Romans were obsessed with the treatment of dead bodies. This obsession was largely a product of more or less universal Greco-Roman customs and standards dictating what were perceived to be the “rights” owed to dead bodies: e.g. corporeal preservation or integrity, funeral ritual, familial and/or communal rites of mourning, the last kiss, the closing of the eyes; also (depending on wealth and status) commemoration, procession, ritual laudationes or panegyrics, etc. (Polyb. 6.53-4; cf. Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 7.72). Evidence, both physical and textual, overwhelmingly suggests this system of funereal respect was upheld in practice. Why then are Rome’s most grand, elevated, and respected literary texts – epic poems – filled with scenes of corpse mistreatment and funeral perversion? Indeed, the increasing emphasis in Latin epic on gruesome and atrocious “death-cult” is the core feature in the literary thematics of Latin epic of the early Imperial period (c. 20 BCE to 100 CE). This talk aims to bridge the gap between reality and literary expression concerning the treatment of the dead by viewing the epics of Virgil (Aeneid), Ovid (Metamorphoses), Lucan (Bellum Civile), Valerius Flaccus (Argonautica), Statius (Thebaid), and Silius Italicus (Punica) through the lens of Roman historical precedence and ritual practice.