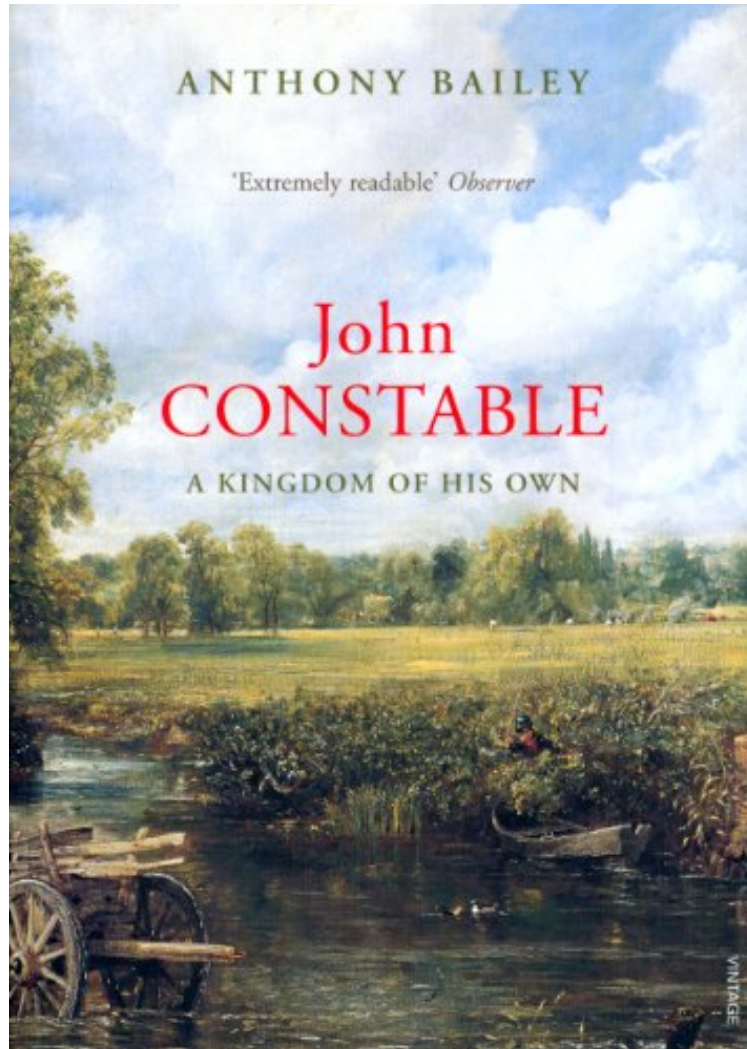


[Ebook free] John Constable: A Kingdom of his Own

John Constable: A Kingdom of his Own

Anthony Bailey

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Anthony Bailey : John Constable: A Kingdom of his Own before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised John Constable: A Kingdom of his Own:

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. an engaging chronicle of Constable's private lifeBy hmf22Anthony Bailey's biography of John Constable is, I believe, the first full-scale biography of Constable in over a century. Bailey did a fine job of sifting through the sources and constructing a meticulous account of Constable's private life, yet this book is more of a chatty chronicle than a rigorous analysis of Constable's life and work. Reading it, I learned something about Constable's education, his relationships with patrons and other artists, and his experience of marketing his paintings, a great deal about his relations with his siblings, children, and housecats, and more than I really wanted to know about his prolonged, tedious courtship of Maria Bicknell; yet I did not learn much more about his painting than I could have gotten from Wikipedia or Smarthistory or other readily accessible websites. The book

includes color plates of some of Constable's paintings, but these plates are neither dated nor keyed to the text. In fact, the selection of plates doesn't match up to the text very well--some of the paintings that are discussed in the text do not appear as illustrations, and some of the paintings that do appear on the color plates are not, as far as I could determine, discussed in the text. Flipping back and forth between the not very illuminating text and the not very well-organized or well-labeled plates got on my nerves after a while. I was also troubled by Bailey's tendency to romanticize his subject. For example, when describing how Constable, aged 24, met his future wife, aged 12, for the first time, Bailey writes: "Constable was twenty-four and Maria half his age . . . He may not have recognized the spark that flashed--he might even have been horrified by any flicker of erotic impulse--but something happened; it is visible in the painting he made of young Maria apparently about this time. . . Maria at that age could not have had a conscious sense of what was to come. And yet between painter and sitter a current passed" (27). The painting--which isn't firmly dated and apparently isn't even firmly identified as a picture of Maria--shows a pretty, impish-looking young girl with her hand on her hip. The sitter's personality comes across decidedly, but it seems a stretch for Bailey to deduce from this painting, and from the fact that painter and putative sitter got married about sixteen years later, that Constable was attracted to his adolescent subject when he made the painting. This is one of several places in which I felt that Bailey sensationalized his material in order to make a good story. Overall, this is an entertaining read, rich in personal information, but not a very rewarding choice for someone who seeks to understand Constable as a painter.

Born in 1776 in East Anglia near the river Stour, John Constable was destined for his father's business of milling and grain-shipping. But he was obdurately opposed to this and persuaded his family he should become an artist instead. In the same determined spirit, he wooed Maria Bicknell in the teeth of opposition from her formidable grandfather, and persisted in painting landscapes at a time when history paintings and portraits were the fashion. Sometimes sharp and sarcastic, and often depressed, Constable in fact possessed a warm gift for intimate friendship. This is revealed in his letters to John Dunthorne, village handyman and housepainter, and to his best friend and patron, archdeacon John Fisher, to whom he wrote: 'I have a kingdom of my own, both fertile and populous - my landscape and my children'. In recent times, after a period of relative ignominy, Constable's influence on British landscape painting has been re-acknowledged, he has been more widely exhibited and his reputation has been reestablished as one of the masters of his genre. This important and absorbing biography explores his life and work, and highlights the dramatic tension between the two.

From Publishers Weekly Romantic painter John Constable (1776–1837) struggled for years to enter the Royal Academy, was constantly torn between the demands of family and artistic life and had a tortuous path to the limited success he did achieve in his lifetime. Bailey (Vermeer: A View of Delft), a longtime New Yorker contributor and prolific author, seeks to expose both the *chiaro* and *scuro* in the painter's life and work; a perspective, argues Bailey, left largely unrealized in the only other full-length biography of Constable, Charles Leslie's 1843 *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable*. The result is an intricate, intimate, balanced study, revealing the artist's moody, depressive, acerbic and often parsimonious nature along with his intense devotion to his wife, Mary Bicknell (whom he met when she was 12, he 24) and their seven children. Bailey's meticulous scholarship at times overwhelms with detail disproportionate to its larger relevance, and interesting issues, such as contemporary criticism of Constable, invite further analysis. Bailey writes with the elegant, carefully composed quietude of a Constable painting, and has crafted a sensitive and highly comprehensive portrait that will be essential for Constable scholars and very significant to general readers with an interest in the artist and his period. Color and bw illus., maps. (Feb. 1) Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. "Well-researched and accessible . . . a valuable companion to the artist's first biography and a cornerstone for future research." Choice