

This book deals with the special power of literary texts to put us in contact with the past. A large number of authors, coming from different ages, have described this power in terms of 'the conversation with the dead': when we read these texts, we somehow find ourselves conducting a special kind of dialogue with dead authors.

The book covers a number of texts and authors that make use of this metaphor – Petrarch, Machiavelli, Sidney, Flaubert, Michelet, Barthes. In connecting these texts and authors in novel ways, Jürgen Pieters tackles the all-important question of why we remain fascinated with literature in general and with the specific texts that to us are still its backbone. Situated in the aftermath of New Historicism, the book challenges the idea that literary history as a reading practice stems from a desire to 'speak with the dead'.