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per Stranieri  
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UNIVERSITÀ ITALIANA E INTERNAZIONALE

## CEMETERIES AND LITERARY TOURISM

**Eduarda Rabaçal (Portucalense University, Portugal)**

Cemeteries have traditionally served as spaces of remembrance and mourning, rooted in religious, familial, and national traditions. As cultural landmarks, they embody collective memory and identity. However, beyond their funerary role, many have evolved into destinations for cultural and literary tourism, particularly when they contain the graves of prominent authors. These sites attract visitors seeking to engage with literary heritage emotionally and symbolically. In such contexts, visiting a writer's final resting place becomes more than a gesture of mourning – it is a meaningful act of cultural connection.

From the grandeur of Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris – the resting place of Oscar Wilde and Marcel Proust – to Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey, which honours numerous canonical English authors, and the atmospheric Highgate Cemetery in London, home to George Eliot, literary cemeteries have become sites of literary devotion, cultural reflection, and ideological contestation (Watson, 2006; Macleod, 2018). They function as symbolic arenas where literature, history, tourism, and affect converge, drawing readers, scholars, and culturally motivated tourists. Many visitors engage in ritual acts of homage, leaving pens, letters, and flowers or performing readings to bridge the imaginative and the material. In doing so, they transform these spaces into memory, identity, and cultural performance *loci*.

Beyond their symbolic appeal, such sites also carry economic weight and raise ethical questions, particularly around the commodification of death, the responsibilities of preservation, and the ways heritage institutions shape public access and interpretation (Stone, 2006; Tomašević, 2018).



A key dimension of this phenomenon is the notion of literary pilgrimage – the belief that visiting sites associated with an author deepens one's connection to their life and work. This practice has roots in early literary fandom and Romantic notions of genius, place, and inspiration. While homes and studios can be spaces of literary intimacy, cemeteries may also represent a relevant, intimate and final form of literary devotion, as they serve as markers of narrative closure and enduring cultural presence. Thus, Westover's (2012) concept of necromanticism offers a valuable lens through which to understand this practice. He explores how literary travellers, especially during the Romantic and early Victorian periods, engaged with death as a cultural aesthetic and grave visitation as a form of communion with the past. Poets such as Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley meditated on death in their writing and participated in physical acts of remembrance that contributed to a broader cultural fascination with ruins, mortality, and poetic legacy. In Westover's framework, literary grave visitation is not merely a retrospective act but an active form of cultural production that reanimates the dead within the living memory of their readers.

This tradition has endured and transformed in the contemporary context, as literary cemeteries continue to function as strong cultural landmarks. For many readers, visiting an author's grave is not simply an act of homage but a deeply personal attempt to experience presence in the writer's absence. These moments of pilgrimage offer a kind of affective intimacy, allowing visitors to imagine themselves as part of a literary continuum and to reaffirm the lasting influence of authors whose works have shaped their inner worlds.

In addition to cultural and emotional significance, the transformation of cemeteries into tourist destinations carries significant economic implications, particularly within the expanding cultural and heritage tourism field. Major literary cemeteries have emerged as central nodes in this network, drawing substantial numbers of visitors motivated by a desire to engage with the lives and legacies of canonical writers. Sites such as Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris – among the most visited cemeteries in the world – have evolved from burial grounds to curated memorial destinations. Here, the graves of Oscar Wilde and Marcel Proust serve as focal points of literary pilgrimage, attracting international tourists who view these locations as touchstones of artistic identity and creative memory. Similarly, Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey is prominent in London's heritage tourism industry. Housing the remains and commemorative plaques of figures such as Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, and Jane Austen functions not only as a national monument but as a curated literary archive embedded within a sacred architectural space. While Père Lachaise and Westminster Abbey's Poets' Corner attract a wide range of visitors interested in their overall historical and architectural significance, the graves of prominent literary figures are specifically highlighted in site-specific literature, guided tours, and tourist marketing materials (Macleod, 2018). This suggests that literary tourism forms a distinct and significant aspect of the overall visitor experience at these sites, even though they are not exclusively literary spaces. Future research and visitor surveys (Tomašević, 2018) could help further differentiate the motivations of visitors focused on literary graves from those with broader historical interests.

The economic benefits of such tourism have been widely acknowledged in studies on cultural heritage and dark tourism (Stone, 2006; Tomašević 2018), with these sites contributing to local economies through entry fees, tours, and associated services. These financial flows help maintain and conserve the sites while supporting local businesses, cultural institutions, and broader tourism



infrastructures. However, this increasing commodification of literary gravesites invites critical scrutiny. Scholars such as Stone (2006) have situated this phenomenon within the broader context of dark tourism, highlighting how the commercial appeal of death-related sites often risks shifting attention away from the intellectual and cultural significance of the deceased. The question arises: Does commodification inevitably dilute these spaces' solemnity and reflective potential? Or can tourism, when responsibly managed, serve as a form of sustainable heritage preservation? Critics argue that the aestheticisation and marketing of death may exploit the memory of the dead, reducing complex literary legacies to consumable, *instagrammable* experiences. This tension between reverence, revenue / cultural value, and commercial appeal remains unresolved, underscoring the need for careful curatorial and ethical considerations in managing literary cemeteries as tourism destinations.

Adding to their symbolic and economic significance, literary cemeteries also serve as ritualised spaces where visitors perform acts of homage and cultural participation. Scholars and cultural theorists have observed that the acts performed at the graves of literary figures often go beyond passive remembrance, constituting complex symbolic gestures that reflect deep emotional engagement with the author's legacy. These behaviours include depositing personal items, writing and leaving messages, reciting texts, and other affective or performative tribute forms. Such practices may represent a meaningful attempt by readers to establish a sense of intimacy and continuity with the deceased writer, thereby transforming the gravesite into a space of active cultural participation (Macleod, 2018).

Numerous well-documented examples illustrate this phenomenon. At Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, the tomb of Oscar Wilde became the site of an unusual tradition in which admirers would kiss the monument with red lipstick, leaving thousands of lip prints that prompted the use of a protective glass barrier to preserve the stonework. In Baltimore, fans of Edgar Allan Poe participated in an annual clandestine ritual for decades, marking his birthday by leaving three red roses and a bottle of cognac at his grave – a practice that gained global media attention and eventually institutional recognition. At Emily Dickinson's resting place in Amherst, readers frequently leave handwritten poems, pencils, and flowers, symbolising her poetic legacy and her famously reclusive life. These acts of homage illustrate how literary gravesites function as more than places of mourning; they are transformed into dynamic cultural arenas where personal memory intersects with public ritual and where readers position themselves as participants in an ongoing literary narrative.

However, the emergence of these rituals also gives rise to several ethical and practical concerns. As the popularity of certain gravesites has increased, so have instances of physical degradation, prompting heritage authorities and local custodians to implement regulatory measures to control visitors' behaviour. The question of who can manage access to literary graves remains highly contentious. Families, literary estates, and heritage organisations sometimes disagree on preserving these spaces while maintaining accessibility. Furthermore, tensions arise in instances where the deceased author explicitly requested anonymity, simplicity, or limited public exposure following death. The posthumous transformation of such graves into tourist destinations raises profound ethical questions regarding consent, legacy, and the commodification of private memory.



This tension between public engagement and ethical responsibility highlights a critical dimension of literary grave tourism: balancing reverence and accessibility with preservation and respect. As readers continue to seek out physical encounters with the sites of literary memory, managing these spaces requires navigating complex intersections between cultural heritage, emotional investment, and the tourism economy. The rituals associated with literary grave visitation thus remain a rich area of inquiry, revealing how we commemorate the dead and interpret, perform, and transmit literary value across generations.

Indeed, cemeteries occupy a distinctive position within the landscape of literary tourism, serving as spaces where historical reverence, cultural heritage, affective memory, and economic interests intersect. As sites of literary memory, they provide opportunities for readers and tourists to engage with authors' legacies in symbolic and embodied ways. While such practices affirm literature's enduring cultural presence, they also raise significant ethical concerns regarding preservation, access, and the commodification of death. As literary tourism continues to evolve, cemeteries will remain central to discussions on how literature is read, inhabited, remembered, and physically navigated across time.

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