

**David J. CALIFF**  
**Francis Cleyn's Vergil Drawings**

John Dryden's *Works of Virgil* is perhaps the most widely known and admired English translation of a classical Latin author; however, the illustrations that accompanied his translation are all but unknown to modern classicists. Designed by Francis Cleyn and executed as prints by Wenceslaus Hollar and Pierre Lombart, these illustrations are remarkable for their attentiveness to the narrative and descriptive details of the *Aeneid*, yet it would be a mistake to regard Cleyn as a bland imitator of Vergil or an artist lacking in creativity and originality. Although it is admittedly difficult to place Cleyn among artists of the first rank, this paper will attempt to demonstrate that he is both a skilled craftsman and, at his best, a subtle and insightful interpreter of Vergil.

A brief biographical sketch will be offered to introduce Cleyn to an audience that may be largely unfamiliar with his work and to place him in his historical and cultural context. The body of the paper is devoted to the discussion of particular illustrations and is built upon five assertions. First, Cleyn's rigorous attention to detail stems less from a pedantic desire to transform word into image than from a deliberate attempt to serve a particular 17th century aesthetic — one that favors ornateness and an intricacy of design within a tightly compressed visual space (e.g. "Aeneas Meets the Disguised Venus"). Second, Cleyn is quite willing to depart from the Vergilian text when it suits him to do so. Indeed, striking alterations are evident in several scenes, among them "The Death of Priam" from *Aeneid* 2 and "The Funeral of Misenus" from *Aeneid* 6, both of which will be discussed with special attention given to the possible reasons for their divergences from Vergil. Third, Cleyn sometimes departs from a *literal* reading of the text but produces an illustration that may nevertheless be justified as a valid pictorial *interpretation* of the overall impact and meaning of a given scene (e.g. "Aeneas's Encounter with the Sibyl"). Fourth, Cleyn has a habit of bringing together several separate, though related, narrative moments in a single image. In *Aeneid* 4, for example, scenes of the hunt, the storm, the cave, and Rumor are joined in a one illustration, whereby Cleyn visually demonstrates the interrelatedness of these otherwise distinct narrative moments.

Finally, the important influence of other visual sources must not be neglected. Cleyn's "Laocoön," for instance, owes a significant debt to the famous Hellenistic sculpture group attributed to Agesander, Polydorus, and Athenodorus of Rhodes.

Collectively, these examples reveal an artist whose concerns extend well beyond a feeble and unimaginative transcription of the plot of Vergil's great epic. This paper will be illustrated by slides, and a handout will be provided.