Name:

**Exercise on 18th-century paintings of Dido**

For this exercise you will compare four paintings: *The Meeting of Dido and Aeneas* by Nathaniel Dance-Holland (1766), *Landscape with Dido and Aeneas* by Thomas Jones (1769), *The Death of Dido* by Joshua Reynolds (1781), and *The Death of Dido* by Henry Fuseli (1781). The paintings are on the website under “Dido paintings exercise.”

1) *The Meeting of Dido and Aeneas* by Nathaniel Dance-Holland (1766)

-- In *The Aeneid*, Venus shrouds Aeneas and Achates in a mist to enable them to enter Dido’s citadel unseen; when he finds her on her throne she is surrounded by other men of his party, from whom he had been separated. She is expressing a desire to see their leader, so the mist evaporates, rendering him and Achates visible. What does representing this moment in the story allow Dance-Holland to emphasize? What impression do we get of the characters of Dido and Aeneas?

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--Look on the website for the exercise on hand gestures. On the first two plates you’ll find gestures that match at least two of the gestures being made here. What are they and what are their implications?

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--Does this painting focus on textures and subtle variations in color or clarity of outline?

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--Would you describe the composition as stable or dynamic?

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--Altogether, does the painting’s subject matter and the handling of that subject matter seem to be in keeping with the neoclassical ideals Reynolds espoused?

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2) *Landscape with Dido and Aeneas* by Thomas Jones (1769)

--How does the title of Jones’s painting signal a different conception of Dido and Aeneas from Dance-Holland’s?

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--What are some of the implications of focusing on this moment in the narrative?

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--How would you characterize the representation of the weather in this painting?

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--Would you describe the overall effect here as neoclassical?

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3) *The Death of Dido* by Joshua Reynolds (1781)

--The composition of Reynolds’ painting was inspired by two common topoi in European painting, the lamentation (of Mary) and the deposition (or descent of Christ from the Cross). The painting is, in fact, very like Raphael’s *Deposition*. Why is it unsurprising that Reynolds should echo Raphael’s composition, and what does this echo suggest about Dido?

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4) *The Death of Dido* by Henry Fuseli (1781)

--Fuseli deliberately painted the same subject Reynolds was painting (he had seen Reynolds at work on *Death of Dido*), knowing that the paintings would be displayed together at the Academy exhibition and that their similarity would garner attention and prompt a comparison between the two artists. He made his canvas slightly bigger than Reynolds’ so there was no chance it would be shunted off to the side; as it turned out, it was hung alone on the wall opposite that where Reynolds’ painting hung. It did indeed cause a furor, which helped to make Fuseli better known.

Art historians have argued that Fuseli also deliberately tried to “out-Reynolds” Reynolds. Can you see ways that Fuseli’s painting is more in keeping with neoclassical theory than Reynolds’ painting is?

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--On the other hand, are there features of Fuseli’s painting that strike you as being gothic and sublime rather than neoclassical in spirit?

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