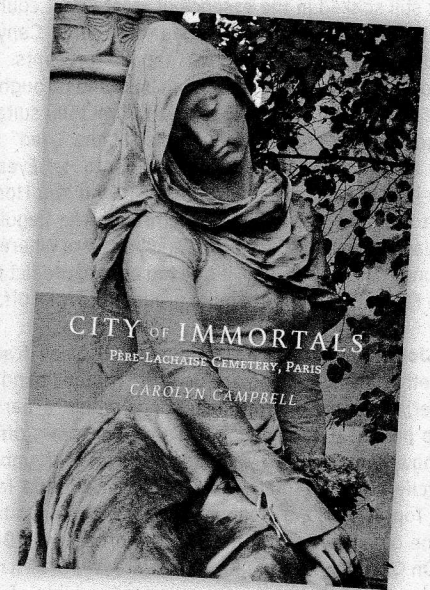


A book excerpt  
from the author  
Carolyn Campbell

# JIM MORRISON IN THE CITY OF IMMORTALS



Author Carolyn Campbell at the Père-Lachaise Cemetery and the book cover of *City of Immortals* (at right).



**M**y first trip to France came about when a fellow staff member in a museum, who moonlighted as a travel agent, offered me a canceled ticket on a charter flight. All I had to pay was the tax. At a gallery opening that following week, an artist friend heard I was leaving for Paris and told me I had to go see an amazing cemetery, Père-Lachaise, filled with art and celebrities. Not a fan of graveyards, I asked, "Why?" He knew Oscar Wilde was a literary hero of mine and said his ancestor had sculpted the monument marking his burial place. I had my first destination. Thirty plus years later my passion for photographing and researching the place has never waned. Signing a publishing deal with Goff Books brought my dream to life.

Right before the pandemic my debut book, *City of Immortals: Père-Lachaise Cemetery, Paris* was named to the *Los Angeles Times* bestseller list, but then my author tour went up in smoke due to the shutdown. However, the silver lining of moving onto Zoom has enabled me to reach hundreds more people around the country. My intention is to give readers three books in one: a personal dialogue with the immortals, including Oscar Wilde, Colette, Edith Piaf and Frederic Chopin; a scholarly history of funerary architecture and design; and an intimate tour of the world's most famous cemetery. I also included a fold-out map of the 107-acre site marking 84 graves of the famous and infamous, along with 100 color photos. The legacy of the cultural icons, rebels, intellectuals, innovators, and rule-breakers buried there reminds me of the importance of taking risks and giving voice to whatever creative contribution you leave behind.

I paid my respects at James "Jim" Morrison's grave in 1981. Over the decades, I have noticed that there is always a steady stream of fans arriving at his resting place in Division 6 of the cemetery. There were ten thousand visitors on the 30th anniversary of his death, necessitating police to set up crowd control barricades. I suspect on July 3, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, will surely see a record turnout as France opens to vaccinated U.S. tourists.

In my career as an arts and communications specialist, I have collaborated with and represented many artists and performers, plus have written some of their obituaries while I was the editor of an arts publication. I have identified with their struggle, survival, joy and redemption. A yearning to speak directly with the creative spirits in Père-Lachaise is what inspired me to have the eight encounters in what became the heart of the book. The following is my conversation with Morrison where we discuss triumphs and failures, as well as any wisdom he wanted to share with those above ground.

— Carolyn Campbell, 2021

THE FOLLOWING IS A BOOK  
EXCERPT FROM *City of Immortals*:

### Conversation with James "Jim" Morrison

As a member of the baby boom generation, I personally related to this particular gravesite more than all the others in Père-Lachaise. Jim Morrison personified an era that I was part of: the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, sexual liberation, Pop art, the drug culture, and the loss of so many creative icons of the 1960s. Although I never saw The Doors live in concert, I certainly danced to their hit "Light My Fire" played by cover bands in nightclubs and bought their albums. My conversation with Morrison at his graveside brought up memories that I hadn't connected with in decades.

**Carolyn Campbell:** I spoke with your friend and Doors keyboard player Ray Manzarek in 1982 when I got back to the U.S. after my first visit to your grave. I was told so many wild anecdotes about your death and burial that I had to find out from a reliable source what really happened.

**Jim Morrison:** Was he able to give you the answers you wanted?

**CC:** He suggested I keep a sense of balance about the sensationalized stories I had heard and would continue to encounter. He was right. More important is what he shared about who you were as an artist.

**JM:** Ray and I met at UCLA in the film department. We were drawn to cinema. It combined all the arts: theater, photography, music, acting, writing — everything.

**CC:** You two formed the group The Doors, correct? How did you come up with the name?

**JM:** We took the band's name from Aldous Huxley's book *The Doors of Perception*. Huxley took it from William Blake, who wrote: "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything

would appear to man as it is: infinite."

**CC:** I live in West Hollywood right around the corner from the Santa Monica Boulevard studio where the group recorded. There's a bronze plaque on the Ita Cienega Motel across the street, where supposedly you did some of your legendary partying. I'd like to hear from you about the intellectual pursuits that counter your Lizard King image. History seems to have missed exploring the man who is behind those extraordinary lyrics.

**JM:** Primarily, I considered myself a writer, and I read a lot, Greek and Roman classics, French Symbolists, German Romantics, modern novels by Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, and existentialists such as Camus, Sartre, and Genet. However, these interests were overshadowed by my drinking. My friends, family, and sometimes my fans, unfortunately, were the unintended victims of my alcohol excesses. I see that visitors to my grave leave joints and bottles of booze. I hope they got a bit more out of my message than that.

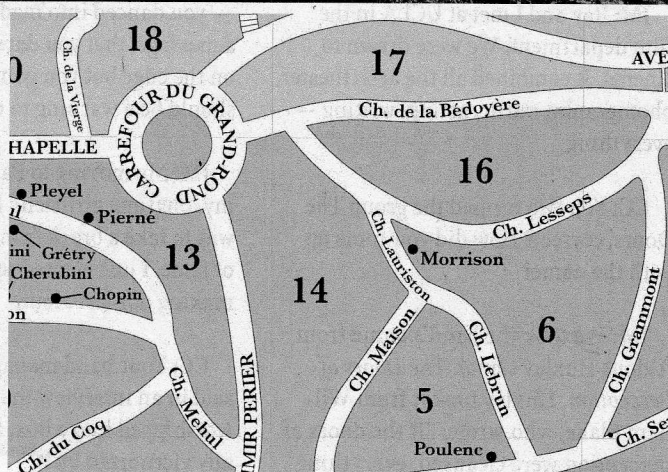
**CC:** For me there is no doubt of your legacy as a poet and musician. The Doors albums are some of the highest selling in history. The group got a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and was awarded a Grammy for Lifetime Achievement. Ray Manzarek told me that you were the "American Dionysus, you danced the dance of the Shaman — the dance of death — preached human possibility — breaking through to the other side — you danced into madness but left us a message: that you dared to risk living on the edge but you going over that edge should be a warning to us."

**JM:** My moving to Paris in 1971 with my longtime girlfriend Pamela Courson was to take a break from the pressures of fame. I just wanted some R & R after making our last album.

**CC:** Your band manager Bill Siddons said in an interview that you were being worshipped into a box, and you were really victimized by it.



A recent photo of Jim Morrison's gravesite with the "True to his own spirit" bronze plaque (above) and a map of its location in the Père-Lachaise Cemetery (at right).



**JM:** Well, I created a monster that got out of control and it turned on me. Like my alter ego, Steppenwolf. I think Steppenwolf's creator, Hermann Hesse, summed it up best: "It happened to him — as it does to all; what he strove for with the deepest and most stubborn instinct of his being fell to his lot, but more than is good for men. In the beginning his dream and his happiness, in the end it was his bitter fate."

**CC:** Too many wildly talented people met a similar fate in that abuse riddled era. At about your age, I found myself staring into the casket of one of my dearest friends who had accidentally overdosed. There were so many unnecessary losses. Ray said he'd gladly trade back decades of time spent doing other things if you could have lived. He said you'd be making music, poetry, doing theater, and creating films together. Didn't we all think we were immortal in our twenties?

**JM:** I was already having signs of some underlying health issues in Paris: On top of my heavy smoking and drinking, I became easily winded walking up a simple flight of stairs only a few days before I died. I had several episodes of severe hiccup and coughing spasms that wracked my chest. One night when Pam was asleep, I snorted far too much of her heroin stash. And from there...

**CC:** I am so sorry, but it's what alcoholics and addicts do, Jim. I don't feel we will ever know the exact circumstances of your death in your apartment at 17 rue Beautreillis, but I don't think it really matters at this point.

**JM:** Pamela and I loved Paris. I was writing a lot, enjoying the anonymity, and hanging out with wonderful people, including old friends like Alain Ronay, who also studied film at UCLA when I was there. I had almost stopped drinking. After I died, it took three days for all the necessary reports to be filed and formalities to be honored before my body could be released for burial and funeral arrangements made. There was no autopsy. Everyone came through and

supported Pamela in all of this.

**CC:** Did you leave any requests as far as your service or tomb?

**JM:** No, but Pamela and Alain found a place in Père-Lachaise hidden between two tall tombs, which they wanted so as to create privacy. There was no headstone. I like the fact that I am buried in the same cemetery as Chopin and Balzac.

**CC:** I was given a description of that day: At 9:00 A.M. a small van came to pick up your blond oak coffin for the short drive to the cemetery. Bill, Alain, your personal assistant Robin Wertle, and filmmaker Agnès Varda were at the graveside. The entire ceremony took eight minutes.

**JM:** Bill Siddons and Pamela had designed a tombstone with an inscription and sent money to someone in Paris, but it never was made. When Pamela died three years later, her parents asked that her ashes be spread on my grave, but sadly that never happened either. Before 1981, when Croatian sculptor Mladen Mikulin placed a lifelike bust of me on my grave, which helped identify the site, fans provided bizarre graffiti on surrounding tombs guiding mourners to my hard-to-find plot, but some people weren't happy about that.

**CC:** Yes, I saw a lot of that firsthand. As a last futile attempt to keep down the defacements, cemetery officials have installed metal barricades to discourage vandalism and supposedly guard dogs are posted throughout the cemetery to deter after-hours interlopers. An estimated 10,000 people showed up on July 3, 2001, for the thirtieth anniversary of your death and were asked to file in by small groups to keep things from getting out of hand. In 1988, unfortunately two reckless fans on a motorcycle stole the marble bust. Your family later installed a bronze plaque, which is now mounted on your headstone with words in Greek that translate as "True to his own spirit."

**JM:** I see so many young people



coming to visit. None of them could have been born while The Doors were performing.

**CC:** I think they may see you as a symbol of their own restlessness. They idolize musicians who have died young and tragically; Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Brian Jones, Kurt Cobain, and Amy Winehouse. There's a collective anxiety in witnessing how frail life is and the malaise of society. When I asked Ray how he would envision an appropriate burial tribute to you, he said, "I would just like to give these young people a clue about what Jim was preaching. I only

**A photograph taken in 1981 of Jim Morrison's gravesite in the Père-Lachaise Cemetery with graffiti and the (now missing) Mladen Mikulin marble bust.**

regret that some of Jim's own words were not inscribed on the headstone. I would have liked to have seen his lyric, 'O great one, grant us one more hour to perform our art and perfect our dreams.'"

For more information on how to get a copy of the book *City of Immortals* by Carolyn Campbell, go to <https://www.goffbooks.com/product/city-of-immortals> ●