

Exercise – The classical landscape



Figure 1 *Landscape with Dido and Aeneas*, 1676, by Claude Lorrain.

In this essay I will analyse at least two landscapes by Claude Lorrain and use them to test the following statement made by the noted art historian Kenneth Clark in his book *Landscape into Art*, first published in 1949:

“This involved a dark coulisse on one side (hardly ever on two), the shadow of which extended across the first plane of the foreground, a middle plane with a large central feature, usually a group of trees, and finally two planes, one behind the other, the second being that luminous distance for which he has always been famous, and which, as we have seen, he painted direct from nature. Much art was necessary to lead the eye from one plane to the next, and Claude employed bridges, rivers, cattle fording a stream and similar devices; but these are less important than his sure sense of tone, which allowed him to achieve an effect of recession even in pictures where every plane is parallel.”

I will create a full annotation of at least one of the images that I've chosen and include notes on the use of perspective.

A brief description of *Landscape with Dido and Aeneas*, 1676, by Claude Lorrain (in the form of three spider diagrams)

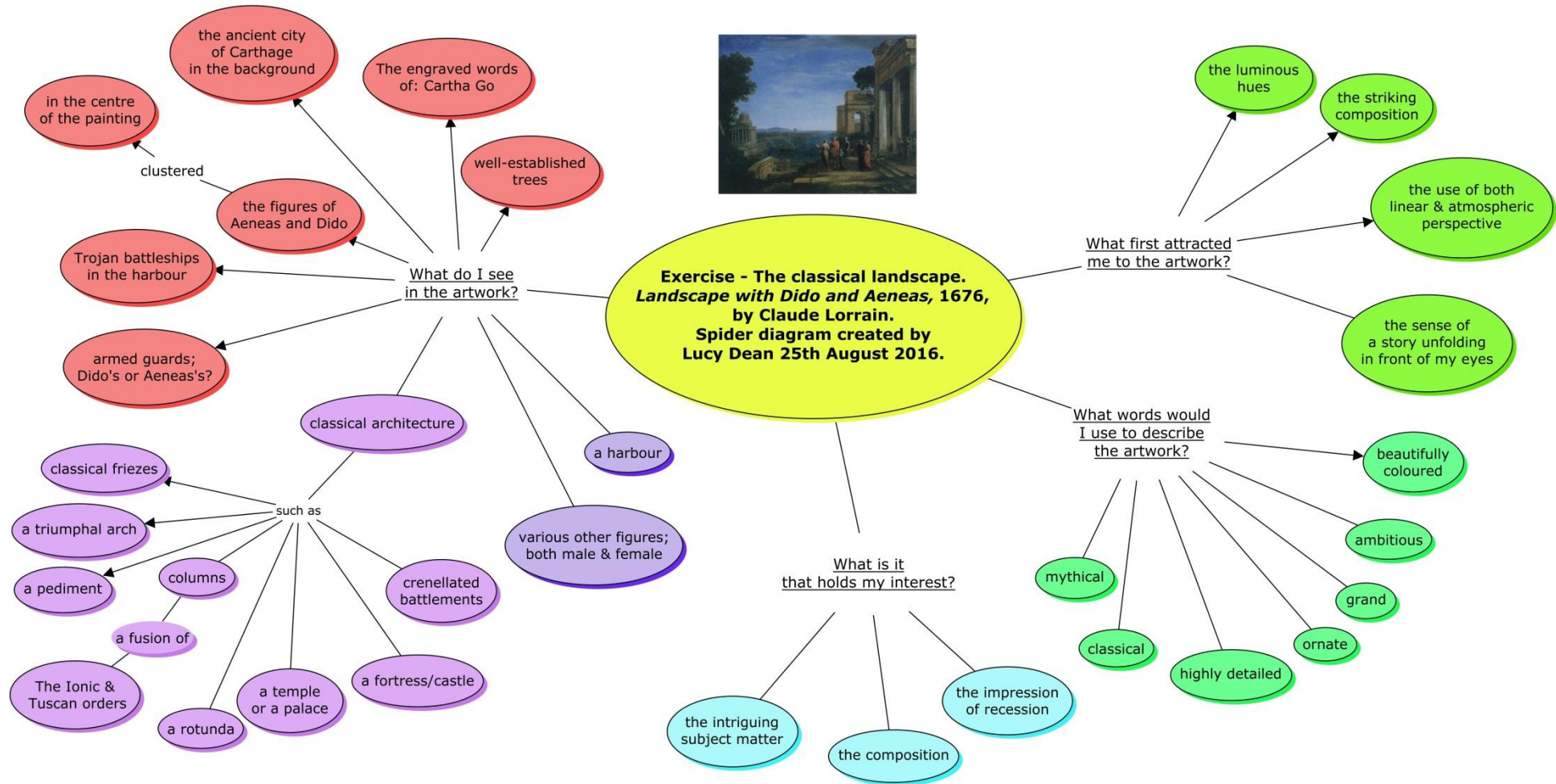


Figure 2 Spider diagram 1 of 3.

Describing and relating *Landscape with Dido and Aeneas, 1676, by Claude Lorrain (spider diagram 2 of 3)*

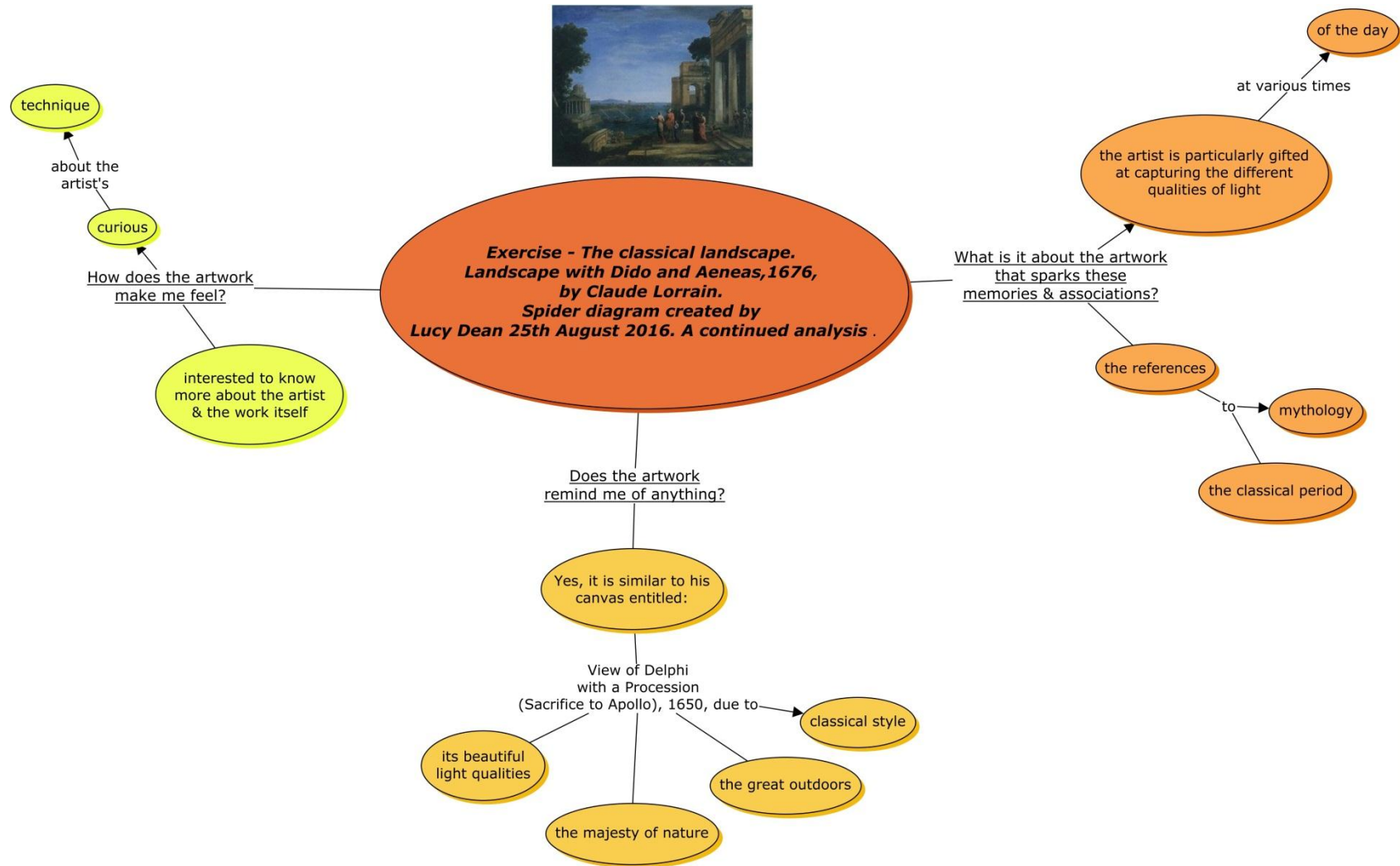


Figure 3 Spider diagram 2 of 3

Describing and relating *Landscape with Dido and Aeneas*, 1676, by Claude Lorrain (spider diagram 3 of 3)

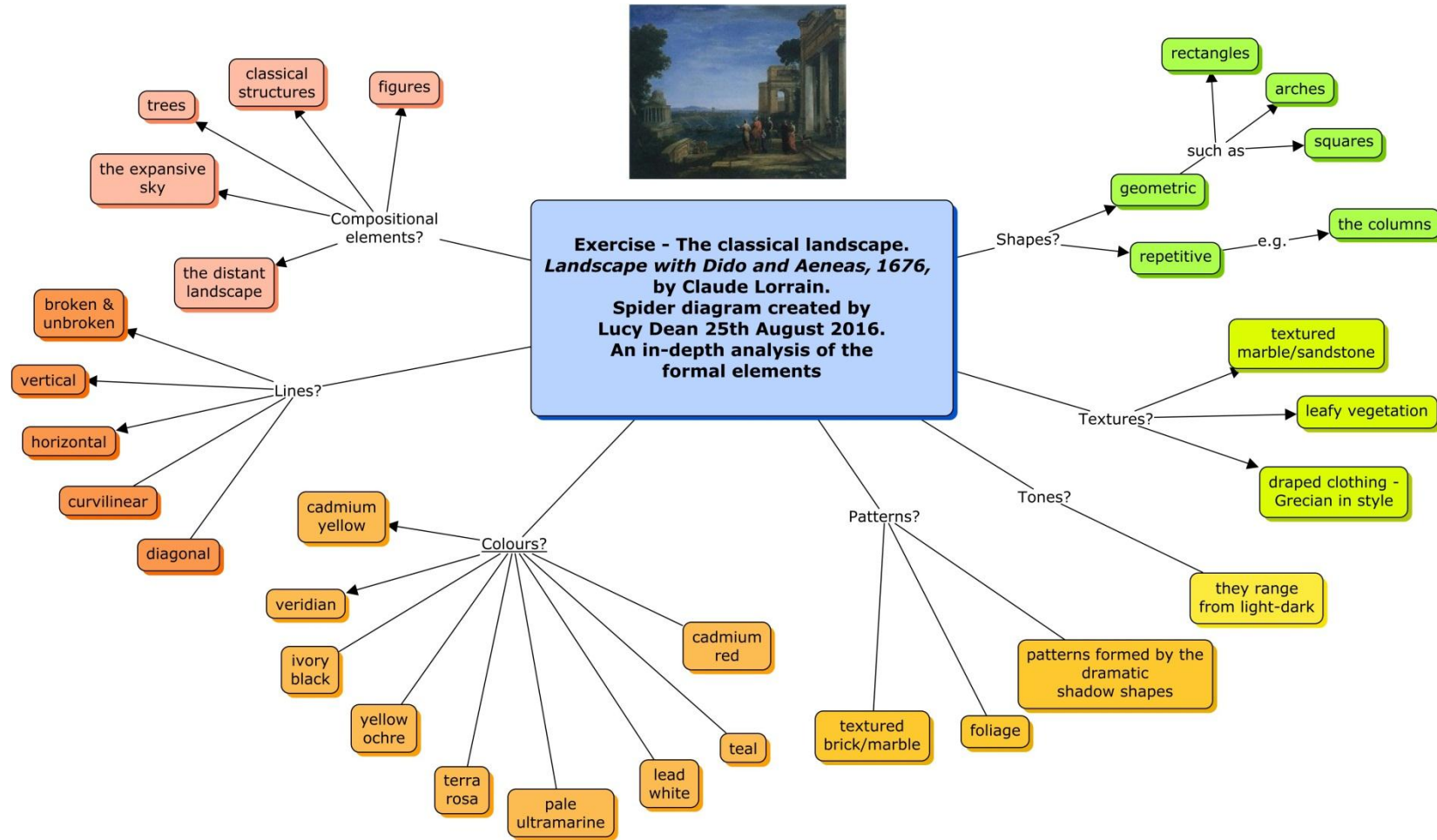


Figure 4 Spider diagram 3 of 3.

Describing the processes and techniques of *Landscape with Dido and Aeneas*

***Landscape with Dido and Aeneas* is a landscape painting of a classical nature**

It is classical due to the references to the lives of Dido and Aeneas, which is a story from antiquity (Hall, 1974).

The architecture is clearly from Ancient Greece or Rome. The rotundas, pillars and triumphal arches are unmistakably antiquarian.

The figures are attired in the garments of a much earlier period.



Figure 6 *Landscape with Dido and Aeneas*, 1676, oil on canvas, by Claude Lorrain.

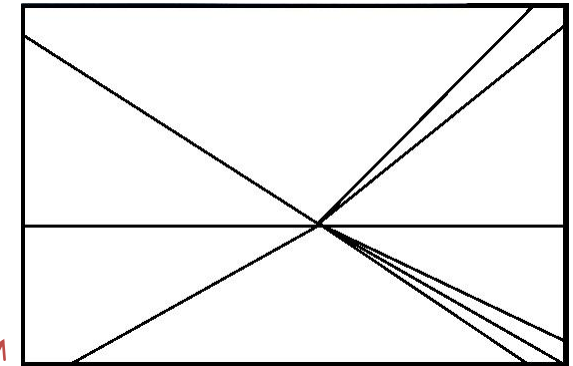


Figure 5 The rules of linear perspective state that all lines must converge on a vanishing point which is situated somewhere on the horizon line (our eye line). Claude's vanishing point is slightly off-centre in *Landscape with Dido and Aeneas*. Digital drawing by Lucy Dean, 2016.

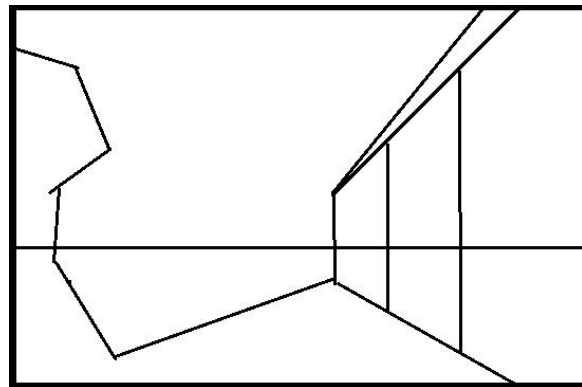


Figure 7 Mapping the largest areas first - the Atelier method. Start by mapping the shadows shapes in order to create a cohesive and proportionate whole (Artists and Illustrators, n.d.). Digital drawing by Lucy Dean, 2016.

To create a cohesive composition Lorrain must have drawn out the largest shapes first. As my drawing (seen left) shows, he would have mapped out the largest shadow shapes first in order to accurately gauge the gesture and proportion (Artists and Illustrators, n.d.).

Also, he utilised the principals of linear perspective to convincingly portray the scenery and the architecture. Aerial perspective was also used once he had achieved the correct proportions. Aerial perspective is a highly effective technique for helping one generate a sense of recession. He used this by applying a series of opaque and transparent glazes to blend the tones. This is particularly clear when we observe the blending of the sky and land bordering the horizon line.

A variety of methods have been utilised by Claude to produce this canvas, namely the techniques of atmospheric or aerial perspective and that of linear perspective.

Describing the processes and techniques of *Landscape with Dido and Aeneas* (continued)

As I've stated previously Lorrain would have first mapped the principal shadow shapes in order to gauge the correct proportions and gesture. Once he had achieved this he would have pursued colour and value (Artists and Illustrators, n.d.).

According to my research Lorrain painted slowly and as a direct result only produced a limited number of canvases a year. The advantage of working slowly is that fewer mistakes are made, leading to a greater overall accuracy. His works were enormously popular in his time which is a testimony to his vision. I think this canvas took a considerable time to produce; perhaps several months due to its superior level of refinement (Chilvers, 2009).

I think the artist produced this without help as he had a very particular eye for colour, composition and layout, which contrasted markedly with his contemporaries (Chilvers, 2009).

I am unsure how it is framed as I have been unable to discover the design of the frame. It must be a frame of a substantial weight and size though as the painting alone is enormous (1.5m in height x 2m wide), (Lagerlof, 1990).

Interpreting *Landscape with Dido and Aeneas*

It seems to me that the scene that Lorrain is depicting is loosely based on the mythological story of the lives of Dido and Aeneas. According to Virgil in the *Aeneid*, Aeneas was a Trojan prince who escaped the Trojan Wars by heading for the sea. Later, the Trojans were washed ashore at Carthage after a severe storm. At this point the mythological figure of Venus intercedes and steers Aeneas in the direction of Dido's palace. Together Aeneas and his friend Achates arrive at the palace where they meet the Carthaginian queen Dido. In an attempt to unite the Carthaginians and the Trojans, Venus persuades Cupid to cast a spell on Dido so that she falls madly in love with Aeneas. For a time they are lovers until Aeneas receives word from Mercury that he must leave Carthage. After a tearful and emotional goodbye, the two lovers separate and beset with grief, Dido commits suicide, on a funeral pyre (Hall, 1974).

I believe that in *Landscape with Dido and Aeneas*, Claude is picturing the moment just before the lovers must separate forever (Hall, 1974). His version of the narrative is largely dispassionate though as the figures are secondary to the overall scenery and the dramatic effects of the light.

The artwork was created in 1676 which was a period of great change in Rome and Italy as a whole. During the 17th century the papacy was extremely powerful and each pope sought to glorify Catholicism and the arts. Rome was redeveloped in this era to allow foreign visitors, pilgrims and locals greater ease of access to the great cathedrals. They also sought to build connections with outlying areas of the city. This was the age of the Baroque and the Vatican

realised that they could counter the spread of the Protestant Reformation by elevating Catholicism via the Baroque. So new avenues were constructed and cathedrals were redesigned to reflect the glory of Christ and his message through all of the arts (About Roma, n.d.).

I think the artwork is influenced by the Baroque and by events in Italy in general as the nobility and senior members of the clergy purchased Claude's art as it was beautiful and pleasing to the eye. The works themselves are perceived as being calm and serene and would have appealed to his patrons as an oasis of peace in spite of all of the tumultuous changes taking place in this era (About Roma, n.d.).

Claude Lorrain (c. 1604–5 - 1682) was born in Chamagne in the region of Lorraine in France in 1604/5. Very early into his teens he moved to Italy from France. Initially he trained as a pastry chef (as was the tradition for natives of the Lorraine region), before progressing to the position of studio assistant to Agostino Tassi. He also spent two years studying in Naples with the German-born landscapist Goffredo Wals. This was to prove pivotal as the scenery of the bay of Naples was to inspire him for the rest of his life. In 1633 he became a member of the Accademia di S. Luca and it was during this period in Rome that he began to establish himself as a leading painter of landscapes. By the end of the 1630s his patrons included European royalty (Prince Philip IV of Spain) and the Pope Urban VIII. As his career progressed his pictures increased in size in line with demand (and his stature), and also due to their purpose as decorations within the palatial homes of his distinguished patrons. In his time he was very well known and much copied. In fact his work was so popular and widely distributed in England, that many people remodelled their estates to resemble his paintings, complete with classical style rotundas (Chilvers, 2009).

I believe that *Landscape with Dido and Aeneas* was designed to fill a palatial abode due to its size and its level of classical elegance. I can well imagine how beautiful it would have looked on the wall of a Roman villa or a palace belonging to a member of the nobility or papacy. Its purpose certainly was ceremonial as the owner would have acquired it with a view to improving his status amongst his peers. To have a work in one's possession by an artist of such renown would have greatly enhanced one's collection and kudos (Chilvers, 2009).



Figure 8 *View of Delphi with a Procession (Sacrifice to Apollo)*, 1650, Claude Lorrain.

It is similar to another work of his entitled: *View of Delphi with a Procession (Sacrifice to Apollo)*, 1650. Although it is an earlier work, it clearly shows his adeptness in regards to capturing the differing light values at various times of the day. A temple or cathedral is glimpsed in the background, complete with columns and a rotunda. Trees dominate the scenery and the dark coulisse is present in the foreground. The different picture planes are united as described by Kenneth Clark, with compositional devices such as trees and bridges dotted around to draw our eyes inward towards the distance. As in *Landscape with Dido and Aeneas*, here Lorrain has utilised both transparent and opaque glazes to vary the light and to give an impression of recession. The delicate values on the horizon provide a gentle warmth which is suggestive of a sunset. The scene depicted is more lethargic and languorous due to the natural forms and the harmonious golden tones. *View of Delphi with a Procession (Sacrifice to Apollo)* differs from

Landscape with Dido and Aeneas as the references to classical mythology are less obvious and are of less importance than in the latter. A knowledge of the stories of classical antiquity is less important in the former as the landscape takes greater prominence (Lagerlof, 1990).

Evaluation

I can certify that *Landscape with Dido and Aeneas* is a grand landscape painting with classical references. It depicts the recognisable structures of a rotunda, a fusion of Ionic and Tuscan columns, friezes and a triumphal arch. Trees and foliage are scattered throughout as well as various figures dressed in classical attire. There are Trojan ships in the bay with a sprawling town pictured in the distance.

The depiction of the trees, buildings and landscape is fairly realistic, although the figures are out of proportion (as their heads are too small for their bodies). This might be because the landscape was the artist's principal focus rather than the people. The people were considered secondary to his magnificent vistas (Chilvers, 2009).

Although the title suggests an antiquarian theme, the landscape as a genre is of more importance to the artist. The narrative is essentially a means of validating the painting in the eyes of his patrons and the greater public (Chilvers, 2009).

The subject is familiar to me as the stories of Dido and Aeneas are popular throughout the ages. Henry Purcell is an English composer who produced an opera based on the original story by Virgil. The opera explores the whole narrative as an all-sung work (This is Global Limited, 2016).

I can see people in the artwork and it would appear that the two central figures are discussing what happens next. Will Aeneas leave Dido as he has been commanded to? Or will he remain and rule alongside her in Carthage? The scene is slightly ambiguous as the artist has a dispassionate view of the proceedings, but this is how I would interpret the narrative.

I believe the artwork is less about the antiquarian story and more about the landscape. My research indicates that Claude used the classical stories to emphasise the majesty of the landscape rather than to develop the story further (Web Gallery of Art, 1996).

I think the artwork would be transformed if different colours and values were utilised as I believe this would generate a sultry feel. The story is rather heroic and would be greatly enhanced by a change in atmosphere or location. If I was to develop the canvas further I might add some drama and more gesture to show some depth of feeling on the character's faces. A fight scene perhaps or more dialogue could be introduced. But this is due to my interest and passion for figures and portraits. Claude preferred landscapes which is why the scenery occupied more of his efforts.

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