

Recognizing Penguins:
Audience Expectation, Cognitive Genre Theory, and the Ending of Mark's Gospel

Elizabeth E. Shively
St. Mary's College, University of St. Andrews, St. Andrews, UK, KY16 8QZ

This study exposes shortcomings of arguments that view an “open ending” theory of Mark as a modern construct that would have made little sense to an ancient audience. It looks at 1st century genre expectations in light of cognitive genre theory and argues that a reader-response approach to Mark's ending is not only appropriate but also desirable. First, it describes and assesses interpretative issues surrounding Mark's ending. Second, it discusses ways of approaching Mark's ending in light of genre expectations, building on a literary approach to genre with a cognitive (psychological) approach. Third, it offers an interpretation of Mark's ending in light of its fit with Greco-Roman *bios* and in terms of cognitive models. It shows how Mark develops a pattern of imitation between Jesus and his disciples that, at the end, invites the audience to reflect on and respond to the person of Jesus and his role as the exemplar of discipleship.

Key words: genre theory, Greco-Roman *bios*, Gospel of Mark, cognitive theories, ending of Mark

Mark's ending continues to polarize scholars. Most agree that 16:8 is the earliest and most reliable ending of the Gospel,¹ but disagree about how to explain its

¹ The rise of textual criticism has yielded this consensus. The manuscript tradition attests to a “shorter” ending (an inclusion between vv. 8-9) and a “longer” ending (vv. 9-20). The “shorter” ending is attested in the uncial Greek mss. of the 7th – 9th centuries (L, Ψ, 099, 0112), the margin of the Harclean Syriac ms., the Sahidic and Boharic mss. In addition, some Ethiopic mss. include it after 16:8 and then continue with vv. 9-12. More manuscript support is extant for the “longer ending” (A C D K W X Δ Π Ψ f¹³), but the oldest Greek mss. (Ⲁ and B) omit vv. 9-12. For a full discussion of the text critical issues, see Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission*,

features. Until recently, most scholars have held that 16:8 is the original ending. A growing number, however, argue that Mark's true ending is lost, and that an "open ending" theory is based on 20th century literary and reader-response approaches that make little sense in light of first-century genre expectations. Underlying assumptions about genre – understood as a "prior agreement,"² "contract,"³ or "code of behavior"⁴ established between author and audience – guide interpretive choices and have hermeneutical implications. Reader-response solutions to Mark's ending tend to view the Gospel as a story; hermeneutical implications include a focus on the literary and rhetorical features of the text and on the audience's response in the construction of meaning. On the other hand, text-generated solutions to the ending tend to view Mark as historiographical or

Corruption, and Restoration (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 322-27.

Recently, Nicholas P. Lunn reexamined the evidence to argue that 16:9-20 is Mark's original ending in *The Original Ending of Mark: A New Case for the Authenticity of Mark 16:9-20* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014). He seeks to demonstrate weaknesses in customary arguments against both external and internal evidence, but a number of methodological flaws prevent his success. See my review of his book, in *RBL*, October 10, 2017.

² Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 49.

³ Richard Burridge, *A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans; Dearborn, MI: Dove, 2004), 53.

⁴ Heather Dubrow, *Genre* (London: Methuen, 1982), 2; see also 31-2.

biographical narrative; hermeneutical implications include expectations of historical details and formal closure. Adherents to both generally see genre categories in terms of literary features. Yet a literary approach does not fully account for how and why people recognize and engage texts. In what follows, I build on a literary approach by integrating cognitive genre theory, which sees genre categories as components of mental frameworks that represent what people know about a text. I argue that an examination of first century genre expectations in light of cognitive models undermines arguments against an “open ending” theory of Mark, and strengthens the view that a reader-response approach to such an ending is not only appropriate but also desirable.

I. Interpretive Issues

A. *A Reader-Response Solution to Mark's Ending*

The rise of narrative criticism in the 1980's solidified a consensus that 16:8 is the intended ending of the Gospel.⁵ The debate in modern scholarship in the first half

⁵ Julius Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Marci*, 2d ed. (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1909), 137; Robert Henry Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St. Mark* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), 106-16; Ernst Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus*, 11th ed. (KEK Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1951), 356-60; Raymond Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Paulist, 1973), 123; William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 591-92; Paul J. Achtemeier, *Mark* (Proclamation Commentaries; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 91; James Dunn,

of the 20th century had come to focus on literary and theological arguments about whether or not a sentence, let alone a whole book, could end with the postpositive particle *γάρ* and whether or not Mark's Gospel could end on a note of fear rather than a note of triumph by omitting an appearance of the risen Christ. In the early to mid-20th century, R. H. Lightfoot made a case that 16:8 is the ending original to the Gospel by urging interpreters to read Mark in light of its own literary and theological aims instead of reading it through the lenses of Matthew and Luke, and by demonstrating examples of sentences that end in *γάρ* in other ancient literature.⁶ Some scholars continued to hold that the true ending was lost, maintaining that it would be rare for a book to end with *γάρ* or with a note of

Jesus and the Spirit (London: SCM, 1975), 389, n. 85; Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 1:239; Norman Perrin, *The Resurrection: According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 18-19; Vernon Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 192; Morna Hooker, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 1991), 391-94.

⁶ Lightfoot, *Gospel Message of St. Mark*, 106-16. Vincent Taylor replied that in none of these examples does the word *γάρ* end a book, but in 1972 Pieter W. van der Horst provided just such an example from the 32nd treatise of Plotinus. Pieter W. van der Horst, "Can a book end with *gar*: A note on Mark 16:8," *JTS* 23 (1972): 121-24. Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1966), 609.

fear.⁷ The majority, however, followed Lightfoot. Swimming with this current, narrative critics interpreted the ending as it stands in Mark, turning from the question, *How* can a book end with *γάρ*? to, *Why* does *this* book end with *γάρ*?

Those employing literary tools tend to identify Mark's genre as some sort of *story*. For instance, Mary Ann Tolbert regards Mark as a Hellenistic Romance;⁸

⁷ Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 322-26; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel*, trans. D. H. Madvig (London: SPCK, 1971), 366-67, 373; C. D. F. Moule, "St. Mark 16:8 Once More," *NTS* 2 (1955): 58-59. Subsequently, N. Clayton Croy would bolster this position by showing that sentences ending in *γάρ* are much less common in narratives than in other kinds of genres, and on this basis concluded that Mark 16:8 is not original. N. Clayton Croy, *The Mutilation of Mark's Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 47-50. However, Kelly Iverson used the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (*TLG*), a computer-driven search engine, to investigate the uses of *γάρ* in all literary genres from the 3d century B.C.E. to the 2d century C.E. to show that statements ending in *γάρ* are rare in all genres at all times, leading to the conclusion that its usage can be deployed as data to support the case for a mutilated text or an intentional ending with equal force. Kelly Iverson, "A Further Word on Final *gar* (Mark 16:8)," *CBQ* 68 (2006): 79-94.

⁸ Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*.

Robert Tannehill compares Mark to a modern novel;⁹ Tom Boomershine and Gilbert Bartholomew assume that Mark is a kind of ancient popular narrative;¹⁰ Norm Peterson implicitly suggests Mark is story by interpreting it according to plot types;¹¹ and Francis Moloney states that Mark invented the new literary form of “gospel” to offer a “narrative telling” of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection.¹²

In light of genre determination, most use narrative criticism and a reader-response approach to interpret 16:8 as an open ending, which is the implied author’s rhetorical strategy to invite the implied audience to finish the story. At 16:8, the reversal of the messianic secret and subsequent human failure creates a problem: the women are commanded to go and tell what others have been forbidden to tell up to now, yet they are silent.¹³ These scholars address the problem by drawing on earlier patterns in the narrative, particularly the exhortation to exhibit faith over fear and the trajectory of flawed discipleship. The audience is thought to generate meaning by responding obediently to the

⁹ Tannehill, “The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role,” *The Interpretation of Mark*, ed. W. R. Telford (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1995): 387-88.

¹⁰ Tom Boomershine and Gilbert Bartholomew, “The Narrative Technique of Mark 16:8,” *JBL* 100 (1981), 213-14.

¹¹ Norman R. Petersen, “Can One Speak of a Gospel Genre?” *Noet* 28 (1994): 137-58.

¹² Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), 3.

¹³ The exception to this is the Gerasene demoniac story (Mark 5:1-20).

command.¹⁴ Thus, Mark's true ending is located in the audience's response to the unsettling features of the written text.

B. A Text-Generated Approach to Mark's Ending

Since the 1990s, scholarly opinion has begun to shift from an audience-generated explanation to a text-generated explanation that locates the intended ending of Mark's Gospel in a supposed manuscript fragment that was either lost or never written.¹⁵ Most who offer a text-generated explanation tend to view

¹⁴ Norman R. Petersen, "When is the End not the End? Literary Reflections on the Ending of Mark's Narrative," *Interpretation* 34 (1980): 156; Thomas E. Boomershine and Gilbert L. Bartholomew, "Mark 16:8 and the Apostolic Commission," *JBL* 100 (1981): 225-39; Paul L. Danove, *The End of Mark's Story: A Methodological Study* (Leiden; New York; Köln: Brill, 1993), esp. 222-230; "The Characterization and Narrative Function of the Women at the Tomb," in *Biblica*, 77 (1996): 397; J. David Hester, "Dramatic Inconclusion: Irony and the Narrative Rhetoric of the Ending of Mark," *JSNT* 57 (1995): 83; Tannehill, "Disciples in Mark," 169-95; Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 297.

¹⁵ Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Craig Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20 WBC 34B* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001); Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids:

Mark's genre as a *historical or biographical writing*. According to this view, an open ending would not have served Mark's purpose of reporting the events surrounding the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus in a complete and satisfying way.¹⁶ Most who hold this view suggest that the ending was lost. For instance, N. Clayton Croy suggests that Matthew, Luke, and John all provide excellent examples of the kind of formal narrative closure that Mark must have originally exhibited.¹⁷ Other scholars take a step further and imagine the ending. The most natural solution is to suggest that the redacted form of Mark's lost text actually appears in the endings of Matthew and Luke.¹⁸

Like reader-response critics, text-generated adherents take their interpretive cues from the preceding narrative, particularly from the pattern of

Eerdmans, 2002); Robert Stein, *Mark BECS* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). Exceptions to this trend are: Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Introducing the Gospel According to Mark*, Vol. 2 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1999), 328; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), 779-801; Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2009), 1088-96.

¹⁶ See Stein, *Mark*, 734-7 for a summary of the leading arguments against the view that Mark 16:8 is the intended ending.

¹⁷ Croy, *Mutilation*, 45-46.

¹⁸ C. F. D. Moule, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1965), 132-33; Gundry, *Mark*, 1009-12; Edwards, *Mark*, 503.

prediction-fulfillment. At 16:6-8, the absence of the risen Christ's meeting with his followers in Galilee creates a problem: Jesus had earlier predicted that he would meet them after the resurrection, and the young man at the tomb tells the women to announce this to the disciples. To resolve the problem, the interpreter generates meaning by positing a lost or unfinished text that narrates the predicted events. Moreover, while reader-response interpreters take their cue from the development of discipleship earlier in the narrative, text-generated interpreters take their cue from the development of the identity and mission of Jesus. That is, scholars representing these opposing approaches tend to focus on either discipleship or Christology to the exclusion of the other theme.

In his commentary on Mark, Ben Witherington builds on the recent scholarly consensus that the Gospel is an example of Greco-Roman *bios*.¹⁹ On the

¹⁹ Richard Burridge and Dirk Frickenschmidt are responsible for establishing this consensus. See Burridge, *What are the Gospels?*; Frickenschmidt, *Evangelium als Biographie Die vier Evangelien im Rahmen antiker Erzählkunst*, TANZ 22 (Tübingen: Franke, 1997). Their predecessors include Charles Talbert, *What is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977; London: SPCK, 1978); David Aune, *The New Testament in its Literary Environment* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1988), 46-76. Critics of the view that Mark is Greco-Roman *bios* include Albrecht Dihle, "Die Evangelien und die biographische Tradition der Antike," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 80 (1983): 33-49; idem, *Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire from Augustus to Justinian*; trans. Manfred Malzahn (München: C.H. Beck'sche

basis of his conclusions about genre, Witherington maintains that the Gospel could not have ended at 16:8. The main contours of his argument are as follows: (1) The focus of ancient biography is the subject, or person about which the biographer writes. Accordingly, Mark 1:1 indicates that the narrative is about the identity of Jesus. If, then, 16:8 is the end of the Gospel, “where is the final key Christological moment where the central character one final time appears on the stage confirming the main theme of the work?”²⁰ (2) Ancient biographers follow the convention of providing suitable closure. Since an ending at 16:8 would not follow this convention, it is likely not the intended ending,²¹ (3) In ancient biography the way a person ends his life reveals his character, so it is unlikely that Mark would have left Jesus’ final appearance with the cry of dereliction, or left

Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1989; English ed., New York: Routledge, 1994), esp. 208-9; Sean Freyne, “Early Christian Imagination and the Gospel,” in *The Earliest Gospels: The Origins and Transmission of the Earliest Christian Gospels: The Contribution of the Chester Beatty Codex*; ed. B. Aland and C. Horton, LNTS 25 (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 2-12; and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Is Mark’s Gospel a Life of Jesus? The Question of Genre* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1990); eadem, “Genre and the Gospels” *Journal of Religion* (1995): 239-46.

²⁰ Witherington, *Mark*, 43.

²¹ He gives the examples of Plutarch, *Life of Caesar*; Josephus’s autobiography; and Tacitus’s *Agricola*. Witherington, *Mark*, 44.

the disciples as failures.²² For Witherington, the recognition that Mark is Greco-Roman *bios* is *ipso facto* the acceptance that 16:8 cannot be the intended ending.

Croy follows Witherington in identifying Mark as Greco-Roman *bios*, and concurs that Mark would have provided suitable closure, following ancient literary conventions. He attributes the view that Mark 16:8 is original to new literary methodologies and post-modern assumptions rather than to new evidence.²³ Accordingly, he entertains only three categories for the ending: “maladroit, modernistic, or mutilated,”²⁴ and not “purposeful.” Others extend this critique. James Edwards states that, “the suggestion that Mark left the Gospel ‘open ended’ owes more to modern literary theory, and particularly to reader-response theory, than to the nature of ancient texts, which with very few exceptions show a dogged proclivity to state conclusions, not suggest them.”²⁵ Stein similarly critiques “open ending” interpretations, suggesting that the audience envisioned by narrative critics appears to be more like highly-educated twentieth- and twenty first-century existentialists than like first-century

²² Witherington, *Mark* 44-45.

²³ Croy, *Mutilation*, 37.

²⁴ Croy eliminates the first two, and concludes that Mark’s ending was mutilated. Croy, *Mutilation*, 106.

²⁵ Edwards, *Mark*, 501. See also Stein, “Ending of Mark,” 92; Philip Oakeshott, “The Wrong Conclusion: Mark 16.1-8 and Literary Theory” *Theology* 113 (2010), 105-13.

Christians.²⁶ In his commentary, Stein labels Mark “historical biography” as shorthand for “historical narrative biography” because he considers Mark to be composed of overlapping genres. He delineates the first two-thirds as biography and the passion narrative (14:43-15:57) as historical narrative. Curiously, he does not identify the genre of the empty tomb account.²⁷ It is difficult to know, then, on what basis these scholars evaluate Mark’s ending and how they reach their conclusions about ancient genre expectations. While they are correct to observe that reader-response critics employ modern literary techniques, they do not successfully demonstrate that an “open ending” or its rhetorical effects fail to meet ancient genre expectations.

II. Approaching Mark’s Ending in Light of Genre Expectations

I agree with Witherington’s and Croy’s attribution of the Greco-Roman *bios* genre to Mark, following the recent scholarly trend;²⁸ but I disagree with their

²⁶ Robert Stein, “The Ending of Mark,” *BBR* 18 (2008): 79-98.

²⁷ Stein, *Mark*, 19-21.

²⁸ Greco-Roman *bioi* would not have served as the only model for the ancient author, however, nor alone have shaped the horizon of expectation for an audience that encountered the Gospel of Mark. Jewish scripture (especially the narratives), apocalyptic thought, and popular storytelling would have also provided significant models and historical and socio-cultural forces that impacted Mark’s generic mode. Taking into account Mark’s features and the developing nature of genres in the ancient world, I find it preferable to think of Mark’s genre

underlying assumptions about genre that their analyses reveal, whereby they treat ancient biography as a class with fixed features to which all the features of Mark must conform. The result is that Mark ends up serving genre, rather than genre serving Mark.

Burridge has demonstrated persuasively that the Gospels's mode of prose narrative, length, focus on Jesus as the subject, characterization of Jesus through words and deeds, basic chronological structure, and concentration on Jesus' death and its consequences all correspond to the repertoire of features²⁹ of ancient biography in form, structure, and topics.³⁰ The presence of such features would

in composite rather than unmixed or uniform terms: Mark is a sub-genre of Greco-Roman *bios*, that is, a biblical-historical *bios* in an apocalyptic mode. The audience's horizon of expectation would have been shaped by familiarity with those models. Eric Eve has an excellent discussion of the models of genre and compositional activity in, *Writing the Gospels: Composition and Memory* (London: SPCK, 2016), 20-24, 52-80.

²⁹ Alistair Fowler defines "repertoire" as the whole range of potential features or points of resemblance that a genre may exhibit. *Types of Literature*, 55.

³⁰ Burridge analyzed the generic features of a group of ancient Lives and demonstrated a high degree of correspondence between these Lives and the Gospels in form, structure and topics. He looked at the opening features (title, prologue), the subject, the external features (mode of representation, size, structure and scale), and the internal features (settings, topics, atmosphere, quality

have provided an ancient audience with a “horizon of expectation”³¹ for communication and meaning.³² Rather than indicating a *new* genre, the “narrative telling” of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection exhibits discernible features of the genre Greco-Roman *bios* applied to Mark’s particular subject.

A look at other ancient works reveals, however, that genres had blurred rather than fixed lines. A writer might depart from generic rules (Homer’s *Odyssey* ends without finishing the storyline of the war) or integrate features of other genres into the primary one (Tacitus’ *Agricola* blends biography and history).

Accordingly, upon outlining its history from ancient times, Dubrow concludes that genre should be viewed in terms of variety and flexibility.³³ Classicist Christopher Pelling avers that while genre provides a “horizon of expectation,” it is nevertheless “not so much a set of pre-cast categories as something which itself continually moves and changes. In Greek and Roman historiography these developments sometimes simply created new norms; more often...they furnished

of characterization, range of purposes, style, social setting). See especially Burridge, *What are the Gospels*, 185-212.

³¹ Pelling, “Epilogue,” in *The Limits of Historiography: Genre and Narrative Historical Texts*, ed. Christina S. Kraus (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 328. The audience may or may not be aware of their expectations, since they are embedded in the cultural and social fabric.

³² Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*

³³ Dubrow, *Genre*, 106.

a wider range of affiliations from which a new writer could select.”³⁴ An approach to Mark’s genre must consider the developing nature and blurred boundaries of genre itself.

This point is not new. Burridge joined scholars across disciplines in allowing for the flexible and developing nature of genre by conceiving of genre identification in terms of family resemblance rather than fixed classification.³⁵

The analogy comes from the idea that, for example, four siblings do not each possess exactly the same set of features as the others, but enough among them to share a family resemblance. The recognition of a member allows for the identification of a type (a family), but does not guarantee that every characteristic feature will be present, important, or similarly represented in every case.³⁶ Three

³⁴ Pelling, “Epilogue,” 328.

³⁵ Burridge, *What are the Gospels?*, 43, 57; cf. 62-67. I believe that this is one of the important contributions of Burridge’s work that biblical scholars who apply it can tend to overlook.

³⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein popularized the philosophical concept of “Familienähnlichkeit” or “family resemblance” in his treatment of language in *Philosophical Investigations*; German text ed. P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte; trans. G.E.M. Anscombe and P.M.S. Hacker, Joachim Schulte; Rev. 4th ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). In a discussion about games, he states that there is no essential feature that they share, but “we see a complicated network of similarities, sometimes similarities of detail” (§66); and he concludes, “I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than ‘family

of the siblings may share the same nose, while the fourth's nose is a different shape. Akin to Burridge, Pelling believes that, "It is better to think of a cluster of 'on-the-whole' expectations" when approaching generic categories.³⁷ Pelling gives the example of Livy's *Decius*, which fits the family resemblance of *bioi*, meeting "on-the-whole" expectations while also departing from those expectations through its use of style. A battle scene that appears to fit the traditional pattern – Romans face an enemy that they outmatch – delays closure such that the episode continually surprises the audience with repeated conclusions. According to Pelling, the ending communicates that, "with a man like Decius every conclusion has to be provisional."³⁸ Similarly, Mark meets

resemblances'; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way, – And I shall say: 'games form a family'." (§67). Fowler developed Wittgenstien's theory of family resemblance for genre theory, viewing genres not as "permanent classes but as families subject to change." Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, v; see also 23, 37-39, 45-48. Dubrow comments that by choosing a genre, a writer "agrees that he will follow at least some of the patterns and conventions we associate with the genre or genres in which he is writing, and we in turn agree that we will pay close attention to certain aspects of his work while realizing that others, because of the nature of the genres, are likely to be far less important." Dubrow, *Genre*, 31.

³⁷ Pelling, "Epilogue," 338.

³⁸ Pelling, "Epilogue," 340.

enough “on-the-whole” generic expectations for the audience to recognize the family resemblance to Greco-Roman *bioi*. But, we should not be surprised if the Gospel fails to meet all the generic expectations; in fact, we should be surprised if it does.

While the family resemblance model is an advance over traditional or Aristotelian genre theory that views genre in terms of fixed features and pure or unmixed categories, it has shortcomings that perpetuate the sort of analysis that Witherington’s represents, which assumes that Mark’s features will correspond to every feature or generic expectation of Greco-Roman *bioi*.³⁹ One key issue is that the family resemblance model continues to focus on discrete features – or parts – rather than the whole and its function.⁴⁰ As Michael Sinding comments, “So even if they are active and useful families rather than passive and useless containers, genres are still categories, and the need to understand how they work persists: how to relate genres to features, to works, to other genres, to readers and to writers.”⁴¹ The family resemblance model is useful, but requires further

³⁹ See also Croy’s analysis in *Mutilation*. Fowler critiques the family resemblance model that he himself adapts for its lack of specificity in *Kinds of Literature*, 41-42.

⁴⁰ For example, Burridge’s analysis focuses on the comparison of particular features of the Gospels to those of Greco-Roman *bioi*, *What are the Gospels*, 185-232.

⁴¹ John M. Swales, *Genre Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Daniel Chandler, “An Introduction to Genre Theory, 2000,

refinement for which a number of scholars have turned to a cognitive model of genre.⁴²

Cognitive theory asks how we organize what we know by our experience, knowledge of the world, and our adaptation of society's worldview.⁴³

http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/intgenre/chandler_genre_theory.pdf;
Michael Sinding, "After Definitions: Genre, Categories, and Cognitive Science," *Genre* 35 (2002): 184; "Beyond Essence (or, getting over 'there'): Cognitive and dialectical theories of genre," *Semiotica* 149 (2004): 377-95.

⁴² Michael Sinding, "After Definitions: Genre, Categories, and Cognitive Science," *Genre* 35 (2002): 181-2002); John Frow, *Genre: The New Critical Idiom* (New York: Routledge, 2006). In biblical studies, Carol A. Newsom views cognitive theory as a key development in genre studies in, "Spying Out the Land: A Report from Genology," in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients*, ed. R. L. Troxel, et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 437-50. Robert Williamson, Jr. follows Newsom in, "Peshet: A Cognitive Model of the Genre," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 17 (2010): 336-60.

⁴³ See George Lakoff's discussion of the development of cognitive models, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 1-154. On 39-57, Lakoff builds upon Eleanor Rosch's pioneering work, in which she overturns the classical idea of categories and develops the idea that people conceptualize prototypes and then see other members of the category in relation to the prototype. Eleanor Rosch, "Cognitive Representations of Semantic Categories,"

Accordingly, a cognitive model of genre sees categories not simply as fixed or family features, but as components of mental frameworks that represent what people know about a text (or a work of art, a piece of music, and so forth). We form these mental frameworks according to prototypes – or central models – that are summary representations of whole categories based on exemplars that we remember. We then extend these mental frameworks to other non-central members of the categories.⁴⁴ Westerners see the robin and sparrow as exemplars of the category “bird” and recognize and define other instances of “bird” (like chicken, ostrich, and penguin) in relation to and as extensions of these prototypes.⁴⁵ Similarly, an ancient audience might see the popular and influential

Journal of Experimental Psychology: General 104 (1975): 192-233; see esp. 193.

See the development of her ideas in Eleanor Rosch and Barbara B. Lloyd, eds.

Cognition and Categorization (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1978).

⁴⁴ Lakoff calls these mental frameworks “idealized cognitive models” (“ICMs”), *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, 68-76. See also the development of this idea in Sinding, “After Definitions, 184-85, 190-91; Chandler, “Schema Theory and the Interpretation of Television Programmes,” (Aberystwyth: The Media and Communications Studies Site, University of Wales, 1997).

<http://www.visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/short/schematv.html>.

⁴⁵ This conclusion is based on a series of experiments by Rosch, in which her subjects rated the extent to which various members of different categories represented their notion of those respective category’s meanings. For the category “bird,” robin ranked as the highest examples, followed by sparrow. Chicken,

bioi of Satyrus the Peripatetic⁴⁶ and Nepos⁴⁷ as exemplars of the category “Greco-Roman *bioi*,” and recognize and define Mark in relation to and as an extension of these prototypes. A significant result of the cognitive model is the realization that we tend to recognize a category as a *gestalt* before we particularize its individual features.⁴⁸ The consequence is that we do not decide that a text must have a standard list of features in order to justify its membership in a category. Rather, we recognize a text *as a whole* in relation to a central or “best” example (like the sparrow), and may see some as extensions (like the penguin) but members of the category nonetheless. The significance for this study is that Mark can depart from a prototype that “demands” closure and still be recognizable in relation to that prototype in the ancient world. The presence of an open ending, along with other variant features, may disqualify Mark from a place at the center with the prototypical member(s) of the category, but it cannot disqualify Mark from the category itself. Mark is more like a penguin than a sparrow, but still a bird.

ostrich, and penguin ranked among the lowest examples. For an explanation of the method, see Rosch, “Cognitive Representations,” 197-98. For the chart listing the ranking of the goodness of examples of the category “bird,” see 232.

⁴⁶ 3rd century BC Greek philosopher and historian who wrote a number of *bioi* still popular after the Gospels were written.

⁴⁷ Roman historian and biographer (c. 99 BC – 24 BC) who influenced Plutarch, Tacitus, and Seutonius.

⁴⁸ See Williamson, “Peshier,” 350.

Daniel Chandler has provided a useful way of mapping the process by which we form mental frameworks. He refers to mental frameworks as schemas that we build out of our prior experiences and knowledge, and which we then use to determine expectations in social and textual contexts.⁴⁹ According to Chandler,

- A schema can be envisaged as a kind of framework with ‘slots’ for ‘variables’, some of them filled-in and others empty.
- The slots are *either* filled in already with compulsory values (e.g. that dog is an animal) or ‘default values’ (e.g. that dog has four legs) *or* are empty (optional variables until ‘instantiated’ with values from the current situation (e.g. that the dog’s colour is black).
- When what seems like the most appropriate schema is activated, inferences are generated to fill any necessary but inexplicit details with assumed values from the schema.⁵⁰

A first-century audience that understood Mark as bearing resemblance to Greco-Roman *bios* would have recognized the Gospel as a *gestalt* schema according to compulsory and default (or typical) values.⁵¹ The compulsory value of *bioi* is their focus on the subject, or person who dominates the writing.⁵² The audience fills in

⁴⁹ Chandler, “Schema Theory.”

⁵⁰ Chandler, “Schema Theory.”

⁵¹ “It is this quality of schemas that makes them an advance on the view that concepts and categories are defined by a list of features.” Sinding, “After Definitions,” 196.

⁵² Burridge, *What are the Gospels?*, 107; also 76. Perhaps mode of

default values according to the schema that work together in a cluster to make them recognizable as a whole: external features (e.g., length, structure, sequence, methods of characterization) and internal features (e.g., setting, topics, style, tone, mood, attitude, values). Nevertheless, default values may vary without violating the schema.⁵³ For example, we would still recognize a three-legged dog as a dog, that is, as an extension of the schema. Similarly, an audience would recognize Mark as an extension of Greco-Roman *bios* even when it violates default values.

III. Interpreting Mark's Ending in Light of Cognitive Genre Theory

I wish to connect these observations about genre to the interpretation of the Markan text by adapting a model of Dubrow's that eschews a deterministic "If/Then" approach in favor of a "What if/Then probably" approach for interpreting generic signals. Dubrow articulates her model as follows:⁵⁴

representation (prose narrative) and metre could also be considered compulsory values. In Burridge's discussion, the only feature of a *bios* that clearly never varies is the focus on the subject.

⁵³ Sinding makes the point that *gestalt* structures assume optional and default values in addition to compulsory ones, meaning that there can be departures from a prototype that is still recognized. He comments, "The integrity of the schema is a product of concepts of defaults and options that are made possible within an abstract relational framework." Sinding, "After Definitions," 196.

⁵⁴ Pelling suggests the application of Dubrow's approach in "Epilogue," 330.

We should remind ourselves...that the reader's reactions to genre do not necessarily follow a pattern that might be codified as 'If/Then', as many critics have assumed ('If it is a *Bildungsroman*, then x, y and z will be present'). Often that pattern might more accurately be formulated as 'What if/Then probably' ('What if the genre of this work is the *Bildungsroman*? Then probably the hero will test out a series of alternative father figures, though of course this may just be one of the few *Bildungsromane* where that pattern does not operate').⁵⁵

I adapt this model by employing Chandler's map of mental frameworks (indicated with terms in italics): In the process of hearing or reading (or better: re-hearing or re-reading) Mark, an audience encounters a narrative framework that meets generic expectations based on a prototype or *schema* of Greco-Roman *bios*. The pattern, "What if...Then probably" allows the audience both to interpret Mark in light of the *compulsory and default elements of the schema* that they have "activated," and also to make sense of *variations in default values* and contextual instantiations of the *optional values*. Below, I integrate Chandler's map of mental frameworks with Dubrow's "What If/Then Probably" approach to analyze two default values that illuminate Mark's ending.

A. Death and Consequences

What if Mark is Greco-Roman *bios*? Then probably the Gospel ends with the subject's death and its consequences, though this could be one of the few examples of the genre where the pattern is broken. The end of ancient *bioi* are

⁵⁵ Dubrow, *Genre*, 106-7.

devoted to the death of the subject, because the way a person's life ends reveals his character and allows the audience to evaluate it.⁵⁶ Mark follows this default value of the schema. Jesus' character is revealed as he does the will of God by making his way to the cross (10:45; 14:35).

An audience implementing a Greco-Roman *bios* schema would expect the ending to resolve as a default feature. Plutarch, for example, likes to bring his *Lives* to a resting point. A restful ending is not compulsory, however, but a default value that may vary.⁵⁷ While Plutarch's *Lives* generally end in rest, the epilogues (*synkriseis*) tend to reopen and sometimes introduce new moral questions and invoke the involvement and judgment of the audience about the characters.⁵⁸ For example, Plutarch closes themes at the end of *Brutus*, but the *synkrisis* opens moral questions that had been left unaddressed about Brutus's political leanings, his murder of Caesar, and his suicide, presumably to "raise thought-provoking questions – who is the better man, whose was the greater achievement – open in

⁵⁶ Dihle, *Greek and Latin Literature*, 191.

⁵⁷ While writings in a number of ancient genres tend towards resolution, the violations of that generic expectation abound. For example, see Sean A. Adams' discussion of the unresolved endings of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and Virgil's *Aeneid*, in *The Genre of Acts and Collected Biography*, SNTSMS 156 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 234-35.

⁵⁸ Timothy E. Duff, *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 283-85.

the fullest sense, or at least declare a draw.”⁵⁹ While Mark 16:8 ends with a sense of completion by drawing together certain themes (e.g., Jesus’ passion predictions), it ends with a lack of resolution by reopening issues of unbelief and fear to leave them with the audience.⁶⁰ Acts ends similarly, drawing together certain themes but leaving open questions about the fate of Paul, Israel, and the mission to the Gentiles.⁶¹ John Chrysostom viewed the ending of Acts as an invitation to the hearer:

[Luke] brings his narrative to this point, and leaves the hearer thirsty so that he fills up the lack by himself through reflection. The pagans do the same; for, knowing everything wills the spirit to sleep and enfeebles it. But he does this, and does not tell what follows, deeming it superfluous for those who read the

⁵⁹ Pelling, “Is Death the End? Closure in Plutarch’s Lives,” in *Classical Closure. Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 228-250; Reprinted in idem, *Plutarch and History*, 365-86. Quotation is from p. 377.

⁶⁰ Troy M. Troftgruben notes that ancient literature exhibits two types of closure: (1) *Resolution*—that which resolves conflict or the plot (Aristotle, *Poetics* 7.3-7, 13-14; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Thucydides* 10.830, 12.837, 16.847) and (2) *Completion*: that which ties together previous narrative themes (Diodorus Siculus 16.1.1-2). Troftgruben, *A Conclusion Unhindered: A Study of the Ending of Acts within its Literary Environment* WUNT 2, 280 (Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen, 2010), 51.

⁶¹ Troftgruben argues this about Acts in *A Conclusion Unhindered*, 151.

Scripture, and learn from it what it is appropriate to add to the account. In fact, you may consider that what follows is absolutely identical with what precedes” (*Homily on Acts 15*).

Three observations are worth making. First, the “open ending” is a common literary and rhetorical practice of ancient writers.⁶² Second, it functions to invite the hearer to respond with reflection and interpretation. Third, the hearer knows how to respond according to intratextual cues. Thus, the idea that Mark ends abruptly to invite a response is against neither the practice of ancient writers nor the expectations of their audiences.⁶³

⁶² Two biblical narratives, Jonah and Acts, employ open endings for rhetorical effect. Although these represent different genres of literature, these show that the literary technique was known among Jewish writers and audiences. J. Lee Magness discusses the significance for understanding Mark’s ending of suspended endings in Jonah, Acts, and other biblical narratives, as well as in Greco-Roman and Jewish literature in *Sense and Absence: Structure and Suspension in the Ending of Mark’s Gospel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986). See also Marcus, *Mark*, 1088-96; Daniel Marguerat, *The First Christian Historian: Writing the ‘Acts of the Apostles’* SNTSMS 121 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 211, 216.

⁶³ Scholars generally assume that Matthew and Luke added resurrection appearances to correct Mark. But perhaps they added this material to convey a different literary (or other) function. J. Andrew Doole argues that Matthew does not aim to dispute or correct Mark in, *What was Mark for Matthew? An*

B. Virtues

What if Mark is Greco-Roman *bios*? Then probably it aims not only to paint a portrait of its subject, Jesus, but also to convey certain virtues to the audience. A default feature of Greco-Roman *bioi* is that the subject's character informs the audience's virtuous living.⁶⁴ For example, Plutarch's *Life of Pericles* (1.1-4a) opens with a story that engages in rather direct moralism to give lessons for explaining and enjoining the virtue of pursuing what is excellent.⁶⁵ Similarly, Nepos' *Thrasybulus* (1.1-2) opens by launching into the explicit praise of his subject. Mark's Gospel, however, opens by launching Jesus into Israel's history. Is it the case, then, that Mark is one of the few *bioi* in which the default pattern does not operate? Indeed, Adela Yarbro Collins argues that Mark's lack of moralism is an important reason to consider its generic fit as history rather than biography.⁶⁶ Exemplars that shaped the prototype or schema of Greco-Roman

Examination of Matthew's Relationship and Attitude to his Primary Source

WUNT 2, 344 (Mohr Siebeck: Tubingen, 2013). The longer endings in Mark's textual tradition represent a snapshot of Mark's earliest history of reception (most of which is unavailable to us); it is a fallacy to conclude that most ancient hearers would not have understood Mark's aim.

⁶⁴ Similarly, Tacitus blends history with moral philosophy. See, for example, Tac. *Ann.* 3.65.

⁶⁵ Plut. *Per.* 1.1-4a.

⁶⁶ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Is Mark a Life of Jesus?*, 46-57.

bioi, however, could have engaged in moral discourse not only by means of explicit moralism, as in the examples above, but also by means of implicit, narrative moral discourse.⁶⁷ In other words, the default value of the exemplars has two varieties. For example, a look at the whole of Plutarch's *Lives* shows that he tends to narrate the virtues and shortcomings of characters through their words and deeds without the intervention of the narrator's judgment about what is right and wrong.⁶⁸ Plutarch not only shows virtue by developing the character of his subjects, but also by juxtaposing their successes with the failures of others. For example, Plutarch highlights the might of Cimon as general by describing the failure of Agesilaus to accomplish any great deeds of war (*Cimon* 19.4).

Throughout the respective pairs of Greek and Roman *Lives*, Plutarch develops certain themes to show how the same attributes lead to one man's greatness and the other's failure.⁶⁹ The epilogues (*synkriseis*) of paired *Lives* then compare the

⁶⁷ Tim Duff, "Moralism in Plutarch's *Lives*: Didacticism and Exploration," in *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 54.

See also Burrige, *What are the Gospels?*, 202. Burrige, however, gives very little discussion of virtues as a feature of the Gospels, other than to state that Jesus's character emerges indirectly through their stories.

⁶⁸ Duff, "Moralism in Plutarch's *Lives*: Didacticism and Exploration," 53-55.

⁶⁹ Christopher Pelling, "Synkrisis in Plutarch's *Lives*," *Miscellanea Plutarchea: Atti del I convegno di studi su Plutarco (Roma, 23 novembre 1985)*, ed. F. E. Brenk and I. Gallo (Quaderni del Giornale Filologico Ferrarese, 8; Ferrara: Giornale Filologico Ferrarese), 83-96; Reprinted with revisions in idem

two men by recalling themes and highlighting what is worthy of imitation.

Similarly, Mark engages in implicit, narrative moral discourse.

An audience that activates a Greco-Roman *bios* schema expects Mark to portray Jesus' virtues in order to inform theirs. They fill in the features of the default value of moral discourse as they process the narrative, observing that Mark tends to engage in praise and blame through implicit discourse. Throughout the narrative, Mark develops a pattern of imitation between his main subject (Jesus) and secondary subjects (disciples). By simultaneously developing and juxtaposing their character, Mark then shows his audience what is worthy of imitation. The disciples' imperception and failure serves to highlight both Jesus' identity as Messiah and his character as the only one in the narrative who does God's will and, therefore, the only one in the narrative worth imitating. Thus, Mark not only has concerns with reporting events, but also with portraying the subject, Jesus, in such a way that reinforces certain values to the audience about what it means to follow him by depicting what to imitate and what to avoid.

Plutarch and History: Eighteen Studies (London: Duckworth; Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2002), 349-63. Pelling comments that "comparison underlies the whole narrative" and drives characterization. 352. See also Dilhe, *Greek and Latin Literature*, 191. While most biographies portray exemplars, some, like the parallel biographies of *Demetrius* and *Antony* portray negative examples to avoid. Ultimately, Plutarch blames both men for their own downfall (6.1).

Both ancient *bioi* and history describe good and weak characters for imitation (*mimesis*) and avoidance.⁷⁰ For this reason, Quintilian teaches his pupils to employ history both to establish facts and to illustrate concrete moral examples.⁷¹ These observations suggest that Greco-Roman *bioi* demand a reader-response approach. Therefore, elements assumed to be at odds with viewing Mark 16:8 as an open ending with a rhetorical effect for the audience may, in fact, be at odds with certain *modern* sensibilities and practices, rather than with ancient ones. Like other ancient biographers who engage in moral discourse, I suggest that Mark is concerned that his audience “should learn from his description of these characters how to live their lives, through imitation, μίμησις,”⁷² both by depicting good characters for emulation and weak characters for avoidance.

C. An Invitation to Respond to the Virtues of Jesus

In what follows, I highlight three ways that Mark develops a pattern of imitation between Jesus and the disciples that progressively reveals their contrasting characters. In that light, I interpret Mark’s ending with a view to the virtues that are worthy of imitation. The abrupt ending, which I have demonstrated is a common rhetorical practice of ancient writers, functions, in part, to invite the audience to respond with reflection on and interpretation of

⁷⁰ Plutarch, *Antony; Demetrius*. Aeschin., *Timachus*, 75-76; *Embassy*, 75-76.

⁷¹ Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.1

⁷² Burridge makes this statement about Plutarch’s *Lives*. *What are the Gospels?*, 64.

those virtues by avoiding the example of the women and imitating the example of Jesus.

1. *Jesus calls the Twelve to imitate him in his preaching and exorcising ministry.*

After Jesus announces the presence of the kingdom of God, he demonstrates the nature of his mission in the Capernaum synagogue, where he casts out a demon and teaches with authority (1:21-28). Soon afterwards, Jesus expands his own ministry when he calls the Twelve to be with him, and gives them authority to preach and cast out demons (3:13-15). Later, Jesus sends them out, and they return to report their success (6:7-13, 30). The Twelve generally do not oppose Jesus' call to imitate him in these opening chapters. In fact, they serve as a foil for others. For example, their movement with Jesus is a counterpoint to that of the scribes in ch. 3. Jesus goes up (*ἀναβαίνει*) the mountain and calls together (*προσκαλεῖται*) his followers (3:13) from whom he selects the Twelve to be with him and to give authority to preach and cast out demons. By contrast, the scribes come down (*καταβάντες*) from Jerusalem to refute Jesus' authority to cast out demons, which is a refutation of that mission; Jesus calls together the scribes (*προσκαλεσάμενος*) to speak to them in parables (3:22-23). Later, the negative response in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth to Jesus' words and acts of power (6:1-6) is juxtaposed to Jesus' sending out of the Twelve to proclaim such words and acts of power (vv. 7-13). These contrasts function to bind the Twelve to Jesus and his mission and separate others from it.

2. *Jesus calls his disciples to imitate him in his pattern of suffering, death, and glory.* Jesus speaks openly for the first time about his passion at the beginning of

the unit that runs from 8:27-10:45, united by the three-fold prediction of his suffering, death and resurrection (8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34). From this point, Jesus' words and deeds are based on the logic of suffering, dying and rising. These acts are necessarily tied together (δεῖ, Mark 8:31) for both Messiah and his followers. After each prediction, however, the disciples expose their misunderstanding of Jesus' mission and of their own participation in it. They repeatedly bicker over status in the kingdom they imagine Jesus will establish and obstruct those they deem to lack status (children, a strange exorcist). Jesus responds by teaching them what it means to follow him (8:32-37; 9:32-37; 10:35-45). At the climactic point of the unit, Jesus gives his own attitudes and actions as the quintessential example of his teaching: "the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45). This singular example functions not only as a basis for the servant-like behavior that Jesus enjoins, but also as the antithesis of the disciples' cumulative words and actions. The Twelve, now, function as a foil for Jesus, in that their words and deeds highlight what it means for him to be Messiah. Moreover, as they increase in misunderstanding, Jesus increases as the exemplar of servant-like behavior. The narrative simultaneously binds the disciples to Jesus' mission by showing the necessity of imitation, and separates them from it by showing their refusal to embrace it.

3. *On the Mount of Olives, the Markan Jesus enjoins his followers to imitate him in the struggle of his own ministry after he is gone* (13:9-13). Jesus speaks about a time beyond the scope of the narrative when his followers will be delivered over to councils, beaten in synagogues, and stand as witnesses before governors and

kings for his sake as they await the glorious coming of the Son of Man (13:9-13; cf. vv. 24-37). Jesus both echoes and foreshadows his own words and fate. The three-fold prediction that Jesus' followers will be delivered over to their enemies and to death (παραδίδωμι, 13:9, 11, 12), recalls his threefold prediction that he himself will be delivered over to his enemies and to death, and then rise (παραδίδωμι, 9:31; 10:33; see also 8:31). After the Olivet discourse, Jesus is delivered over to a council (14:53-65) and a governor (15:1-5). He is beaten, not in a synagogue, but in the precinct of the high priest (v. 65). Jesus tells his followers that they are not to worry about what to say when delivered over to trial because the Holy Spirit will give them their words "in that hour" (ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ, 13:11). "That hour" connects Jesus's followers to the eschatological time of his suffering and death. The fulfillment of Jesus's words begins within the story world. Later, in the place called Gethsemane, Jesus prays that the hour might pass from him (14:35), and after an excruciating night of prayer he yields to God's will. When those who will betray and arrest him are near, he says, "the hour has come" (ἤλθεν ἡ ὥρα, v. 41). That is, the eschatological time of Jesus' suffering and death has come, and Jesus, unlike his disciples, faces it resolutely.

The disciples' characterization functions in service of Mark's *bios* of Jesus. At first, they appear in a positive light as a foil for others who misunderstand and resist Jesus' mission. Then as their own misunderstanding and resistance grows, they become negative examples and a foil to Jesus. The disciples' repeated resistance enables a narrative demonstration of Jesus' identity and character, showing that Jesus is not only the Christ, but is also himself the exemplar of

discipleship. Jesus demonstrates commitment to his own mission to do the will of God, a mission that he repeatedly calls his disciples to imitate by denying themselves and taking up their cross to follow him (8:34). According to that mission, Jesus manifests a grasp of the integral relationship between suffering, death, and glory through three passion predictions, in which he signals the divine necessity (δεῖ) for the Son of Man to suffer, die, and rise (8:31); through his prediction that he will eat and drink the fruit of the vine anew in God's kingdom after pouring out his blood for many (14:22-25); through his promise to meet the disciples in Galilee after he is struck, deserted, and raised (14:26-31); through his abandonment of his own will to God's (14:36); and through his confession to the high priest who holds Jesus's life in his hands: "I am [the Christ, the Son of the Blessed], and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (15:62). Jesus's commitment to such a mission requires faith that divine action is able to transform apparent failure of suffering and death into glory. The disciples manifest no similar understanding, devotion, or faith.⁷³ Jesus becomes the example to imitate, the disciples the example to avoid.

The pattern of imitation between and juxtaposition of Jesus and the disciples both highlights Jesus's exemplary discipleship and prepares the audience for the empty tomb account. Jesus's absence as a character in 16:1-8 puts divine action on display. The darkness that had covered the earth is dispelled, the stone is

⁷³ The Transfiguration is a most glaring example (Mark 9:2-9).

rolled away, and Jesus is raised (v. 6).⁷⁴ God's powerful act in raising Jesus from the dead confirms that Jesus is the model disciple, because it vindicates the words and deeds by which he entrusted himself to God's will. God has now acted to transform apparent failure in bringing glory from suffering and death.⁷⁵ Yet like the disciples before them, the women at the tomb fail to grasp the logic of suffering, dying, and rising that informed Jesus's words and deeds and, therefore, they fail to comprehend God's powerful, transforming act. Although they raise our expectations by risking their safety to be present at the crucifixion – albeit at a distance – the women quickly join their shameful brothers in abandoning Jesus (cf. 14:50, 52). The flight and fear of the women function to bind their action to the preceding action of the men, so that the ending does not simply report an event, but provides an account of human failure.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ As in the prologue of Mark, “The action and the design of God are again at center stage.” Francis J. Moloney, SDB, *The Resurrection of the Messiah: A Narrative Commentary on the Resurrection Accounts in the Four Gospels* (New York; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2013), 15. See also Moloney, 9, in which he argues that God is the central character of the ending.

⁷⁵ Moloney, *Resurrection of the Messiah*, 12.

⁷⁶ I agree with Moloney, who comments, “The women's sharing of the fear and flight of the disciples must be given its full importance. Before them, the disciples in the story had steadily increased in their experience of fear (see 4:41; 5:36; 6:50; 9:32; 10:32), and they finally broke their oneness with him when they fled (14:50; see 3:14).” Moloney, *Resurrection of the Messiah*, 13.

The climax of the passage is not the action of the women, but the action of God to raise Jesus from the dead (ἡγέρθη, Mark 16:6). The young man at the tomb commands the women to “go tell the *disciples* and *Peter*” (v. 7). Mark is the only Gospel writer to target these recipients of the good news, pointing the audience back to a time when Jesus predicted both Peter’s denial and the disciples’ flight, *and* his future presence in Galilee (14:27-30). The promise in 16:7 is a renewed call for them to follow him, and a pledge that God’s action in the risen Jesus overcomes human failure outside the written story.

One key critique of an “open ending,” however, is that Mark must have narrated a resurrection appearance in Galilee, otherwise it would be the only one of Jesus’s promises left unfulfilled in the course of the narrative (8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34; 12:11-12; 14:17-21, 27-31). But perhaps this is exactly the point. Since everything Jesus predicted has happened thus far, then this unfulfilled promise elicits a response of faith from an audience that has every reason to understand that this promise will happen, too.⁷⁷ The effect of the ending, then, is to intensify the response of faith in Jesus’s promise and in God’s act. Thus, Mark allows the audience to imagine an ending that depends not on human activity – whether the disciples’, the women’s, or their own – but on God’s action to triumph over the weakness and apparent failure of a dead Messiah, of an improbable message, of a delayed Parousia, of fear and unbelief.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ See also Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 351.

⁷⁸ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 352.

The cognitive approach of this study supports and further illuminates the significance of an open ending. Scholars in the cognitive sciences have demonstrated that storytelling is one of the key ways that human beings make sense of experience, reason about others' and their own actions, and find patterns for thinking and acting.⁷⁹ Applying this idea to Mark, the experience of processing the disciples' and the women's words and actions can help the audience interpret their own actions and consequences. In short, the Markan narrative helps the audience to think about thinking. Mark's narrative progression portrays how the disciples' and Jesus's circumstances, their character, and other factors influence their actions. At the end, the narration of the women's response to the announcement at the empty tomb models what it is like for human beings to make choices when they encounter opportunities for action in particular contexts.⁸⁰ If, against the context of the whole narrative, the audience thinks about

⁷⁹ Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1986). David Herman, *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 227. Storytelling is not the only way that people make sense of experience. Other ways might include conversation, verbal instruction, and ceremonies. Eric Eve, *Behind the Gospels: Understanding the Oral Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2014), p. 92. David Herman discusses the limitations of storytelling in *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind*, pp. 80-94.

⁸⁰ See David Herman, *Storytelling and the Sciences of the Mind*, p. 261.

why the women act or fail to act in the story world, then the empty tomb account provides them with a model for making sense of their own stories in the world.

Mark provides a specific opportunity for this kind of reflection through an intratextual connection by which Jesus' words in the Olivet discourse to his future followers who await the Parousia – among whom Mark's audience can count themselves – may be set alongside the experiences and actions of both disciples and, later, the women at the tomb. Unlike those who flee, 13:9-13 indicates that Jesus' future followers stand firm by divine power, that is, the power of the Holy Spirit, when called to announce the good news in the face of opposition. The Spirit has been promised (1:7-8) but not yet given in the story world. The intratextual connection provides an audience that may be struggling to live self-sacrificially in the face of hostility and even death for what appears to be a weak message an opportunity for reflection on their own words and actions, their own baptism with the Holy Spirit, and their own experiences of and responses to fear and opposition. Will they imitate the women (and disciples) by refusing to speak and act according to a logic of suffering-death-glory, or will they imitate Jesus, whose deeds bore out his words, "the one who loses his life for my sake and the sake of the gospel will save it" (8:35)?

IV. Conclusion

The function of the open ending is at least twofold. 1) To say something about Jesus, the subject of the narrative. He is not only the risen Christ, but also the disciple extraordinaire, and the one whose virtue – character and actions – Mark wishes his audience to emulate. By finishing at 16:8, Mark's *bios* compels

the audience to reflect and respond in faith to the God who acts by avoiding the women's example and emulating the example of Jesus, who lived and died believing in a God who raises the dead. 2) To say something about the nature of discipleship. The "success" of discipleship depends not on human activity but on God's. I concur with Moloney that,

the Gospel of Mark is not only about Jesus, Christ and Son of God (see 1:1, 11). It is equally about the challenge of following a suffering Son of Man to Jerusalem—and beyond, as he promises resurrection and life to those who lose their lives for his sake (see 8:38-9:1). It is as much about how others, especially the disciples, respond to Jesus as it is about Jesus himself.”⁸¹

The end of the Gospel is where Christology and discipleship meet.⁸² Mark does not call the audience to replace failed characters simply by succeeding to proclaim the good news in their stead (contra the typical reader-response view). Rather, Mark leads the audience to reflect on their own part in (or beyond) the storyline, and *join* these characters in Galilee, where they may gaze on the risen Jesus to find the coherence of suffering, death, and glory.

⁸¹ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 18.

⁸² Hooker comments, “This is the end of Mark’s story because it is the beginning of discipleship.” Hooker, *Mark*, 394.