

One of the most momentous developments in Western history – the Industrial Revolution – impacted the evolution of Romantic landscape painting in England. Although discussion of the Industrial Revolution invariably focuses on technological advances, factory development, and growth of urban centers, its effect on the countryside and the land itself was no less severe. The detrimental economic impact industrialization had on the prices for agrarian products produced significant unrest in the English countryside. In particular, increasing numbers of displaced farmers could no longer afford to farm their small land plots.

This situation is addressed in the landscape paintings of JOHN CONSTABLE, perhaps the best known of the English landscape artists. *The Haywain* is representative of Constable's art and reveals much about his outlook. In this large painting, Constable presented a placid, picturesque scene of the countryside. A small cottage sits on the left, and in the center foreground a man leads a horse and wagon across the stream. Billowy clouds float lazily across the sky, and the scene's tranquility is augmented by the muted greens and golds and by the delicacy of Constable's brush strokes. The artist portrayed the oneness with nature that the Romantic poets sought; the relaxed figures are not observers but participants in the landscape's being. Constable made countless studies from nature for of his canvases, which helped him produce in his paintings the convincing sense of reality praised by his contemporaries. In his quest for the authentic landscape, Constable studied it as a meteorologist (which he was by avocation). His special gift was for capturing the texture that the atmosphere (the climate and the weather, which delicately veil what is seen) gave to landscape. Constable's use of tiny dabs of local color, stippled with white, created a sparkling shimmer of light and hue across the canvas surface – the vibration itself suggestive of movement and process.

*The Haywain* is also significant for precisely what it does not show – the civil unrest of the agrarian working class and the outbreaks of violence and arson that resulted. Indeed, this painting has a nostalgic, wistful air to it. To a certain extent, this scene (although carefully detailed) is linked to Constable's memories of a disappearing rural pastoralism. The artist came from a family of considerable wealth; his father was a rural landowner, and many of the scenes Constable painted (*The Haywain* included) depict his family's property near East Bergholt in Suffolk, East Anglia.

The people that populate Constable's landscapes blend into the scenes and are at one with nature. Rarely does the viewer see workers engaged in tedious labor. This nostalgia, presented in such naturalistic terms, renders Constable's works Romantic in tone. That Constable felt a kindred spirit with the Romantic artists is revealed by his comment, "painting is but another word for feeling."



JOHN CONSTABLE, *The*

*Haywain*, 1821. Oil on canvase, 4'3" x 6'2". National Gallery, London