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**Eugène Burnand portrays John and Peter's dawning hopes and deep concerns through his realistic depiction their anxious race to Christ's tomb.**

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# Anticipation

BY HEIDI J. HORNICK

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**A**fter Mary Magdalene ran to tell Peter and “the disciple whom Jesus loved” that the stone had been removed from the entrance to Jesus’ grave on Easter morning, the two men raced back to the garden tomb to see for themselves. The other disciple (traditionally understood to be the Apostle John) outran Peter and looked into the sepulcher first (John 20:1-5). This ‘race to the tomb’ does not indicate competition, Raymond Brown notes, because “throughout the Gospel, Peter and the Beloved Disciple are portrayed as friends and not as rivals.”<sup>1</sup> Rather, their running expresses the disciples’ concern upon hearing Mary Magdalene’s report.<sup>2</sup>

There is a traditional depiction of this event in the fifteenth-century *Codex de Predis*. As is characteristic of Renaissance compositions, the figures in *Following the News of Mary Magdalene of the Resurrection of Jesus, Simon Peter and John Come Running to the Tomb* (1476) are represented in solid or local colors; their bodies are proportional and movement across the foreground is conveyed through their body positions. In keeping with both literary and visual traditions, John is shown in the lead and he appears young and clean-shaven. Notice that his facial features indicate anticipation with directed gaze and open lips; his hands are open and his arms are moving forward. Peter, bearded and grey, seems more complacent and calm with both feet firmly on the path. An indication of movement can be found in his gold mantle extending behind him and his arms moving out in front of his body. Despite the late date of this image, the halos are painted flat against the sides of the apostles’ heads. One-point linear perspective had been codified four decades earlier in 1435 by Leon Battista Alberti and was certainly known by the illustrator of this codex. The three empty crosses on Golgotha and the pink Jerusalem cityscape are visible in the background against the blue sky.

The *Codex de Predis*, a manuscript book of the New Testament which is signed and dated April 6, 1476, was illuminated by the Milanese artist Cristoforo de Predis (c. 1440-1486).<sup>3</sup> This artist’s oeuvre remains debated amongst scholars. In the earliest archival documentation of his life, which occurs in a notarial act of September 1467 concerning the division of his paternal inheritance, he is described as “mutus” (mute). The artist worked for the Duke of Milan, Galeazzo Maria Sforza, the Borromeo family, and the Bishop of Piacenza, Fabrizio Marliani.<sup>4</sup> This miniature was most likely patronized by a noble family in Milan. Cristoforo was influenced by the retardaire miniature style of France and Flanders, which may explain the lack of perspective for the halos discussed above.

The Swiss painter Eugène Burnand (1850-1921) offers a modern interpretation of the same event in *Saints Peter and John Running to Christ’s Tomb on the Morning*

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*Cristoforo de Predis* (c. 1440-1486), *FOLLOWING THE NEWS OF MARY MAGDALENE OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS, SIMON PETER AND JOHN COME RUNNING TO THE TOMB*, illustration from the *Codex de Predis* (1476). Royal Library, Turin, Italy. Photo: Album / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.

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of the Resurrection (1898). The disciples are seen running through a Swiss-inspired landscape on a cold morning. John's facial expression and body language indicate worry as he wrings his hands. Peter's eyes show fear and anxiety.

Burnard was intrigued by the newest publishing techniques especially as they applied to photography. As a Realist, he challenged the avant-garde painters of the time known as the Impressionists. Like them, however, he was inspired by nature in his homeland. He studied in Geneva at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts with Barthélemy Menn before he went to Paris and joined Jean-Léon Gérôme's studio in 1872. He decided to stay in residence in Paris after a trip to Rome in 1876-1877. Along with the young French artists of the time, Burnand was exposed to discussions about the aesthetic aspects of positivism and the tradition of recording modern rural and urban life under the rubric of naturalism.<sup>5</sup>

Soon the artist created his signature style of landscape painting that is seen here. His ability to convey the rural beauty of Switzerland was rewarded with several works being included in the Paris Salon. He was awarded a medal in the Paris Salon of 1882, a gold medal in the Exposition Universelle of 1889 in Paris, and another in 1900.<sup>6</sup>

Burnand was influenced by the realism and sociological concerns found in the paintings of Jean-Francois Millet (1814-1875) and Gustave Courbet (1819-1877). After learning the technique of engraving from Paul Girardet (1821-1893), Burnand produced numerous illustrations for newspapers such as *L'Illustration* and *Tour du monde*. Not only did these works in the graphic arts allow Burnand to earn a living, they earned him quite a reputation. Because he could work quickly and accurately, he was often hired to illustrate popular working people: collectors of coal, sowers in the fields, and penitent woodsmen praying at a roadside cross.<sup>7</sup>

An interesting mixture of realism and religious symbolism are woven through this composition. For instance, the biblical figures of John and Peter are depicted as rugged "working types." They are running away from the three crosses on the lower right of the composition and towards the light of the dawn. The liturgical colors of both Easter and Lent (purple, gold, and white), found on the horizon and through the sky, are reflected by John's robe. As the art historian Gabriel Weisberg explains, "The artist's ability to capture the light and atmosphere of Switzerland showed how Burnand's vision of the [realist] landscape was integrated with progressive developments while also suggesting that the landscape itself could contain religious symbolism."<sup>8</sup>

Beginning in the 1860s, the writings of the French historian and philosopher Ernest Renan (1823-1892) had highlighted the importance of Christ's humanity.<sup>9</sup> Burnand, as a naturalist, was also determined to show in his religious compositions only what could be tangibly understood. Weisberg writes, "Such paintings as *Les Disciples* (1898), in focusing on two figures in the foreground plane, reveals religion through the recording of human conduct and passion. There is little that is supernatural in this or in his other works." Documentary photographs of the artist's models reveal how he painted in his studio to achieve the realist effects seen here.

## NOTES

1 Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, Anchor Bible 29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), II, 1006.

2 *Ibid.*, 1007.

3 R. Passoni, *Il Codice Varia 124 della Biblioteca Reale di Torino e Cristoforo De Predis*, in *Il Codice Varia 124 della Biblioteca Reale di Torino, miniato da Cristoforo De Predis* (Milano, 1476), edited by A. Vitale-Brovarone (Turin, Italy: 1987), 85-113.

4 Enrica Banti, "Predis, de," *Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online* (Oxford University Press), [www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T069308pg1](http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T069308pg1) (accessed December 12, 2013).

5 Gabriel Weisberg, "Review of Philippe Kaenel, *Eugène Burnand (1850-1921), peintre naturaliste* (Exhibition catalogue, Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne and Editions 5 Continents, Milan, March 12-May 23, 2004), in *Nineteenth Century Art Worldwide*, [www.19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/autumn04/290-eugene-burnand-18501921-peintre-naturaliste-by-philippe-kaenel](http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/autumn04/290-eugene-burnand-18501921-peintre-naturaliste-by-philippe-kaenel) (accessed December 17, 2013).

6 A. Daguerre de Hureaux, "Burnand, Eugène," *Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online* (Oxford U.P.), [www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T012567](http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T012567) (accessed December 12, 2013).

7 Weisberg, *ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*