

Ovid Unseen 2: Cadmus and the dragon's teeth I

Ovid's Metamorphoses, Book 3,

Edited and supported by Mathew Owen in the Classic Bloomsbury book, *Ovid Unseens*, 2014.

Cadmus is ordered by Athene to sow the teeth of a giant serpent he has just killed in the ground. When he does so, a terrible crop grows up.

With his spear Cadmus pinned the serpent to a tree, which bent under its weight as it thrashed in its death throes.



1573-1617 [Hendrik Goltzius](http://www.koldinghus.dk) - <http://www.koldinghus.dk>



c.1619 Cadmus and Harmonia turn into snakes.

dum spatium victor victi considerat hostis,
vox subito audita est; neque erat cognoscere promptum,
unde, sed audita est: 'quid, Agenore nate, peremptum
serpentem spectas? et tu spectabere¹ serpens.'
ille diu pavidus pariter cum mente colorem
perdiderat, gelidoque comae terrore rigeant:
ecce viri fautrix superas delapsa per auras
Pallas adest motaeque iubet supponere terrae²
vipereos dentes, populi incrementa futuri.
paret et, ut presso sulcum patefecit aratro,
spargit humi iussos, mortalia semina, dentes.
inde (fide maius) glabrae coepere moveri:
mox umeri pectusque onerataque brachia telis
exsistunt, crescitque seges clipeata virorum.

Vocabulary

considero (1)	contemplate, consider
spatium, -i (n)	extent, size
promptus, -a, -um	ready, easy
quid?	Why?
Agenore natus (+ abl)	son of Agenor i.e. born from
et tu	you, too,
pariter cum + abl.	alongside, along with
perdo, -ere, perdi	lose, destroy, ruin
fautrix, -icis (f)	supporter (i.e. Athene)
suppono, -ere	place under + acc. + dat.
incrementum, -i (n)	seed
premo, -ere, pressi	press down
sulcus, -i (m)	furrow
patefacio, -ere	lay open, reveal
aratrum, -i (n)	plough
semen, seminis (n)	seed
fide maius!	- believe it or not! – lit. greater than faith.
glabra, -ae (f)	sod (of earth), clod
exsisto, -ere	come into being
seges, segitis (f)	crop
clipeatus, -a, -um	shield-bearing

¹ spectābere is an abbreviation of the passive form spectāberis. This abbreviation (like the Perfect stem + ēre = ērunt) is quite common. The line is supposed to be oracular and mysterious – 'You, too, will be watched as a serpent.'

² This combination of participle and main verb is very common in Latin: 'to place under the having been moved earth = to move the earth and place under it...'