitors can come away with as enriching and transformative experience as I have had.

Purchase *City of Immortals* by Carol Campbell at your favorite independent bookstore or via Amazon [here](#)



Grieving female figure. Photo © Cityofimmortals.com

Lead photo credit : *Fall in the "romantic section. City of Immortals : Père-Lachaise Cemetery, Paris by Carolyn Campbell - Courtesy Goff Books. Photo © Joe Cornish*

By **Janet Hulstrand**



Janet Hulstrand is a freelance writer, editor and teacher who divides her time between France and the U.S. She is the author of "Demystifying the French: How to Love Them, and Make Them Love You," and she writes frequently on France for a variety of publications, including her blog, Writing from the Heart, Reading for the Road. She teaches "Paris: A Literary Adventure" for the education abroad program of Queens College of the City University of New York; classes at Politics & Prose bookstore in Washington D.C.; and Writing from the Heart workshop/retreats in Essoyes, a beautiful little village in the Champagne region (l'Aube).