



# The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare's Theatre

*Susan Zimmerman*

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Within a theoretical framework that makes use of history, psychoanalysis and anthropology, *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare's Theatre* explores the relationship of the public theatre to the question of what constituted the 'dead' in early modern English culture. Susan Zimmerman argues that concepts of the corpse as a semi-animate, generative and indeterminate entity were deeply rooted in medieval religious culture. Such concepts ran counter to early modern discourses that sought to harden categorical distinctions between body/spirit, animate/inanimate - in particular, the attacks of Reformists on the materiality of 'dead' idols, and the rationale of the new anatomy for publicly dissecting 'dead' bodies. Zimmerman contends that within this context, theatrical representations of the corpse or corpse/revenant - as seen here in the tragedies of Shakespeare and his contemporaries - uniquely showcased the theatre's own ideological and performative agency.

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