"Popular history and the desire for knowledge: an examination of James A. Michener's *The Source* as a popular history of Israel"

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Introduction

The presentation of history through popular genres and media, such as television, film, novels and documentaries, has increased dramatically over the past forty years. One might argue that there is a veritable 'history industry' that sometimes intersects with the practices of professional historians; Simon Schama's television series and accompanying books *A History of Britain* being a good example. However, it is also perpetuated not by professional historians, but also by non-professionals who have a deep interest in learning and educating as ways of self-improvement.

One such writer was James A. Michener (1907-1997). Michener first came to fame with his collection of short stories *Tales of the South Pacific*, which was based on his time in the navy during World War II in the South Pacific Ocean. It won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1948, and was later adapted into the Broadway musical, and later film, *South Pacific*, by Rogers and Hammerstein. Despite this, his fame mostly rests on his long novels of nearly one thousand pages that span centuries, or in the case of *The Source*, several thousand years. The first of these was *Hawaii*, published in 1959, and *The Source*, published in 1965 was his next epic of a similar scale. It was the highest selling book that year in the United States. It has been remarked that a reader is likely to get "a sense of bafflement as you can't tell whether *The Source* is a novel, or a history."[1] If it is a history, and I will argue that we can take it as such, it is a history both of Israel, the Holy Land, and a history of the Jews.

[1] Eric Friedland, "Michener and His Source," ***The Chicago Jewish Forum***, Summer (1966): 285.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the issues surrounding the presentation of the history of Israel in Michener's *The Source*. Chapter 1 will examine the reasons why people are eager to engage with popular forms of history and what kind of novel *The Source* is, for the term 'historical novel' does not adequately define what it is and does. Chapter 2 will discuss the issues surrounding the presentation of history in popular genres, with particular reference to the use of narrative in such formats, and what positive things can be gained from this as well as the dangers that historians need to be aware of. Chapter 3 will then examine how Michener has constructed his history in novel form.

Michener's novels were often thought of as works readers could learn from; when he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Gerald R. Ford in 1977, Ford described him as an "author, teacher and popular historian."[2] However, there has been little discussion as to the beneficial and concerning aspects of 'learning' through work like his. Also, quite strikingly, compared to the critical work on Michener's American based novels and on his writing on the Pacific, what we have on The Source is slim. This is perhaps indicative of the importance held by critics of what Michener has to say on America's history and their very near neighbours in the Pacific. Whatever the case, much of the critical response has been content to simply outline the key event of each chapter, which is actually a rather unsatisfactory way of describing the novel.[3] There are a few critical reviews published not long after the book was first released, mostly coming from

[2] John P. Hayes, ***James A. Michener: A Biography*** (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1984), p. 233.
[3] A. Grove Day's ***James Michener*** (Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1977) is particularly guilty of this.

scholarly Jewish journals,[4] but these concentrate on assessing how the novel works as a novel and critiquing Michener's assumptions about Jewish law.

Despite this lack of critical response, *The Source* is one of Michener's most popular novels, and, according to A. Grove Day, long-time friend of Michener and author of one of the three critical companions to his work, readers often agree that it is one of his best.[5] It is certainly one of his most ambitious; Michener himself acknowledged it had the most complex structure of any of his novels, one he would not use again nor recommend any writer to do so, but felt that it worked very well for *The Source*.[6]

The framework of the novel is thus: at an archaeological dig in Israel – Tell Makor – Makor means 'source,' referring to the water source that has since become hidden, two trenches are dug. As the trenches grow deeper, the artefacts that the team uncover become increasingly older. Proceeding from the oldest artefact thus far uncovered (flints from prehistoric times, about 9000 years old) Michener then tells a story that involves each artefact, incorporating an interlude back to the archaeologists in 1964. Whilst the stories are separate, they are connected in more ways than their relation to the Tell. Each builds on what happened in earlier chapters. In addition, in all but two of the chapters, there is an interlude back to the present day. These interludes are used to allow the

[4] Eric Friedland's " Michener and his Source" (***The Chicago Jewish Forum***, Summer, (1966): 281-285) and Maurice Wohlgelernter's " The Tell at Tell Makor" (***Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought***, 8 (1966): 87-91) most pertinently.
[5] Grove A. Day, ***James Michener*** (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), p. 125.
[6] James A. Michener, ***About Centennial. Some Notes on the Novel*** (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 46.

'characters,' or rather, Michener's multiple voices, to make comparisons between history and present, or to meditate on history, or discuss where Israel is going based on it's past.

The book certainly made a strong impression on many people. Michener wrote in his article "Historical Fiction" that Jewish readers informed Michener that they did not appreciate their own heritage until they read *The Source*. What Michener found even more rewarding was the response from Russian Jewish immigrants, who told him that handwritten translations of the novel were secretly passed around with the notation: "If a Gentile can know so much about Judaism, how can you know less?"[7]

Indeed, *The Source* is a novel about Judaism, but it is also more than that. Tracing back to 9000 BCE and moving forward all the way until 1964 CE, it covers not only many important historical eras, but also one of the most contested regions of the world, the Middle East. The fact that it was highly popular means we need to consider its role in guiding the perception of the issues that beset the region and its people.

The steps that led Michener to eventually write *The Source* are worth discussing. Having published his novel about Afghanistan, *Caravans*, in 1963, Michener planned to write his next novel about Islam, set in Istanbul; he had spent over ten years studying it as a religion and culture in various countries, and he felt that "the United States suffered

[7] James A. Michener, "Historical Fiction," ***American Hertiage***33, no. April-May (1982): 46-47.

because it did not understand Islam,"[8] and in May 1955, published an article in *Reader's Digest* titled "Islam: The Misunderstood Religion."

How he came then to turn his attention to Israel and Judaism is an interesting question. There are two stories, albeit interconnected. One is far more romantic, and more oft quoted, and then there is the one that he related to his biographer John P. Hayes. The story that appears the most often is that during his visit to Israel on a junket in April 1963, he was taken to a Crusader castle where, he says "as I stood also in the dungeon of that ancient fortress, with the shadowy forms of warriors long dead moving in the dust, I suddenly conceived my entire novel, *The Source*." Then, "feverishly," he sat down and outlined the 17 chapters that would make up the novel.[9] The story in his biography is somewhat different. The events still happened in a Crusader castle, and he did outline the whole book, but there is also something more. Namely, that "three men, including the mayor-to-be of Jerusalem, all got me in a corner and said that in view of *Hawaii*, I could write a similar book about Israel." Michener told them that it really "should not be written by a gentile, that I was not capable of doing it – that they had good people in Israel who could do it – but I outlined the whole book for them." Afterwards, the soon-to-be mayor told him that no one could be found, but they would be willing to support his research, so he agreed to do it.[10] The difference between the two stories is obvious. One is the story of pure inspiration, with the artist, independent of external influence, conceiving something monumental on the spot. The other suggests that Michener was

[8] James A. Michener, ***A Michener Miscellany: 1950-1970***, 1st ed. (New York,: Random House, 1973), p. 229.
[9] Michener, ***About Centennial. Some Notes on the Novel***, pp. 20-21.
[10] Hayes, ***Biography***, pp. 180-81.

influenced and buoyed by the offer of help in an area that he initially felt he had little expertise. Michener, I think, probably did conceive the structure of the novel very quickly, but I have trouble believing that a flash of inspiration would have caused him to abandon a novel that had been gestating for a considerable length of time.

What this latter story also means is that an argument could certainly be made for the possible Israeli political influences on Michener's research. This can not only be seen from the offer of research assistance, but also in the processes Michener goes through in the final stages. His assistant John Kings wrote that Michener, in order to "confirm the overall authenticity" of his work, normally "invite[d] a highly qualified authority to read and report on it from as critical a standpoint as possible…*The Source* went to Eli Misrachi, Secretary of the Israeli Cabinet."[11] A Secretary of the Israeli Cabinet is not exactly an unbiased reader. However, this is not suggesting that Michener's main intention was to write a near 1000-page propaganda work on behalf of Israel, as Omar Azouni, a member of the Palestine Arab Delegation, suggested by arguing that Michener was "money hungry" and had been used by "the corrupting Jews."[12] Rather, the research material that he had access to was very likely slanted from a very official perspective, which would have been, understandably, pro-Israel.

These somewhat auspicious beginnings should be kept in mind. Although Michener described himself in his autobiography as "that ancient man who sat by the campfire at

[11] John Kings, ***In Search of Centennial : A Journey with James A. Michener*** (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 109.
[12] Cited by Hayes, ***Biography***, p. 185.

night and regaled the hunters with imaginative recitations of their prowess,"[13] casting himself more as a storyteller rather than an historian, he is writing about a very real, very topical, very present situation, and we need to consider what biases may have affected his particular presentation of history.

[13] James A. Michener, ***The World Is My Home: A Memoir*** (New York: Random House, 1992), p. 9.

Chapter 1 - Author

Whilst *The Source* is ostensibly an historical novel, Eric Friedland's comments that the reader can never quite tell if it is a novel or a history are pertinent in revealing the issues that surround the nature of the book. It is important that we define what kind of book this is, for despite Michener's claims of being a 'mere' storyteller, the scope of *The Source* is far more ambitious and far more wide-reaching than simply being fiction with an historical setting. Thus, I have adopted the term used by Pearl K. Bell to describe Michener's work: docudrama. Whilst this term is usually reserved for television and film, I think Bell is right to apply it to Michener's work as it provides a useful link between Michener's own intentions as a writer and the desires of his readers, and also accounts for his popularity. The purpose of this chapter is thus to explain Michener's own 'project' and how it merged with the desires of his readers.

It might not seem to be important to ascertain why Michener's novels were so popular; one could easily accept that they simply were and move along. However, if we consider that texts have the potential to influence ways of thinking over a particular issue, then we need to see what it was about them that made it so appealing. *The Source*, we must remember, sold well over a quarter million in the year it was released, making it the best seller of 1965;[14] by 1977 had sold 2,687,734 copies;[15] and is, at least anecdotally, one of Michener's most popular novels.[16] Furthermore, literary scholar and historian Sol Liptzin once insisted that *The Source* was a decidedly Jewish book because "it did more to

[14] Alice Payne Hackett and James Henry Burke, ***80 Years of Best Sellers, 1895-1975***(New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1977), p. 15.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Grove A. Day, ***James Michener***(Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), p. 125.

further an understanding of Israel's right to its homeland than all the propaganda releases of the past decade."[17] Along with the lack of popularity of the propaganda releases, we can no doubt include the work of historians such as Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé, and others who have been revising much of modern Israeli history away from the myths that Michener himself uses (these issues will be explored further in Chapter 3). Considering how deeply contentious the issues are surrounding the conflicts in the Middle East, the implications of Michener's impact are vast.

Moreover, Michener came to be an established public figure. In 1977 he was awarded the President's Medal of Freedom, an award given, to use the words from President Gerald R. Ford's speech at the ceremony, to "men and women who have used…freedom to achieve extraordinary excellence," whose "outstanding accomplishments have made our lives better and set a stirring example for others to follow." Ford further described Michener as "author, teacher and popular historian," whose "prolific writings…have expanded the knowledge and enriched the lives of millions."[18] This acknowledgment reveals the extent of Michener's impact on American society, and furthermore, highlights the roles he took on; not only was he regarded as an author, but also a teacher and popular historian.

Still, this does not account for what it was that made Michener popular. His works are markedly different in comparison with other best-sellers of the mid-twentieth century.

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[17] Ben Siegel, "Introduction: Erasing and Embracing the Past: America and Its Jewish Writers - Men and Women," in ***Daughters of Valor: Contemporary Jewish American Women Writers*** ed. Jay L. and Ben Siegel Halio (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997), p. 20.
[18] John P. Hayes, ***James A. Michener: A Biography*** (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1984), p. 233.

Pearl K. Bell, who first suggested the term docudrama in her 1981 article in the American Jewish Committee's neoconservative magazine *Commentary* "James Michener's Docudramas," contrasts his "panoramic chronicles" with "the classic schlock" such as Sidney Sheldon and Harold Robbins, as Michener's novels were "short on sex and long on facts."[19] Likewise, Caryn James in her 1981 *New York Times* article "The Michener Phenomenon" points out that "the Michener formula might seem an unlikely one for the media age," describing his narratives as "big" and "old-fashioned," that show "generations of fictional families through densely documented factual events, celebrating the All-American virtues of common-sense, frugality, patriotism."[20] Michener's success surprised him as well; like James, he also alluded to the fact that he wrote in the age of television "when it was predicted that the novel was dead," and that he couldn't "imagine there [were] millions of people who want[ed] to read my books."[21]

However, it is not quite as surprising as one might think. We need to consider the era in which Michener began writing. Whilst Michener claimed that he was "at a loss to explain [his success],"[22] elsewhere he showed himself to be very aware of what the reading public wanted. He cited his success being due to the fact that he wrote after World War II, arguing that the war opened up the rest of the world for America, and that Americans now wanted to know about the rest of the world. This point about the desire to know shall be returned to shortly. His comments were that "if I had come along fifty years earlier, I

[19] Pearl K. Bell, "James Michener's Docudramas," ***Commentary*** (1981): 71.
[20] Caryn James, "The Michener Phenomenon," ***New York Times***, September 8 1985.
[21] Hayes, ***Biography***, p. 2.
[22] Ibid.

might have been very small potatoes – writing the same books."[23] Sociologist Andrew Hacker was quite correct to assert that "Michener knows his constituency."[24] Timing, for Michener, was always of the essence. Not only was the era he wrote in hungry for his work, but he had "an uncanny ability to choose a topical subject." *Hawaii*'s publication (1959) coincided with the islands becoming a state; *The Source* was published only two years before the Six-Day War of June 1967; *Centennial* (1974), about Colorado, came on the eve of the American bicentennial; and *The Covenant* (1980), a novel about South Africa, was published just as the country was experiencing further challenges to apartheid (notably, *The Covenant* was initially banned in South Africa before the government changed its mind.)[25]

Strikingly, much of the commentary on Michener came after the publication of *The Covenant*, even though Michener had been writing these kinds of novels for 20 years. However, this is related to two important factors. Michener's success had proved durable, and whilst it galled many critics that his work was so widely read, it was indisputably popular. Many of his novels were the best-seller the year they were released, and if not, reached the top 10. He received hundreds of letters weekly, many of which requested that he do his next novel on the letter-writer's home country. This was coupled with another important trend: during the late 1970s and early 1980s a number of lengthy, epic historical novels were being published, and a number of docudramas, both movie and serial-length, were being screened on television. Mentioned alongside Michener during this time were works such as Alex Haley's *Roots* and James Clavell's *Shogun*, both of

[23] Lawrence Grobel, ***Talking with Michener*** (1999), p. 42.
[24] Michiko Kakutani, "Michener: The Novelist as Teacher," ***New York Times***, 23 November 1980.
[25] Ibid.

which were long novels and multi-part television mini-series. The use of history and 'real-life' stories in these mediums grew considerably throughout the 1980s, and is a trend continuing right up until today.[26] This combination of Michener's lasting popularity and his place amongst the popular 'historian-novelists' and makers of docudramas of the late-70s-early-80s, would have lead commentators to ask, what was drawing people to his works and others like it. Why he fits along side these works will be discussed later in the chapter.[27]

Michener thus was clearly not a phenomenon unto himself, but rather part of a larger trend. What initiated the appeal of that trend is somewhat more complex, and relates back to what Michener saw as a desire within American society to learn about the rest of the world after World War II. Of course, the next question is clear. Why was this desire to know and to learn that drove the sales of Michener's novels so strong? The answer lies in desires rooted quite deeply within the psyche of Middle America. It is first necessary, though, to discuss briefly what Michener's own intentions were with his novels.

Michener's project, if one could call it that, was the furthering of people's education. Michener was a teacher before being a writer; he taught first at George School in Bucks County, followed by a year at Colorado State Teachers College, before becoming

[26] Discussion on the proliferation of television docudramas abounded during the 1980s, with articles including: Robert B. Musburger, " Setting the Stage for the Television Docudrama" ; Eric Breitbart, " From the Panorama to the Docudrama: Notes on the Visualisation of History" ; Thomas W. Hoffer and Richard Allan Nelon, " Evolution of the Docudrama on American Television Networks."

[27] It is also worth noting that much of the discussion that surrounded Michener appeared at the same time as the discussions in academia on the revival of narrative as well as the increasing appearance of docudramas on television and at the cinema. Literary critics and commentators were clearly aware that Michener played some part in this border interest in history and the presentation of history. The issues surrounding this will be elaborated on further in Chapter 2.

Assistant Visiting Professor of History at Harvard University, teaching English and Social Studies. This commitment to education remained throughout his life. As close friend and sometime co-writer of Michener's A. Grove Day wrote in his critical guide to Michener's work, "although [Michener] had long put his classroom service behind him, he has devoted much of his writing to informative purposes. Behind the novelist often lies the scholar, the editor, the professor."[28] Lawrence Grobel, who interviewed Michener over a period of seventeen years, commented not long before Michener died that in the years that he had known Michener "education was always his greatest interest."[29] This educational aspect can be seen prominently in his writing; more didactic instances in *The Source* include Michener, via one of his characters, informing the reader that a translation, in this case of the Bible, is not simply a translation, but are usually biased by the intent of those who do so.[30] Furthermore, the lengths he went to with his research were astounding (these will be elaborated on in Chapter 2.) A more 'concrete' demonstration of his belief in education was the enormous sums of money he donated to educational institutions (including $37 million the University of Texas at Austin) and education-related charities, which amounted to about $100 million, as well as donating millions of dollars in art work to various institutions.[31]

Michener's intentions were clearly identifiable, as Michiko Kakutani's *New York Times* article titled "Michener: the novelist as teacher" makes explicit. She points out that "in all his work a certain didacticism persists," and that "scattered" throughout his works are

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[28] Day, ***James Michener***, p. 17.
[29] Grobel, ***Talking with Michener***, p. xx.
[30] James A. Michener, ***The Source***(Random House, 1965), p. 187.
[31] Robert L. Gale, " Michner, James" in American National Biography Online, http://www.anb.org/articles/16-03380.html. Viewed 11/01/06.

meditations on ecology and sociology, and "detailed descriptions of everything from the feeding habits of geese to the cooking of local delicacies," which allows the reader to "feel that they are getting more than entertainment."[32]

It is now necessary to look at the readers' desires. Bell suggests that perhaps what is so appealing about Michener "is the thought that [the readers] are getting solid value for their money and learning a great deal without arduous intellectual effort."[33] Writer and literary critic Alfred Kazin likewise said "people read for information these days," arguing in line with Bell that by reading Michener, people "probably feel they are getting the information painlessly and pleasantly."[34] Kazin takes the argument further, saying that "a lot of people in this country feel undereducated, so this sort of book appeals to them."[35] This idea of wanting education is again echoed, in the same article, by sociologist Andrew Hacker, who argues that "in a way, his books are like a *history course for people in Middle America* – this is the way they continue their education."[36] Hacker's comment captures both Michener's intentions and the main group of his audience, Middle America. To further stress the educational value of Michener's books, it is worth pointing out that *The Source* has been used to supplement high school history and literature courses.[37]

[32] Kakutani, "Novelist as Teacher."
[33] Bell, "James Michener's Docudramas," 72.
[34] Kakutani, "Novelist as Teacher."
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.(my italics).
[37] Arlene J. and Connelly Barthgate, Lizabeth A., "Challenging Gifted Students with Michener's the Source," ***Journal of Reading***35, no. 1 (1991).

Hacker was also aware that "out there are these people who *want to improve themselves*, and they're very earnest about that."[38] Hacker was identifying, although not stating explicitly, what is often termed middlebrow culture. It is a term I use with some caution, as its connotations are frequently negative, and attitudes against middlebrow culture are often hostile and/or dismissive. It is, as Charles Paul Freund, senior editor of *Reason* magazine wrote in 2003, "a complex subject beset by issues of status and social power." In order to understand why it is complex, we need to look briefly at its history, but first a definition. Freund's is useful for its precision; he states that at the heart of middlebrow culture "[lies] the duty of all educated persons to become "well-rounded" citizens, especially by exposing themselves to great ideas, great art, and great literature." Freund points out that middlebrow culture "dominated mid-century culture in the Anglo-American world."[39] However, Joan Shelley Rubin, in her book *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*, situates its development as far back as Ralph Waldo Emerson's ideas in the nineteenth century. Emerson strongly linked character and virtue with appreciation of culture, therefore concluding that by improving your cultural appreciation you improve yourself. Self-cultivation and self-improvement were therefore deemed worth goals, and it's these ideas that have transmuted down the ages. Emerson effectively established himself as something of a tutor to the masses, thus beginning what David Robinson, in his book about Emerson, *Apostle of Culture*, called "the gradual domestication of the idea of culture."[40] These ideas were disseminated through magazines such as the *North American Review* and *Atlantic Monthly*, whose "diffusion held the

[38] Kakutani, "Novelist as Teacher." (My italics)
[39] Charles Paul Freund, "Reading for Nobrows: Pleasure and power in the wake of the middlebrows" in Reason.com, October 16, 2003, http://www.reason.com/links/links101603.shtml, viewed on 12/9/06.
[40] David Robinson, ***Apostle of Culture***, 215. Cited by Joan Shelley Rubin, ***The Making of Middle/Brow Culture*** (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 10.

promise of counteracting materialism."[41] This was reinforced and most strongly influenced by the ideas of Matthew Arnold, who famously believed that culture was "the best that has been said and thought in the world."[42] It is out of this Arnoldian tradition, Rubin says, that led to the middlebrows who established museums, symphony orchestras, libraries, and public parks.[43]

Why this linking of culture and virtue developed when it did is directly related to the rise of consumer culture and of the middle classes. Decline of economic and social barriers meant that true refinement and gentility could not be recognised via a person's material possessions, but on the rather more elusive qualities of character and virtue.[44] Such things had to be gained through exposure to and appreciation of the best aspects of culture, as they were things that money could not buy. Ultimately, it is the idea that links the appreciation of the 'best' in culture with an individual's 'worth.' This has, however, been one of the most contentious aspects of discussion on middlebrow culture. Rubin points out that the rise of mass consumerism meant the rise of a culture that *had less time to gain* culture, which had been one of the early important aspects of middlebrow culture, and yet there was still a need within society to gain culture.[45] It was ironic, then, that this very need enabled market/consumer forces to cater directly to the desires of middlebrows.

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[41] Ibid., p. 11.
[42] Matthew Arnold and John Dover Wilson, ***Culture and Anarchy*** (Cambridge: The University Press, 1935), p. 6.
[43] Rubin, ***The Making of Middle/Brow Culture***, p. 15.
[44] Ibid., p. 3.
[45] Ibid., p. 25.

However, Rubin points out it was not entirely motivated by desires for wealth, but rather a genuine, earnest desire amongst upper middlebrows to make culture readily and easily available for those who wanted it. Rubin uses the Harvard Classics Series as an example. Begun by Charles W. Eliot, the series was a collection of books that could fit on a five foot book shelf, selected on the basis that reading such books would lead to a higher cultivation of the self. Eliot also propagated the idea that this could be achieved through reading just 15 minutes per day.[46] This latter point is what rankled critics, such as Dwight MacDonald, about middlebrow culture the most. To them, the conflation of capitalism with culture, the idea that culture could be something bought, or at the very least, easily acquired, and it was marketed as such, was something to be regarded with disdain. Indeed, the situation was decidedly ironic. As one of the 'principles' of middlebrow culture is the idea that being educated and informed counteracts the materialism, this is undermined by quite literally 'buying into' the marketing of such forms, which are regarded as lesser works as the intention behind them is profit gain and they play into the audience's desire for sentimentality.[47]

Whilst Rubin's work focuses mainly on the early twentieth century, the ideas that she discusses certainly continued to apply during the mid century. This can be most readily identified in the culture trends that appeared at this time, and the continuing popularity of institutions such as the Book-of-the-Month Club. The Book-of-the-Month Club began in 1926. It gave subscribers a selection of recently published books chosen by a panel of

[46] Ibid., pp. 27-28.
[47] At the time Rubin was writing (1992), she aruged that as a result of such attitudes, middlebrow culture has often been ignored by academia, which takes up either 'highbrow' culture, perceived 'marignalised' or at least 'small press' works, or at the other end of the scale, the study of 'popular' culture, the culture of the working classes and masses, now turned to as it previously had been neglected by the academy.

expert judges who deemed It is often up held as the 'height' (if that is possible) of middlebrow culture, and many of Michener's books were featured by the Book-of-the-Month Club, including *The Source*, the rights to which were sold there at a $60 000 minimum.[48] It is very much part of middlebrow culture that people 'should' know about the right books to read. That this kind of middlebrow culture can be identified today as proliferating in the mid-twentieth century with much the same language as applied in the early twentieth century reveals it continuing, albeit changing, culture. Noted quite frequently on the 'blogsphere' were music and drama critic Terry Teachout's comments on his blog in 2003. Teachout, wondering about the apparent disappearance of middlebrow culture, described himself as a former middlebrow who was, during the 1950s and 60s, "that earnest, self-improving fellow who watched prime-time documentaries and read the Book of the Month."[49] He continues that he was able to know "a little something about people like Willem de Kooning [Dutch abstract expressionist painter] and Jerome Robbins [American choreographer], thanks to *Time* and *Life* magazines and *The Ed Sullivan Show*, and what little I knew made me want to know more."[50] To this list of documentaries, magazines, and books we can add things like *National Geographic* magazine and Reader's Digest.

How exactly then does Michener fit into this middlebrow culture? For one thing, he is an inheritor of what Rubin termed the "outline" genre, even though he himself may not be aware of it. Briefly, "outline" works were written at a time when it seemed that

[48] Hayes, ***Biography***, p. 196.
[49] Terry Teachout "TT: The middlebrow moment" in ArtsJournal: About Last Night Thursday, October 9, 2003, http://www.artsjournal.com/aboutlastnight/archives20031005.shtml#55571, viewed 14/7/906.
[50] Ibid.

knowledge was becoming increasingly specialised and therefore harder to access for the general public. "Outlines," according to Rubin, "promised another was to catch up culturally and to regain a unified perspective." They proliferated in the early twentieth century, covering all topics from history to science to philosophy, and were written in styles that were "relentlessly factual, syntactically uncomplicated, devoid of bare generalisations, confidently unambiguous, and usually more lucid than dramatic."[51] In short, they rendered "intellectual achievement comprehensible for a broad readership," and were written by people who were confident in the capacity of that broad readership to understand what they were trying to impart.[52]

The "outline" was mostly famous propagated by Will Durant, American historian, through his works, written along with his wife Ariel, *The Story of Philosophy* (1926) and *The Story of Civilisation* (1935-1975), and it is striking to note that Will Durant was also awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom the same year as Michener, along with another much lambasted middlebrow artist Norman Rockwell. Michener, however, has much in common with the 'originator' of the genre, H.G. Wells, most famous for his science fiction novels such as *War of the Worlds* and *The Invisible Man*. Wells, like Michener, was a teacher before a writer, and while his career as a novelist was at its height, he came to believe that education would be the saving grace of not just society but civilisation itself (not unlike Matthew Arnold), and that it could supply his global vision. Wells' *The Outline of History* (1919) had at its heart the thesis that history revealed

[51] James Steel Smith, cited by Rubin, ***The Making of Middle/Brow Culture***, p. 210.
[52] Ibid.210.

mankind to be part of a universal brotherhood.[53] Ultimately, Wells concluded that "the future of civilisation…depended on the outcome of "a race between education and catastrophe." "[54] Whilst Michener was perhaps not as worried as Wells about the future of civilisation, he certainly is in some agreement with Wells on the idea of universal brotherhood, or at the very least, cooperation between different racial and ethnic groups.[55] It was a theme that ran right through his novels, and in *The Source*, there sense of the sadness at the end, as Michener puts forward the idea that there needs to be co-operation between Arabs and Israelis in order that both groups may move forward successfully.[56]

Having established what kind of culture Michener was situated in, it is now necessary to define what kind of work he was writing. Bell, having suggested docudrama, gives us considerable pause, for she offers a compelling argument as to why Michener's work can be called such as opposed to historical novels. However, it is first necessary to define both before presenting Bell's case.

The historical novel as a genre is generally considered to have begun with the works of Sir Walter Scott at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[57] Socialist literary critic Georg Lukács argued in 1930 that novels prior to this might have been set in the past, but were not attempts to genuinely depict people who might have been part of that historical

[53] Ibid., p. 212.
[54] Ibid., 213.
[55] Hayes, ***Biography***, p. 3.
[56] George Joseph Becker, ***James A. Michener, Literature and Life Series.***(New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co., 1983), p. 96.
[57] There is some contention to this question, although not especially relevant to our purposes here, is interesting to pursue.

setting.[58] Lukács believes that what made Scott different from earlier novelists is that Scott "very seldom speaks of the present. He does not raise the social questions of contemporary England in his novels," and that "Scott endeavours to portray the struggles and antagonisms of history by means of characters who, in their psychology and destiny, always represent social trends and historical forces."[59] Writing a few years earlier (1924) historian Herbert Butterfield, better known for his *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931), argued that Scott "did not write historical novels to teach history in an easy way or to get at a moral indirectly" but rather because "his mind was full of the past, just as the mind of a musician is full of tunes," and that it was in this world of the past that Scott created tales.[60] This distinction between exploring the past as a setting and using the past to educate is important and will be further discussed later. Avrom Fleishman's much later definition identified the inclusion of historical events that occur in the public sphere, such as war, politics, and economic change, showing how they affect the personal lives of characters, and the appearance, however brief, of a genuine historical personage.[61]

Historical realism was important to both Lukács and Butterfield, but for different reasons; for Lukács it was related strongly to his politics, for he insisted "on a realist aesthetic as the appropriate means to convey socialist ideas,"[62] whilst Butterfield, as seen in his later work, was resistant to using history that emphasize the idea of progress in order to produce a story that potentially glorified the present.

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[58] G. Lukacs, ***Historical Novel*** (1962), p. 15.15.
[59] Ibid., p. 32.
[60] Herbert Butterfield, ***Historical Novel*** (London: Cambridge University Press, 1924), p. 2.
[61] Avrom Fleishman, ***The English Historical Novel; Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*** (Baltimore,: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), pp. 3-4.
[62] Esther Leslie, " George Lukács (1885-1971)" in The Literary Encyclopaedia, http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=2816, viewed 13/9/2006.

There is a general agreement, then, that historical novels are about capturing the essence of a past time period. At best, they strive to create an authentic sense of the past, giving characters a psychology suited to their times, with attention to the details of their lives, a sense of the setting, the tools they used for everyday living. At its worse, the historical novel merely use historical settings as a backdrop for romanticised plots that allow for characters to operate with anachronistic mindsets. Michener's work, I would argue, does owe much to the historical novel, for he does make considerable effort to delve into the past and reveal how what people thought at the time. However, his intention is somewhat different. Michener himself resisted the term to describe his work, as he felt that while he felt his books had a strong historical base, he regarded them as concerned with the present.[63] I do agree with Michener's own estimation that his works are far more related to the present; his intent is not only to create a sense of the past, but also to reveal the progression of history, that is, how things came to be as they are now. Along the way, he delves into peoples of the past and their worlds. Michener uses the past as a way of explaining the present, rather than exploring the past for the sake of itself. This alone does not make what Michener writes a docudrama, although it does distinguish him from others who use history for fictional purposes. The intentions of Scott and later historical novelists who are often praised, including Mary Renault and Marguritte Yourcenar (Michener regarded both these writers highly) is more to explore the past for its own sake, to understand what was happening at the time without reference to our own. Therefore, the term historical novel is not entirely adequate to describe Michener's work.

[63] James A. Michener, "Historical Fiction," ***American Hertiage***33, no. April-May (1982): 48.

Docudrama is the marrying of two terms: documentary, and drama. A documentary can be defined as a factual and/or non-fiction film, either for the cinema or television. The concerns are about events that have happened, are happening, and will happen. In general, the idea of a documentary is to be informative, hence, on the one hand, an expectation of a strong adherence to the truth. Drama, on the other hand, implies a sense of the theatrical, the playing out of fictional characters and events; Joseph P. McKerns' in his article "Television Docudramas: The Images as History" in the journal *Journalism History* describes it concisely as "a creative, subjective interpretation of a human situation."[64] Briefly then, a docudrama is a merging of the two forms, and so can be described as the dramatic representation of factual events. Alan Rosenthal, in his introduction to his book *Why Docudrama?* offers the following definition of what docudramas are and what they should aspire to be:

> docudrama covers an amazing variety of dramatic forms, bound together by two things. They are all *based on* or *inspired by* reality, by the lives of real people, or by events that have happened in the recent or not too distant past. Furthermore, they would seem to have a higher responsibility to accuracy and to truth than fiction does.[65]

Although Rosenthal uses the meaning to refer to works that focus on fairly recent history, this does not mean we need to discount Michener from this definition, and it is perhaps

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[64] Joseph P. McKerns, "Televion Docudrams: The Image as History," ***Journalism History*** 7, no. 1 (1980).24.

[65] Alan Rosenthal, ***Why Docudrama? : Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*** (Carbondale, Ill: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), p. xv.

not especially relevant; the TV-miniseries *Shogun* is set in 15th century Japan, hardly can be described as the not-too-distant past, and yet still receives this classification from almost every critic without hesitation.

It is now necessary to return to Bell's argument on why Michener's books, which she regards as "not really novels and not really history, not genuine art or awful kitsch," can be classified as docudramas. She argues that his work is "the fictional equivalent of *Roots, Holocaust*, and *Shogun* (the last advertised by the network as a "TV novel")," and very much part of the television age, which is in striking contrast to James' assertion that the success of his formula was surprising. Bell continues, saying that "like the TV docudramas, his books convey the sweep of history through its high moments, enacted in simply dramatic, pictorially vivid scenes whose moral and meaning are immediately and unambiguously clear." [66] This fits with Robert Rosenstone's arguments presented in his chapter on Oliver Stone's *JFK* in Rosenthal's book on what defines most historical films produced in Hollywood. He argues that most employ 'realism,' use the traditional narrative structure of having beginning, middle, and end, usually accompanied with a moral message that is "embodied in a progressive view of history," and that "the story is closed, completed, and ultimately simple," whilst alternatives are not considered (the majority of films are certainly not like Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950)). History in these films is about individuals who perform heroic acts for the good of others, and thus by extension for the good of mankind, and "historical issues are personalised, emotionalised, and dramatised – for film appeals to our feelings as a way of adding to our

[66] Bell, "James Michener's Docudramas," 73.

knowledge or affecting our beliefs."[67] We will see more clearly in Chapter 3 how Rosestone's points apply to Michener.

Part of the problem of Bell's definition is that she wishes to conflate Michener's artistic merits with the genre he writes. She argues that "a great, or even serious, novel…cannot be translated into a movie or television special through images, and the serious novel works through language. Novels have to be read. No such obstacles face television in assimilating the fact/fiction of a Michener."[68] This may be the case, but it is not, to my mind, what warrants Michener's inclusion in the docudrama genre. While she acknowledges that his obsessiveness with even minute details "suggests that he regards himself as a teacher even more than a novelist," and that his pretensions do not seem to be that of a novelist, but rather an historian, she does not make this connection with the docudrama genre. I, on the other hand, see this as the vital aspect of classifying a work as docudrama. The 'docu' part of the word implies the need to educate, or at the very least inform. As Bell and others point out, Michener's novels sit comfortably alongside James Clavell's *Shogun* and Alex Hayley's *Roots* – both novels that were turned into TV-miniseries. *Shogun* was a novel about European contact in fifteenth century Japan, depicting through fictionalised…In the case of *Shogun*, the potential for its educative purposes were realised early with a conference in 1980 that resulted in a book, *Learning from Shogun*. Discussing it in his article for the journal *Publican Historian*, John E. Willis Jnr commented that one of the most important things to come out of that conference was that "all of [those present] recognized Clavell's deeply serious intention

[67] Robert Rosenstone, "***Jfk:*** Historical Fact/Historical Film," in ***Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and Tv***, ed. Alan Rosenthal (Carbondale, Ill: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), p. 335.
[68] Bell, "James Michener's Docudramas," p. 73.

to *introduce his readers* to some basic contrasts between Japanese and European values and attitudes toward life and death."[69] Hayley's *Roots*, which the product of Hayley's research into his family history, something rarely attempted by African Americans at the time, was similarly intended to educate his readers not only on the hardships of faced by enslaved Africans, but also correct commonly held stereotypes of slaves.[70]

Despite the fact that Michener often cast himself as a story teller, which I would not deny him, I think his educational concerns are far stronger, evidenced not only in his writing but also his charitable works. There is a didactic quality about *The Source*, not preachy but eager to deliver information to the reader. Whilst Michener does of course make a solid effort to give an impression of what life was like in the past, a sense of the individuals who are caught up in events, but it is done at the service of education, and education as a means of self-improvement was a strong tenant of middlebrow culture.

What is at play here then is an ideal partnership between Michener and his readers. Michener had a desire to educate and inform, and his readers had a desire to be educated and informed, which resulted in high sales and Michener's extraordinary public profile. The fact that the topics he wrote about were so pertinent at the time they were published made the chances of his success even greater. It was the educative purpose that allows the term docudrama to be readily applied to his work, for that is one of the docudrama's

[69] John E. Wills Jr., "Taking Historical Novels Seriously," ***The Public Historian*** 6, no. 1 (1984): 41. my italics

[70] Leslie Fishbein, "***Roots***: Docudrama and the Interpretation of History," in ***Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV***, ed. Alan Rosenthal (Carbondale, Ill: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), p. 287.

ultimate goals. Michener thus was very much part of twentieth century middlebrow culture; that earnest, self-improving fellow was in fact Michener himself.

Chapter 2 – Popular Historian

In Chapter 1 we saw what President Gerald Ford meant when he described Michener as an "author, teacher and popular historian," through his novels, all three merged together. The "popular historian" point is what we return to at this juncture, as it is now necessary to examine the implications of this. I would argue that Michener can most certainly be judged as an historian, despite his protestation of being a mere storyteller and novelist, and that, despite writing docudramas, which others have regarded as needing different considerations to historical writing, we can still up hold him up to similar criticisms. It is necessary then to examine what kind of history Michener is writing, and what potentially positive outcomes can arise from this kind of history, and also what points may arouse contentious. In order to explore this, we need to first examine what influenced Michener, so we can establish what sort of 'intellectual tradition' he belongs to.

If history is part rigorous examination of sources, and also part literary genre, which has been in contention within the profession since Leopold von Ranke,[71] what then is Michener? As we have also established in chapter 1, Michener's work can be better classified as 'docudrama,' for his works are a merging of fiction with fact in order to educate. Whilst the nature of what the historian's role should be is contestable, as is precisely what kind of education they should be delivering, there is no denying that there *is* an educative aspect to the historian's work.

However, is it necessarily correct to hold the creators of docudramas to the same standards as we do those within the history profession? Historian Iain McCalman, in his

[71] Ann Curthoys and John Docker, ***Is History Fiction?***(Sydney: UNSW Press, 2006), p. 116.116.

chapter "Flirting with Fiction" from *The Historian's Conscience*, gives the example of criticism aimed at Peter Carey's novel *True History of the Kelly Gang*. Journalists frustrated Carey by suggesting that the novel might be construed as real history by readers, but Carey argued, and McCalman concurred, that as long as the work proclaims itself to be imagined then the novelist is free to do as he likes, and that "the most one can ask is that [the novel] conveys a feeling of authentic history, and that is solely an aesthetic judgement."[72] This is a sound conclusion and can also apply to works such as those of Sir Walter Scott (*Waverly, Ivanhoe*), Mary Renault *(The Last of the Wine)*, and Robert Graves (*I, Claudius*).

Robert Rosenstone takes a somewhat different approach. Admittedly, he is writing about historical film (in this particular instance, Oliver Stone's *JFK*), which is a somewhat different but related medium. Rosenstone argues that it would perhaps be better to hold such works to different standards. He acknowledges the short comings, but argues that these are a condition of the medium, such as the necessity of invention, from the simplification of complex events to adhere to both plausible narrative structure and the time constraints, to the furnishing of the sets where exact replication is virtually impossible to achieve. Of course, he reminds us, written history cannot exactly replicate, either. Both written and visual history are representations and interpretations the past, and film makes a different contribution to our understanding of history. [73] Historical films are viewed for "drama" not "data," "for the way it intensifies the issues of the past, for the

[72] Iain McCalman, "Flirting with Fiction," in ***The Historian's Conscience***, ed. Stuart Macintyre (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishers, 2004), p. 153.
[73] Robert Rosenstone, "***Jfk:*** Historical Fact/Historical Film," in ***Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and Tv***, ed. Alan Rosenthal (Carbondale, Ill: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), pp. 335-37.

way it shows us the world as process, makes us participate in the confusion, multiplicities, complexities and of events long gone."[74] He argues that Stone, by constructing *JFK's* narrative around an investigation into the past, rather than delivering historical accuracy, uses the conditions of film making in such a way as to raise questions about the past, which contributes significantly to historical debate, a point raised quite sharply from the media reaction to the film.

Michener, however, always strove for accuracy, often arduously; Pearl K. Bell reminds us that Michener, in a note in *The Covenant*, pointed out that he read through the entire manuscript with a South African editor and journalist seven times, twice aloud, "to clarify historical and social factors which an outsider might misinterpret, to correct verbal usage, to verify data difficult to check."[75] Bell believes that such striving for accuracy begs the question, "why should it matter so much to a novelist?" for such accuracy does not necessarily beset other historical novelists. This leads Bell to argue that Michener's pretensions are more in line with those of an historian than a novelist.[76] Thus, if we take on the term docudrama and the idea that the medium holds a responsibility of adhering to the truth with greater accuracy than other fictional forms, then we certainly must judge it accordingly. We can consider *The Source* as a work of history, for while Michener is writing fiction, he is also constructing an historical argument.

Since we have established that Michener can be assessed as an historian, we can now judge what type of history he is constructing, but first we need to understand the

[74] Ibid., p. 338.
[75] Pearl K. Bell, "James Michener's Docudramas," ***Commentary*** (1981): 73.
[76] Ibid.

'intellectual tradition' from which Michener is coming. I say 'intellectual tradition' with caution, for Michener is still a novelist, and it is far easier to trace novelists that influenced him as opposed to historians who did, but as we shall see, this is highly relevant. I will also briefly discuss his education and religious upbringing, and suggest ways in which these too contributed to his work.

Michener cited the works of Honoré de Balzac, the French writer who is regarded as a founder of the realist tradition in European literature in the mid-nineteenth century, as a major influence. In artistic terms, realism means depicting subject matter as it appears in everyday life. For Balzac, this meant applying the rich detail of everyday life to present-day subjects. Michener claimed to have read all of Balzac by the age of 14, having received a great number of books from his aunt. "I've always been a sucker for a narrative, especially old foreign language novels, the great historical novels," he told his interviewer, Lawrence Grobel.[77]

When Grobel asked what Michener felt he had learnt from Balzac, Michener responded that a writer had no reason to draw "back from the major commitment," meaning that a writer (Michener includes Tolstoy, Dickens, and Joyce Carol Oates in this equation) could justifiably attempt numerous novels on the same theme.[78] As diverse as the topics are that Michener covers, he argues that the point that is often missed with his works is the continuing theme of optimism for the cooperation of humanity. He also feels that he took much from Balzac in terms of structure: the use of location to establish background

[77] Lawrence Grobel, ***Talking with Michener*** (1999), p. 6.
[78] Ibid.

– Balzac sets his work *La Comédie Humanie* in Paris occasionally delving into surrounding areas – whilst Michener, in the case of *The Source*, sets the novel mostly on an imaginary site, Makor; having the presence of a continuing character, Balzac using Rastignac throughout this works, whilst Michener, though not using one character, continually returns to the family of Ur in *The Source*. *Comédie Humanie* is, of course, a series of inter-connected novels rather than a singular work, however the use of consistent character and place in order to establish a milieu is strikingly similar.

George Becker, author of one of the critical companions to Michener, wonders, however, if the Balzac connection is overstated. He argues that the way Michener populates his novels with minor characters verges on a Dickensian style.[79] Becker argues that "what Michener seems to have done is to take the examples of Balzac, Zola, and [John] Dos Passos [author of the *U.S.A* trilogy] and stretch them to panoramic histories covering three or four hundred years, or in the case of *The Source* several thousand years."[80]

In discussing his own writing technique, Michener makes frequent reference to nineteenth century writers. "I am didactic and persuasive and hortatory and everything else that a novelist should probably not be," he said in a speech in 1961 to a group of students at the University of Oregon. "I take my lessons from Balzac and [Emile] Zola and [Theodore] Dreiser and that group."[81] Zola and Dreiser are of course naturalist writers, a style in literature that developed out of realism that emphasised believable

[79] George Joseph Becker, ***James A. Michener, Literature and Life Series.***(New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co., 1983), p. 169.
[80] Ibid., p. 168.
[81] Ibid., p. 172.172.

portrayals of every day life over symbolic and romantic. In terms of character creation, Michener divides novelists into two groups, citing those who create a character on which to build a world, putting Flaubert in this one, and those who see characters in the world around them, such as Balzac and Dickens, including himself with the latter writers.[82] Michener's literary influences then are aligned within traditions of realism and naturalism developed during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This point of realism shall be better discussed later when we look at the potential positive aspects of history presented in Michener's style. It is highly appropriate, then, that Michener's novels have been compared both favourably, and less so, with nineteenth century works. Albert Erskine, his editor at Random House, argued that Michener, in contrast with many contemporary "serious" authors, "relied on old-fashioned narrative techniques." ""It's the same appeal, say, Dickens had in his time." Indeed, Michener's work has more in common with the 19th-century novel of social realism than with contemporary modes."[83] Bell, however, suggests that even such writers would have cringed at his contrivances (the situating of three archaeologists of the three Semitic faiths so that they may engage in a three-way commentary on history and other issues being perhaps the most obvious one in *The Source*).

We should also consider Michener's educational background. Michener was educated at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, having been granted one of the first Swarthmore

[82] On a more prosaic level, Michener cites Karl Ploetz's *Epitome of History* as frequent reference point of his. He wrote that he doubted he could "think constructively without it." *Epitome* was written chronologically, outlaying the major events within the history of several regions of the world. This chronological construction no doubt influenced Michener's work, and we could also argue that the way Michener compacts information into the novel is probably very similar.

[83] Caryn James, "The Michener Phenomenon," ***New York Times*** September 8 1985.

Open Scholarships. It was a private liberal arts college, founded by the Society of Friends, better known as the Quakers. Michener identified as a Quaker for much of his life. If we are to take on what Becker suggests, Quakerism gave Michener a tradition that emphasised and nurtured "independence of mind and spirit," and it allowed him to develop him "boundless curiousity about life."[84] Quakerism, we could argue, gave Michener the considerable support of an intellectual tradition in which to believe.

Coming, thus, out of a liberal arts education coupled with a strong Quaker tradition would likely have created his "pledge not to fake anything [with his novels], not to give spurious quotes or to portray a person contrary to what the facts are."[85] This further highlights his need for accuracy. Taking both the influence to nineteenth century realist fiction with this kind of intellectual tradition makes it easier for us to understand why he wrote the kind of novels he did; that is, fictional realism with a narrative drive that strives for historical accuracy. Michener is writing narrative *fiction*, but if we are to reconsider his works as 'docudrama,' and if we are to believe his intentions are more educative and didactic as opposed to exploring 'history for its own sake,' I think we can also judge *The Source* as an *historical* narrative, and if so, then the criticisms, as well as the praises, of the use of narrative in history, must be taken into consideration.

What then is narrative history? Lawrence Stone, historian of early modern Britain, in his influential 1979 *Past and Present* article "The Revival of Narrative," put forward this definition: "Narrative is taken to mean the organisation of material in a chronologically

[84] Becker, ***James A. Michener***, p. 184.
[85] Grobel, ***Talking with Michener***, p. 44.

sequential order and the focussing of the content into a single coherent story, albeit with sub-plots." He continues, adding that it differs from structural history by being "descriptive rather than analytical and that its central focus is on man not circumstance," meaning that it favours events and the people who shaped them rather than the underlying structures in society that led to historical movement.[86]

Stone rightly points out that by narrative he does not simply mean the detailing of events in chronological order. Rather, "it is a narrative directed by some 'pregnant principle,' and which possesses a theme and an argument."[87] The theme and argument driving the narrative can be seen from the earliest forms of history; Stone points to Thucydides *Peloponnesian War*, and how the war affected society in Ancient Greece. The point here is that narrative is used to explain what has happened in the past, and *The Source*, as we shall see in Chapter 3, is no exception.

There is considerable debate about the positives and negatives of narrative history. It was called into question initially by those such as Roland Barthes, semiotician and literary critic and theorist, Fernand Braudel, historian who was highly influential for introducing other disciplines such as economics and geography to the study of history, and members of *Annales* school of history (which Braudel subscribed to), which, in general, regarded history as an examination of structures over a period of time, rather than a connecting series of events, that is, narrative. Their criticisms were aimed directly at history being too much like fiction in its structure, in particular, the tradition of realism

[86] Lawrence Stone, "The Revival of Narrative: Reflectionss on a New Old History," ***Past and Present*** November, no. 85 (1979): 3-4.
[87] Ibid.: 4.

found in nineteenth century fiction. Braudel argued that "to the narrative historians, the life of men is dominated by dramatic accidents, by the actions of those exceptional beings who occasionally emerge, and who are often the masters of their own fate and even more of ours."[88] Hayden White, historian most noted for his historiographical works, concluded that Braudel's idea " characterise[s] [narrative history] as informed by a specifically dramatistic perspective on historical events." History becomes spectacle, " unfolding before the mind's eye of the reader with all the colour, intensity, and fascination of a theatrical production."[89] Barthes likewise concurs: "does the narration of past events…really differ, in some specific trait, in some indubitably distinctive feature, from imaginary narration, as we find it in the epic, the novel, and the drama?"[90] Barthes further argued that nineteenth century realism in fiction was linked to the narrative structure, being an inherently bourgeois ideological discourse, therefore narrative history was to be considered "a mere pseudoscientific and therefore ideological enterprise."[91] The implication is thus that history was made by extraordinary figures within a kind of "theatrical" setting, one in which the ordinary person played very little part. History can thus take on the sense of being an epic, a 'myth' rather than an historical truth. White concludes that in forcing readers into the role of spectator, the reader thus becomes a subject to the forces of history, with little agency of their own, and thus reaffirms the status quo of the bourgeoisie.

[88] White, 60
[89] White, Storytelling, 60.
[90] 61
[91] White, Storytelling, 61.

White notes that Georg Lukács put forward a very different argument. According to White, for Lukács, narrative "produces ideology," and rather than expressing a particular socio-political position, allows the writer or the historian to "engage reality in ideological rather than non-ideological terms." Lukács, believing as he did in the realistic works grounded in socialist ideology, did not, as White points out, regard works being informed by ideology as a problem.[92] We will leave Lukács for the moment, for his comments on the benefits of narrative fictional history need to be looked at separately.

These arguments might help us account for the appeal of narrative works of all variety. Appeal is, of course, difficult to gauge accurately, particularly in terms of fiction.[93] Of course, as we have established, Michener's appeal was strongly related to the educative aspects of his work. In the case of *The Source*, readers were likely to have been drawn to it for a combination of factors; it is a history of a place considered holy by three major religions, but it is also a history set in a region that was and still continues to be highly topical.

It is possible to argue that the connections Braudel and Barthes made between fiction and history are related to what makes narrative forms so appealing; if history pans out in the manner that a story does, the reader, already attuned to the structures of narrative, will be more willing to accept it (or at the very least, take interest in reading it.) What is also

[92] Hayden White, "Storytelling: Historical and Ideological," in ***Centuries' End, Narrative Means***, ed. Robert Newman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 64.
[93] Michener joked in his autobiography that what the reading public desire in terms of fiction is really not a precise art, claiming that a group of sophisticated analysts would not conclude that the American public were really after novels about archaeologists in Israel (***The Source***, obviously), rabbits on a journey through England (reference to Richard Adams' ***Watership Down***, a best-seller a few years later), and a monk involved in murder mystery (Umberto Eco's ***The Name of the Rose***). James A. Michener, ***The World Is My Home: A Memoir*** (New York: Random House, 1992), pp. 665-66.

striking is that Michener's popularity during the 1960s coincides with the development and widespread practice of methodologies such as those supplied by the *Annales* school, new history, economic history, and such as advocated by Braudel and Barthes. So it would seem that whilst professional historians were in the process of rejecting narrative histories, the general public were fully embracing them and Michener's in particular. Of course, as Stone pointed out in 1979, professional historians were increasingly returning to narrative as a mode of writing history, finding that things like the political decisions of individuals were better told through narrative rather than analysis of structures.[94]

The concerns of Braudel and Barthes are noteworthy, and such thoughts certainly held considerable sway within the historical profession for several decades throughout the mid-twentieth century. I also acknowledge that the linking of historical narrative writing to fictional narrative writing provides an invaluable approach on reflecting how history is constructed and written and the possible prejudices that the historian may be imparting in her writing of history. Braudel and Barthes' criticisms are further worthy in drawing attention to the ability of history to partake in creating myths of history, which is especially important in the case of national histories. Narrative structure certainly allows Michener to take part in myth-making. However, what I regard as more important in the case of *The Source* is not so much the narrative *structure* itself but rather the *kind of narrative* that is told and what theme and argument Michener is putting forward within that narrative.

[94] Stone, "The Revival of Narrative: Reflectionss on a New Old History," 10.

Despite this, there are certain benefits of presenting history in a narrative format, and here, more precisely, in a fictional narrative format. These advantages are precisely linked to the fictional aspect of the docudrama medium. American novelist and essayist Gore Vidal's comments in his book *Screening History* are of great use to us in this regard. He is referring to the historical film rather than the docudrama, but the similarities between the two are enough for his comments to be useful. Vidal argues that "a primary function of the narrative art is to produce empathy in those who may otherwise lack the ability to understand what it is another person feels or thinks."[95] In a similar vein, Wills, argues that historical fiction allows the development of individuals "whose lives we know in an abstract way from the historical record," such as beggars and peddlers, but who can rarely be portrayed as such in non-fiction history.[96] Indeed, it is often difficult to present 'factual' history in this way as the historian could undoubtedly be accused of 'speculation.' The freedom that fictional forms allow with the limitations placed on it by the constraints of historical fact give creators of historical novels and docudrama the room to suggest, as Lukács and Butterfield have said, to envision life as it was in historical times. Indeed, Lukács, in referring to writers such as Scott, Balzac and Tolstoy, argued that

> we [the reader] experience events which are inherently significant because of the direct involvement of the characters in the events and because of the general social significance emerging in the unfolding of the characters' lives. We are the

[95] Gore Vidal, ***Screening History***(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 48.
[96] John E. Wills Jr., "Taking Historical Novels Seriously," ***The Public Historian***6, no. 1 (1984): 40.

> audience to events in which the characters take active part. We ourselves experience these events.[97]

These positives notwithstanding, there are still significant problems with narrative fictionalised history. In addition to the dangers of myth-making aspects of narrative, there is a further point that warrants attention. In discussing historical film, using the examples of *Reds* and *The Good Fight*, Robert Rosenstone argues that the most "unsettling" aspect of these films "is the way each compresses the past to a closed world by telling a single, linear story with, essentially, a single interpretation." He argues that such presentations of history deny the possibility of alternatives and take away the subtly of history. [98] Elsewhere Rosenstone pointed out most historical films do not take the root Kurosawa's *Rashomon* did, which present five alternative endings to the same story without ever settling on one 'correct' version.[99] *Rashomon* is admittedly fictional, but one might wonder why this technique is not more often employed in historical films. Perhaps it is as Curthoys and Docker point out, that "public audiences want what historians say to be true, and do not like it when historians disagree among themselves or suggest that a true answer may never be found. If the question is important, there must be a correct answer; to say there are many truths sounds like obfuscation, fence-sitting, and avoiding one's public responsibility."[100] Of course, Curthoys and Docker are referring to professional historians rather than writers and makers of docudramas, but they do make a good point about general audiences' desire for a single truth above a range of possibilities.

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[97] Cited in White, "Storytelling: Historical and Ideological," p. 63.
[98] Robert Rosenstone, "History in Images/History in Words: Reflections of the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film," ***The American Historical Review***93, no. 5 (1988): 1174.1174.
[99] Rosenstone, "***Jfk:*** Historical Fact/Historical Film," p. 335.
[100] Curthoys and Docker, ***Is History Fiction?***, p. 4.

Another problem is the potential for the reader/audience to be deceived by the authenticity of the research. Although I would not level the same accusations towards Michener that Iain McCalman made about Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* attempt at history, McCalman makes a fair point that the problem is that Brown uses the cloak of fiction to sell his 'history.' McCalman argues that such writers "are thereby asking to have their cake and eat it too." It is a rather exploitative set up; on the one hand, the writer can lay claims to disclosing the truth, but is not required to go through the "stringent tests of evidence that historians must expect."[101] McCalman, as discussed previously, does not see it as a problem as long as the author proclaims the work to be fiction with some basis in history, although one wonders what he might think of Michener. Michener is certainly not exploitative, but rather, as I have discussed, does take considerable advantage of conventions of both fiction and history, and is adamant about the extent to which he researched his novels. Chapter 3, however, will discuss not necessarily the level of his research, but rather the biases that have very likely affected the presentation of his research.

A further point is somewhat related to the concerns raised by Rosenstone, and most certainly relates back to the discussion in Chapter 1 on the appeal of Michener's books to the middlebrow reader. Iconoclastic literary critic Leslie Fiedler was at one time particularly vitriolic about Michener and others writers like him. In his 1960 introduction to his collection of essays *No! In Thunder* when discussing (or rather, 'dissing') Michener and middlebrow writers, he situated them as part of "the prevailing upper middlebrow

[101] McCalman, "Flirting with Fiction," p. 153.

form of our time: the serious pseudo-novel as practiced by certain not-quite-first-rate authors, committed equally to social conscience and success, and sure that these are not mutually exclusive goals." His criticisms were that Michener and his ilk cynically went after the latest crisis at hand before the ink on the newspaper headlines were dry, writing "Sentimental Liberal Protest Novels" about victimised people, creating the sense that wars are fought "so that the persecuted Jew or tormented Italian can shame his fellows by proving his unforeseen valour in the end." Fiedler regarded the attitude as degrading and patronising, and filled with sentiment and "ersatz morality."[102] This idea of over-simplification and sentimentality is one often levelled at middlebrow writers.

Later on, Fiedler was far less hyperbolic,[103] maintaining that "some writers are read because they have a voice like that of an old friend; Michener doesn't have that. His is as close to neutral or nonstyle as you can get." The critique is not inaccurate, but there are points in *The Source* that are quite beautiful: "High in the heavens over the desert a vulture wheeled, its glinting eye fastened to an object almost invisible in a clump of brush where the drifting sand met fertile earth."[104] Additionally, Michener does not draw back from describing the torture under the Inquisition where Diego Ximeno is "suspended for nearly an hour, while his arms, wrenched upwards from behind, slowly pulled his shoulders away from their sockets,"[105] and the murderous rampages of the Crusaders,

[102] Leslie A. Fiedler, ***No! In Thunder : Essays on Myth and Literature*** (New York: Stein & Day, 1972), pp. 14-16.
[103] One might wonder if the gentler tone came perhaps because Michener, along with several others, signed a letter to the New York Review of Books in October 1967 proclaiming the start of the Fiedler Defense Fund after he was arrested on drug charges.
[104] James A. Michener, ***The Source*** (Random House, 1965), p. 115.
[105] Ibid., p. 775.

depicting the impalement and trampling to death of a pregnant woman,[106] refusing to hide the horrific acts of violence under vague euphemism.

Fiedler continues, saying that Michener "puts a book together in a perfectly lucid, undisturbing way, so that even potentially troublesome issues don't seem so…*The Source* is about the Middle East, one of the most troublesome political issues in the world, but he's forgotten all the ambiguities."[107] This latter point I disagree with, for as chapter 3 will show, Michener does have an understanding of the complexities surrounding both the internal difficulties of modern Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

However, the description of his work as lucid and undisturbing is true in relation to how Michener structures the novel. The informative parts of the novel are mostly digestible, in bite-sized pieces: they often consist of exposition at the beginning or end of each chapter, which mostly works earlier in the book but less so later when Michener begins almost listing what happened in the intervening centuries he does not have a story about. However, there is a sense of achievement having read the novel, partly because of its size, but there is also a sense that it was not all that arduous to get through as has informative exposition bookend-ed the chapters, allowing the story to mostly take centre stage for the majority of the book. One could perhaps accuse Michener of what James L. Ford wrote satirically about much earlier in the 20th century; supplying capsules of

[106] Ibid., p. 665.
[107] Michiko Kakutani, "Michener: The Novelist as Teacher," ***New York Times*** 23 November 1980.

culture which could be take twice a day so in order to appear educated and informed at dinner parties.[108]

Michener thus appeals to the middlebrow not only because he is easy to read and the reader feels informed, but because he presents it easily and 'lucidly.' The busy reader, preoccupied with other things, would like to be informed but rather not be disturbed. Some of Michener's scenes are uncomfortable to read, but it is still ultimately laced with hope and is unambiguous.

This is one of the great problems with Michener. Fiedler continues, saying that "his approach is that if you knew all the facts, everything would straighten out, so it's soothing and reassuring to read him."[109] This reassurance in the face of complex situations is particularly noticeable in the penultimate scenes of *The Source*, as several critics have pointed out. This is where Jemail Tabari, the Arab archaeologist, and Ilan Eliav, the Israeli scholar, have a dialogue that is in fact fraught with complexity, for Tabari is insistent that Israel must confront the problems of the Palestinian refugees, particularly in regards to repatriation, whilst Eliav argues that it would be very dangerous for Israel to do that, almost like committing suicide. Michener, however, concludes it with Eliav saying "we're very old brothers…and in the future we shall meet many times, for we understand each other,"[110] which unfortunately undermines the acknowledgement of the difficulties of the situation and does feel a bit tacked on for reassurance that things

[108] Cited by Joan Shelley Rubin, ***The Making of Middle/Brow Culture*** (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 26.
[109] Kakutani, "Novelist as Teacher."
[110] Michener, ***The Source***, p. 1071.

will one day be better. Bell writes that in this scene, "Michener instinctively reaches for the silver lining," instead wishing to affirm the "soggy liberal optimism" that he shares with his readers.[111] Becker, who is otherwise supportive of Michener's attitudes, even taking Bell to task and saying that he believes "Michener's value and attitudes are more valid and more enduring than those behind the buzz-saw tearing apart of left-wing intellectuals or the reinforced concrete of the troglodytic right,"[112] likewise agrees that the ending is "too optimistic"[113] for the realities of the situation. (Vitriol is certainly ever-present in discussions of culture and values.)

What then, are the implications that Michener presents for professional historians? His popularity for one thing is astounding. Galling as it might be, Michener's history of Israel is what has sold to well over 2.5 million readers, and this is a figure taken 30 years ago. The question of whose vision of history, that is, professional historians versus Michener's, the "author, teacher, and popular historian," is having the widest impact across Western society, is almost unquestionable faced with these figures. Professional historians should be concerned about the kind of history Michener delivers not because, as McCalman argues, "unless we distinguish ourselves from false practitioners, we're in danger of being discredited with them,"[114] (although this is certainly a worthwhile concern in many instances) but rather because Michener is presenting the kind of narrative history that is inclined to unambiguous storytelling that reassures the reader

[111] Bell, "James Michener's Docudramas," 73.
[112] Becker, ***James A. Michener***, p. 178.178.
[113] Ibid., p. 96.
[114] McCalman, "Flirting with Fiction," p. 155.

rather than causes them to question, and uses the narrative structure around which to construct a myth of Israel that, as we shall see in Chapter 3, is quite often inaccurate.

Chapter 3 – Teacher

Having established that Michener is writing in the docudrama genre, and having explored the issues that arise from presenting history within this particular fictional format, we can turn and answer the pressing question: through *The Source*, what kind of history of Israel/Palestine is Michener 'teaching' the reader? Ultimately, I argue, it is a historical narrative that is myth-like and epic in its structure, telling the story of a people who come through adversity to triumph. To see this, we need first to examine the narrative structure itself to understand what type of story Michener is constructing. This will be followed by a discussion on how this is done throughout the novel, before looking at how Michener strives to make his narrative believable through a combined use of verisimilitude, realism, and contrivance. This is then followed by a discussion of the novel's constructive educational purposes, before concluding with an examination of the many concerns that the novel holds for us, most pertinently connecting its narrative in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Although we briefly looked at the structure of the novel in the introduction, it is necessary to reiterate it as it provides the framework around which Michener constructs his narrative. The setting is Israel in 1964 CE. Michener makes a point about using the dating system of BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era) as opposed to BC and AD, as he is dealing predominantly with a cast of characters who are not Christian,[115] which is a good example of the didactic nature of his work. At the fictional site of Tell Makor (Makor meaning 'Source'), a team of archaeologists, aided by the young people of

[115] James A. Michener, ***The Source***(Random House, 1965), p. 11.

a nearby kibbutz, dig two trenches in different parts of the tell in order to see if the site will be worth future years of investigation. They uncover fifteen artefacts, each one older than the last the further down they dig. Each artefact then provides the focus of a story, the first set over 10 000 years ago, and the last in 1948. Makor serves as either the central place of action or, in later chapters where it is no longer a settlement, a place where significant actions occurs.

The novel is book-ended with two chapters titled "The Tell." The first one begins on a high note, standing as a highly pro-Israel chapter, with a strong sense of hope for the country, featuring as it does young kibbutzniks who have a real sense of pride in their nation, as well as other characters who fought in the 1948 war. For many of them, being Jewish is related more to having a political identity and nationality rather than a religion.

The historical narrative commences with the "The Bee Eater," in years 9834-9831 BCE, where Michener hypothesises on how the tentative beginnings of religion and religious thinking may have begun amongst cave-dwelling people. Their leader is Ur, whose descendants appear in varying capacities throughout the rest of the novel. Following this, is the chapter "Of Death and Life," set in the years 2202-2201 BCE, a time dominated by the pagan Canaanites. Their religious practices, both violent (revolving around the sacrifice of first born sons to a god Melak), and seductive (worship of Astarte, goddess of fertility, involves sexual rites with temple prostitutes), overwhelm a newly formed group of people named the Habiru, who worship a god named El, who is omnipresent, rather than localised as Astarte and Melak are.

The Habiru, however, in later centuries, become a people known as the Hebrews who worship El-Shaddai, and in 1419 BCE, a small group led by the patriarch Zadok fight and gain control of Makor ("An Old Man and his God"). The Hebrews then rise to a height of power under the rule of King David (966-963 BCE), whose technical achievements Michener shows through the tunnel dug by Hoopoe, a descendant of Ur ("Psalm of the Hoopoe Bird"). This is followed in 606-605 BCE by the exile in Babylon ("The Voice of Gomer"), and whilst the Jews do eventually return to Israel, it is at this point that direct anti-Jewish persecution begins; first under the Selucid Greeks in 167 BCE where the act of circumcision is made punishable by death ("In the Gymnasium"), then under Herod in 4 BCE ("The King of the Jews"), then with the Romans (40-67 CE), who, angry that the Jews will not worship the emperor as a god, once again send large numbers of Jews into exile ("Yigal and his Three Generals").

What follows are centuries which are not only the most troubling for Jewish existence but also the most intense for the development of the religion. During this time (326-351 CE) the Talmud, a central text of Jewish law, is developed ("The Law"). However, the law both binds and excludes; Rabbi Asher, another descendant of Ur, and his friendship with a young man who was born illegitimate, reveals this most strongly. Whilst Asher is helping develop the Talmud, the young man whom he is close to is unable to ever be part of the community as the law does not allow it. Islam enters history as a religious force of great power in "A Day in the Life of a Desert Rider" (635 CE), and the problems of the law are further highlighted with a story featuring a widow whose husband was killed by

his brother, but, as they had no children, the law demands that she must marry his brother.

However, persecution from Christians turns violent during "Volkmar," set during the first Crusade, 1096-1105 CE. The sense of religious fervour and resulting bloodshed of the Crusades is highlighted, with only a handful of thousands reaching the Holy Land. This occurs to a lesser extent in "The Fires of Ma Coeur" (1289-1291 CE), focusing more on the polyglot and multicultural world that has grown in the Holy Land, which is then invaded by the Mamelukes, who destroy Makor so that it is never again settled. This is followed by "The Saintly Men of Safed" (1521-1541 CE), which explores in detail the varying forms of persecution across Europe; humiliation in Italy, the Inquisition in Spain, and life on the Judenstrasse in Germany. Like "The Law," a focus is the development of the Kabala, an influential mystical strain of Judaism, but it also features three Rabbis from these European communities settling in Safed in Palestine, where they practice without restraint their own styles of Judaism.

Then, in 1855-1880 CE with increasing anti-Jewish persecution across Europe, and a long standing desire within Diaspora Jewish communities, doggedly persistent European Jews begin buying land in Palestine ("Twilight of an Empire"). The narrative climaxes with the war of 1948 CE, when groups of Jews, outnumbered by Arab forces and abandoned by the British, come to an almost exhilarating triumph, albeit tainted with the death of Eliav's wife ("Rebbe Itzik and the Sabra"). Whilst the final "Tell" chapter strikingly underscores the optimism of the first by pointing out that the unbending aspects

of religious law conflict with ideas of modernity, it ends on a hopeful note, with Eliav contemplating: "life isn't meant to be easy, it's meant to be life."[116] The novel concludes with remembering the martyrdom of Rabbi Akiba, repeating his final words, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one," revealing how he maintained his dignity till the end.[117]

The overarching narrative follows an almost epic structure. Beginning with the tentative emerging of a new people in "Death and Life," it is followed by a fuller development in "Old Man" before the Jews rise to a height in "Psalm." They as a people fall in "Gomer," which is followed by years of hardship ("Volkmar") although this is countered by a consolidation of religious law ("Law"), and the persecution often strengthens the bonds of community, most particularly seen in "Saintly Men." This culminates with Jews beginning to return to Israel in "Twilight" before they rise again, victorious, in "Rebbe Itzik." The narrative is one of triumph over adversity, often against impossible odds, where the hero is not a person, but the Jewish people. Michener portrays them as having survived centuries of exile, massacres, and persecutions with tenacious dignity through forbearance, at times dogmatism, and strength of community.

It is his incremental depiction of the history of brutal persecutions, balanced by the strength of the Jewish communities, that most reiterates his point. Persecution is shown as becoming increasingly harsh and more vicious down the ages. In "Psalm," when Hoope visits the port city of Accho, a trader smears pork fat on the tools that Hoopoe

[116] Ibid., p. 1077.
[117] Ibid., p. 1078

handles as a practical joke.[118] This first instance of using pork against a Jew is somewhat comical and only embarrassing for Hoopoe, but centuries later will be used to persecute and humiliate. Antiochus Epiphanes in "Gymnasium" demands the sacrifice of a pig to him, and an old Jew who does not obey the instruction dies brutally.[119] "Ma Coeur" shows how the image of a pig is used to insult both Muslims and Jews in Acre by placing it in front of a Mosque. In Spain, the Inquisition lists the spitting out of pork as an indication that someone is a secret Jew, and while Diego Ximeno, who is caught this way, is indeed a secret Jew, his punishment of months of imprisonment and torture seems absurd and does not fit the crime. In Greetz, for an incursion against harsh restrictions placed on the Jews of the city, Rabbi Eliezer is forced to kiss the behind of the statue called the Sow of Greetz, featuring a sow being suckled by Jews.

Similarly, and perhaps more strongly, the myth that the Jews crucified Christ is used as a frequent justification, or rather, as an excuse for far deeper questions of suspicion, for persecution, and is the one that most often leads to violence and death. It is first mentioned 'historically' in "Law,"[120] and more as a sneering remark rather than with brute force, but in the novel it initially appears in "Tell," where it is revealed that Cullinane, as a child, threw rocks at Jewish boys of his own age chanting "Jew boy! Jew boy!/Gonna crucify a goy." Cullinane holds this belief until young adulthood when education corrected the misconception. Thus he (and possibly the reader) learns that it was the Romans who bear the responsibility.[121] From "Law" onwards, there are many

[118] Ibid., p. 281.
[119] Ibid., p. 372.
[120] Ibid., p. 561.
[121] Ibid., p.38.

instances of persecution brought about by this belief. When the Crusaders in "Volkmar" are about to begin their journey, they violently attack the Jews in their home city of Gretz having "listened to the ill-informed priests crying "The Jews crucified Jesus and God wants you to punish them." "[122] The details of the slaughter continue for several pages. With the arrival of the last Crusade in Acre in "Ma Coeur," the synagogue is burnt and the rabbi killed with the cry of "Kill the Jews! They killed Jesus!"[123] When Rabbi Eliezer in "Saintly Men" is punished for requesting permission to build a cleaner synagogue, part of his confession is to admit that his people crucified Christ. The Russians who partake in the pogroms portrayed in "Twilight" use a similar line, but this is coupled with the cry of "Hep!" an acronym for *Hierosolyma est perdita*, meaning 'Jerusalem is lost,' echoing regret at the failure of the final Crusade. It is particularly striking, then, that this is turned on its head, with an encounter between a Dutch Jesuit, Father Vilspronck, and Schwartz, the kibbutz secretary who is a holocaust survivor. Vilspronck sees that Schwartz has a banner in his room which reads "We did so crucify Him." This attitude of defiance came as a rejection of the forgiveness offered by Pope Paul VI, for Schwartz argues that it is exoneration that is needed, not forgiveness, and that modern Israelis do not need Christian churches to 'allow' them to exist.[124]

The ability to outlast the persecution, despite its harshness, comes, Michener argues, from the strength of community which is bound by its religious laws. The Hebrews in "Old Man" are the first to introduce this theme, for Zadok is benevolent but harsh in his adherence to the law. Circumcision as a mark of the covenant is shown as both a practical

[122] Ibid., p. 654.
[123] Ibid., p. 734.
[124] Ibid., p. 1032-33.

matter as well as a spiritual one; one may not betray the community by pretending not to be a Hebrew as the matter can be sorted out by checking for circumcision. Indeed, circumcision as a mark of the covenant with God is brought sharply to attention in "Gymnasium." When Antiochus Epiphanies decrees that no children are to be circumcised, Jews in Makor continue to do so because "If [they] are not faithful to Adonai, [they] are nothing,"[125] even though the punishment is death. The strength of community is next most prominently featured in "Yigal," when Yigal is able to unite the Jews of Makor in protest against the introduction of a statue of Caligula as a god. This follows with further defiance when the emperor Nero orders the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as punishment, meaning that Makor needs to be overtaken before the march south to Jerusalem. Although the Jews of Makor are brutally defeated, as many are killed or sold into slavery, and Yigal and his wife are crucified, there is still a sense of hope, for Yigal manages to find the strength before he dies to cry out to General Vespasian "but they [the other Jews of Judea] will resist."[126] In "Saintly Men," persecution is overcome by fleeing to Palestine from the various European countries, but here Michener creates a wonderful sense of a community in Safed, vibrant in its diversity, and yet bound together by a common heritage.

The strength of community culminates with "Rebbe." Not only has there been centuries of persecution, but there has also been submissiveness, beginning from the time of exile in Babylon. In the early chapters, the preparedness to die is startling: parents risk their own lives and their children's by requesting circumcision in "Gymnasium," mothers kill

[125] Ibid., p. 399.
[126] Ibid., p. 495.

their children and themselves rather than be slaughtered by Crusaders in "Volkmar," and there is an almost placid acceptance of death in the pogrom by the Rabbi in "Twilight." Many Jews continue to hold this attitude right up until "Rebbe." In this chapter, however, the Jews are prepared to die, not with forbearance, dread, or a sense that this is somehow deserved, but fighting for their right to exist. This change in attitude is almost exhilarating for the reader when reading "Rebbe." The odds being weighed heavily against the Jews here also adds considerably to the empowerment they now gain from fighting back. This "new Jew," is most prominently figured in Schwartz, who is willing to defend the Jews' right to exist to the point that he says late in the book that if trouble hits America, he knows groups in Israel will be willing to send help.[127]

Whilst Michener does not argue explicitly that the Jews have a right to the land that is now Israel because of centuries of persecution, he certainly does imply very strongly that this is why they now have the right to defend themselves. Indeed, when Paul J. Zodman, the millionaire Chicago Jew who is funding the dig, visits, he tells them that his greatest moment was seeing an Israeli soldier, for in the past, the sight of a soldier meant bad news, for he could not have been a Jewish soldier, but here was one "standing on his own soil, protecting Jews…not persecuting them."[128]

The believability of the narrative works due to Michener's use of verisimilitude, realism and ironically, also thanks to his contrivances. This latter point can particularly be seen in how he uses characters. In many ways, the characters are not much more than two-

[127] Ibid., p. 1050.
[128] Ibid., p. 60.

dimensional representations and mouthpieces for ideas, points of view, and ultimately, Michener's own perspective. This can be clearly seen through a device Michener uses in several sections of the novel; dialogue written as if it were a film script, with the character's names followed by a colon. It is worth noting that in Zadok and Uriel's (who is another descendant of Ur) conversation in this format in "Old Man," their names are used, while in later chapters the group that the character represents is used instead. In "Rebbe" the conversation is between the 'Rebbe' and the 'Sabra,' rather than Rebbe Itzik and Ilana, and more blatantly, in the final "Tell" chapter, the 'American' and 'Israeli' talk rather than Zodman and Eliav. This use of characters as representatives of different religious and/or national groups makes it vital to analyse them to further our understanding of the historical arguments of the novel.

It is his trio of male archaeologists that make his intent almost amusingly obvious; John Cullinane is an American Catholic of Irish descent whose initials, J.C., are often short-hand for Jesus Christ; Ilan Eliav a German-born Jewish Israeli citizen, a 'watch-dog' from the Israeli government; Jemail Tabari an Arab Muslim Oxford trained archaeologist who chose to remain in Israel after the 1948 war. Such a situation is obviously quite contrived, but perhaps not entirely unbelievable given that it is an American backed dig in Israel. It is, however, a useful devise, as the three characters allow for a dialogue of differing view points.

For most of the novel the reader follows Cullinane's perspective. This is effective, as Cullinane is an outsider of the region and therefore can ask questions about modern Israel

without Michener resorting to "table dusting"[129] that is, unmotivated exposition where characters give each other information that they realistically should know. He is also appropriate in this role as Michener seems to anticipate a majority Christian (at the very least culturally Christian) readership, thus he needs to explain both Jewish and Islamic religious beliefs and practices, and not so much Christian ones, although he occasionally delves into differing matters of doctrine, such as in "Law," where Christians even kill each other when debating the divine nature of Christ.[130] Cullinane, thus, being both Christian and an outsider (like the reader) is a character with whom the intended audience can identify, as both Cullinane and the reader need 'educating.' Indeed, through Cullinane, Michener subtly hinting perhaps that education can cure prejudice, for as we have seen, as a child Cullinane held very anti-Semitic attitudes that were only changed once he went to university. Eliav offers the Jewish-Israeli perspective; he knows why things are the way they are and how they work, but is also emotionally involved enough in his country to be defensive and passionate about it. Tabari, as a Muslim Arab from Israel, has the privilege (at least as a commentator) of being an insider with an outsider's emotional distance. One of the more interesting examples of this is in "Yigal," "Tell" interlude, which explores the Ashkenazi and Sephardi distinction with Judaism; when Cullinane asks about it, Eliav responds in a confused manner, on the one hand stating it is not important but giving the impression he is proud to be Ashkenazi. It is Tabari who provides Cullinane with the details on the educational and cultural distinctions between the two; that is, the Ashkenazi are generally better educated, but the Sephardi make up more than half the population of Israel.

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[129] Robert McKee, ***Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principals of Screenwriting***, (London: Metheun Publishing Limited, 1999), pp. 339-40.
[130] Michener, ***The Source***, p. 579.

Another important character is Vered Bar-El. She plays a very different role to that of the three men. As Eliav represents modern Judaism, Vered essentially represents Israel. Bar-El, I think, can be extrapolated to read 'Baal-El,' a combination of the two competing gods of earlier times, both gods a product of the region, and Vered is very much of the region. Not so subtly, Michener has Cullinane admiring her, thinking, "she seemed to be the spirit of Israel, a dark-haired, lovely Jewess from Bible times."[131] She is the first archaeologist fully trained in Israel, an indication that Israel has progressed rapidly since Independence, bringing itself to the academic standards of the rest of the world, and she also fought along side Eliav in the 1948 war, showing her to have a fighting spirit. She is fiercely Jewish, although not religiously so, and is so passionately nationalistic she often comes across as defensive or aggressive.

Elsewhere, characters are frequently used to explore tensions of the time, which, more often than not, is related to the conflict between the concerns of everyday living and those of higher spirituality. This is normally done through the use of a matched pair of some kind: Zadok the Hebrew is paired with Uriel the Canaanite in "Old Man;" Hoope's practical worship of both the Hebrew god and the local Baal is contrasted with his wife Kerith's desire to see her god as an all encompassing presence in "Psalm;" and Shmuel Hacohen's vision for rebuilding Jewish communities in Palestine is contrasted with Kaimakan Tabari's (great uncle of the modern Tabari) self-serving interests in "Twilight."

[131] Ibid., p. 1078.

Michener further enhances the believability of the narrative through his use of verisimilitude. This comes through in several ways. According to Eric Friedland, he based Makor on the real archaeological site Hazor. It is located in northeastern Galilee, and like Makor, the nearby kibbutz provided eager hands in helping with the process of the dig.[132] Michener also makes Makor a historically plausible town. It is a minor settlement, mentioned only in passing in perhaps two primary sources. It is always portrayed on the edge of the action, rather than in the thick of it. There is a sense that this could be any town in the Galilee. Michener even describes it as "a town of no significance."[133] In this way, Michener creates the sense that Makor *could* have existed, but being of little importance, never took place in the way of great action, meaning that Michener could avoid potential clashing with 'real' history.

This also applies to his detailed writing about archaeological processes, revealing archaeologists not to be adventurers but rather careful scientists; "no shovel would be permitted on a respectable dig."[134] He spends a good page describing the process of carbon dating,[135] has other figures including photographers, architects, and sketch artists whose necessary presence on the dig he explains in order to create the sense that this could in fact be a genuine dig.

Michener does deal with grand movements of history, but he also discusses the minutiae of daily life. Here his use of realism comes through most particularly. He provides

[132] Eric Friedland, "Michener and His Source," ***The Chicago Jewish Forum***, Summer (1966): 281.
[133] Michener, ***The Source***, p. 18.
[134] Ibid., p. 21.
[135] Ibid., p. 66-67.

considerable detail about the lives of his characters; he discusses the process of the cave-dwellers working with flint in "Bee-Eater,"[136] and the process of extracting olive oil in "Death."[137] He also shows how characters interact, particularly in terms of their business dealings; Hoopoe, on a trip to the nearby port city of Accho, encounters an international port that sells a variety of goods from various nations.[138] This sense of society would be harder to convey in a work of pure history as some speculation is needed. This is one of the historically appealing aspects of the novel; as discussed in chapter 2, the docudrama genre allows readers to glimpse into the past and see it as a real place where people lived and worked.

There are other very valuable things within *The Source*. In fact, I would argue that Michener's educative intentions, at least for the following points, come through quite strongly. Michener is myth-breaking as well as myth-making. What I mean by this is that he sets out to correct certain suppositions that might be held by his audience. Again we can see this with Michener's comments on the crucifixion of Christ. Michener points out in "Law" that crucifixion was in fact a very common, and very Roman, form of execution. It takes away the particularity of the crucifixion of Christ, and this is further undermined when Michener points to the fact that there were other men who 'claimed' to be messiahs. We might also consider that by Romanising crucifixion, it further damages the myth that Jews crucified Jesus.

[136]Ibid., p. 106.
[137] Ibid., p. 126.
[138] Ibid., p.279-280.

Michener likewise does this with Arab Muslims. He informs the reader that they, like the Jews, are a Semitic people, circumcised as well. Via Tabari, he hints at what Edward Said would later call "orientalism": Tabari accuses Cullinane of looking at the "date palms and pillars" which would allow him to "imagine [himself] living with the Arabs." This romanticised image of the Arab is furthered by the mention of the image of Richard the Lionheart fighting "gallant Arabs from the desert,"[139] and later with a mention of T.E. Lawrence, better known as Lawrence of Arabia, whose image established the romantic notion of Arabia that "helped determine British policy in this region as much as oil."[140]

Along with myth-breaking, Michener is also attempting to 'demystify' Judaism and Jews in general. Notably, when it was first published, *The Source* was not the only work to bring the Jewish experience to the forefront. Emily Alice Katz's article "It's the Real World After All: The American-Israel Pavilion Jordan Pavilion Controversy at the New York World's Fair, 1964-1965" in the journal *American Jewish History* considers this briefly. Katz writes that during the 1960s "mainstream America…was becoming ever more receptive to the Jewish experience." She cites the popularity of both the book and the film *Exodus* for making Israel "a staple of American popular culture" in the years before the World Fair, and that during the two year tenure of the fair, *Fiddler on the Roof* won the Tony award for Best Musical, while *The Source* and Dan Greenberg's *How To Be a Jewish Mother* topped the national best-seller lists. In relation to the World Fair, "the time," she argues "was ripe for a public celebration in America of Israel's

[139] Ibid., p. 666.
[140] Ibid., p. 964-65.

achievements, and a confident display of the American Jewish community's hand in the young nation's triumphs."[141]

His didactic intentions always at the forefront, Michener clearly wants to educate his majority Gentile readership on the complexities and depths of the religion and the history and experience of its people. In the "Tell" interlude in "Old Man," Cullinane asks Eliav what he could read to come to a better understanding of the Jews. Eliav tells him to read Deuteronomy five times in various translations because he wants Cullinane to understand that "for us [the Jews] this is a living book," although, pertinently, "not necessarily a religious book, you understand."[142] Eliav tells Cullinane that "most Gentiles think of the ancient Hebrews as curious relics who reached Israel ten thousand years ago in some kind of archaic mystery."[143] Thus, through Eliav's remarks and Cullinane's response to reading Deuteronomy, Michener is attempting to reveal Judaism as a tradition that is very much alive.

That it is a living tradition, not an archaic one, is further emphasised in the "Tell" interlude in "Saintly Men." Here Michener, quite poetically, uses the olive trees outside Makor to illustrate this point. Cullinane considers that one of the trees is centuries old, and although it may seem dead, it is in fact still living – things that seem dead still have much life in them.[144] He furthers the metaphor by considering Christianity as being like "a beautiful singing young woman filled with life," whilst Judaism is like "the old

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[141] Emily Alice Katz, "It's the Real World after All: The American-Israel Pavilion-Jordan Pavilion Controversy at the New York World's Fair, 1964-1965," ***American Jewish History*** 91, no. 1 (2003): p. 131.
[142] Michener, ***The Source***, p. 189.
[143] Ibid., p. 185.
[144] Ibid., p. 806-7.

woman, knowledgeable, patient, immortal and close to God."[145] This imagery shows that Michener is very keen to emphasise Judaism as a living religion that has a very long history. Cullinane earlier, in the "Tell" interlude in "Law," considered that Judaism might not have the 'physical' beauty of Christian worship, where churches of particular construction are considered highly, but rather focuses on the beauty of worship itself.[146] This is particular poignant in this section, for one of the features of "Law" is the construction of a Christian church in Makor, the building of which requires knocking down many homes, leading Jewish characters to wonder what kind of religion would require this to be done.

This beauty of worship is emphasised with the discussion of the Lecha Dodi, the Shabbat Hymn. Cullinane had always assumed there was but one Judaism, but finds, in Israel, a richness of diversity in worship. The Lecha Dodi is sung in many different tunes, sometimes simultaneously in certain synagogues, for it is, according to Eliav, "a most personal cry of joy."[147] Here Michener takes time to create a sense of diversity of worship, having Cullinane attend several different synagogues to reveal this. This sense of variation is also conveyed earlier in the book; Michener points out that the Jews in Israel all look very different, and in fact it is Tabari, the Arab, who looks the most traditionally 'Jewish.'[148]

[145] Ibid., p. 808-9.
[146] Ibid., p. 554.
[147] Ibid., p. 552.
[148] Ibid., p. 14.

Quite importantly, Michener is also keen to emphasise the pressures that modern Israel faces, internal and external, and also how this may affect its future. This is where a great degree of ambiguity comes through. The arrival of the financier Zodman in the first "Tell" chapter highlights the conflict between those who want a modern future for Israel (modern Israelis) and those who want to keep it in the past (Jews in the United States) as there it is the Holy Land. Zodman expects the Israelis to be more religious. While Israeli airlines and restaurants are kosher, the kibbutz is not, even though Zodman does not eat kosher at home.[149] There is an expectation that Israelis will uphold what it means to be Jewish, and the final chapter shows that this is not only from other Jews but Christians as well. An older couple from the society that is sponsoring the dig come to Israel regularly to take photographs for their talks, and find that the modernisation and urbanisation of Israel means that significant parts of it no longer look as they did in 'biblical times.' The Americans have a desire to keep the Holy Land 'holy,' as a symbol for others to look towards. The final "Tell" chapter also provides a tense dialogue between Eliav and Zodman; Zodman is willing to send money to Israel, but not so willing to send people, especially if Jews have to deal with the hard restrictions of Jewish law that he, as we shall see, was confronted with, whilst Eliav argues they need more than monetary support, and that Zodman does not understand that Israel's very existence gives Jews everywhere in the world hope for a stable future.

The issue of Jewish law and the creation of Israel as a Jewish state are important to this discussion, though we should bear in mind that Michener has been taken to task by several scholars on his perception of the law. Maurice Wohlgelernter in his article for

[149] Ibid., p. 47-48.

Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought, argues that "he displays not only a lack of knowledge but also an unbecoming genuflection to the uninitiated everywhere," and that his "derisive comments about *Halakhah* [Jewish law]" reveal considerable arrogance. Wohlgelernter writes one can only respond as Eliav does to Cullinane: "You're wrong. You have been digging in Judaism but you haven't tried to understand it."[150] Friedland, far less critical, also voices his concerns, wondering if the average reader, both Jewish and non-Jewish, might come away from the book feeling distressed about the harshness of the law, which Friedland points out is not quite as unbending as Michener would have the reader believe.[151]

During a "Tell" interlude, Cullinane, as Michener's mouthpiece, wonders if Israel is setting itself up for problems by emphasising religion too much.[152] Michener's misgivings, as Becker points out, are particularly related to his perception of certain aspects of Jewish law as almost antihuman,[153] which he shows in several cases, both historical and modern, where the law does more harm than good. I have already mentioned the issue of illegitimacy shown in "Law," as well as the situation a widowed woman without children may face in "Desert Rider." This point is reiterated in the final "Tell" chapter; Eliav shows Cullinane a series of cases where personal desire and goodness of intent are made difficult by Jewish law. This is also an important plot point. Eliav and Bar-El would like to marry, but Bar-El has divorced from her first husband, meaning they cannot have an official recognised marriage in Israel. Eliav has been

[150] Ibid., p. 90.
[151] Ibid., p. 283.
[152] Ibid., p. 878.
[153] George Joseph Becker, ***James A. Michener, Literature and Life Series.***(New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co., 1983), p. 82.

offered a position in the Israeli government, and he feels that morally he cannot marry Bar-El in Cypress (where others in similar situations go) and take the position. Bar-El instead marries Zodman, who also finds that he cannot marry her in Israel, as he divorced his wife to do so.

The criticism here is implicit, even though there is certainly reverence on Michener's part for other aspects of the religion. How should Israel balance modernity with the old laws that have made them as strong and cohesive as they are today? Michener does not offer easy answers, but rather points out that these issues will continue to trouble modern Israel.

These worthwhile aspects notwithstanding, there is much of the novel that is good cause for concern. This is much related to Michener's position on the Arab-Israeli conflict. At first, it seems a somewhat confused one, but ultimately, it is not. As mentioned in the introduction, he had spent over ten years studying Islam and Islamic culture in various countries, and he felt that "the United States suffered because it did not understand Islam,"[154] and in May 1955, published an article in *Reader's Digest* titled "Islam: The Misunderstood Religion." Michener was by no means anti-Arab or anti-Muslim; he once said that "on at least 50 percent of the characteristics by which men and societies are judged, I like Muslims at least as well as I like the Jews."[155] Also, Michener was neither ignorant nor unsympathetic to the situation of the Palestinian refugees. In September 1970 he wrote an article for *New York Times Magazine* titled "What to Do About the

[154] James A. Michener, ***A Michener Miscellany: 1950-1970***, 1st ed. (New York,: Random House, 1973), p. 229.
[155] James A. Michener, "Israel: A Nation Too Young to Die," ***Look*** 31 (1967): 65.

Palestinian Refugees?" where he argued efforts should now focus on the issues that the Palestinians in the camps face, rather than the events that drove them there. He shows an awareness of this within the novel as well, as Tabari brings up the issue of the refugees in his final conversation with Eliav.[156]

Furthermore, Michener is aware that the custodianship of this region is a complicated issue, which I think comes through most strongly with his use of the Family of Ur. Descendants of the family of Ur figure throughout the novel, though not always as the major players. They are depicted with different personalities, professions, and most strikingly, religions. The latest descendant (or rather the most specifically stated), Tabari, is an Arab Muslim. He is of the land, a point made early in the novel quite subtly, when Tabari says he views Israel "as if it had always been here, with me standing on it."[157] The family of Ur were whatever people it was prudent to be; Canaanites, Phoenicians, Jews, Greeks, Romans, Christians, or Turks, "because all we wanted was the land," for the family of Ur are above all survivors, as his people were here "long before [Eliav's] were formed."[158] Tabari's behaviour and personality are rather born of an almost instinctive need to survive. Not simply to live, however, but to live on the land. Gregory Orfalea, in his article from *Journal of Palestine Studies* on the depiction of Arabs in the Post-World War II English novel, described Tabari as the "pleasant 'boy Friday' "[159] character. This seems to me both an unjust description of Michener's treatment of Tabari and of him as a character, for as we have seen, Tabari is quite the cynical realist which is much needed

[156] Michener, ***The Source***, p. 1068.
[157] Ibid., p. 294.
[158] Ibid., p. 1070.
[159] Gregory Orfalea, "Literary Devolution: The Arab in the Post-World War Ii Novel in English," ***Journal of Palestine Studies***17, no. 2 (1988): 119.

against Cullinane's 'ignorance' and Eliav's stoic optimism. Orfalea is also wary of Michener's other Arab characters; Abd Umar, for instance, whose tolerance of the Jews does not extend to the pagans, is particularly noted, although considering other characters (Jewish and Christian alike) have also killed people in rounds of conversion, and usually with less discrimination, this seems a little irrelevant.

Returning to the point of custodianship, there is an irony when Eliav says "we are very old brothers, Tabari,"[160] for they are both descendants of the Family of Ur. Interestingly, Michener does not make it explicitly clear that Eliav is related, although if the reader is sharp enough to recognise reoccurring names and family connections, they might realise this fact. The difference is that the branch Tabari is from managed to remain on the land, whilst Eliav's branch are those descendant from Rabbi Asher in "Law," whose family left Palestine after Christian influence in Makor. It would be difficult to argue that Michener does not recognize the complexities of the Palestinian question when it is the Muslim character who is described at "the descendant of Ur,"[161] the one whose family has always been there, and not the Jewish one.

Michener is thus not only sympathetic to the plight of the Palestinians, but he is also aware that there are complications in the matter of custodianship, a point that many critics do not give him credit for. However, and this is the key point, politically, his sympathies are definitely on the side of the Jewish Israelis. It is Michener's narrative that really tells us this. He sees the Jews as a people having overcome centuries of hardship.

[160] Michener, ***The Source***, p. 1071.
[161] Ibid., p. 1070.

While he is not one hundred percent certain on their rights to the land that is Israel, although their victory in the 1948 war and the Palestinians leaving gives certain modern rights, he is certainly sure they are right to defend themselves against their Arab neighbours. There has been enough suffering, and the time has come for Jews to take arms.

The much larger issue, too large, in fact, to be discussed here in great depth, is that Michener's narrative relies on many pro-Israel narrative myths, ones he no doubt believed to be true; his research, after all, was guided by government officials and government-backed money. Many of these myths have since been disproved by Israeli scholars. The third last and second last chapters, "Twilight" and "Rebbe," being set in more recent times, present particularly deep problems.

One of the arguments that Michener puts forward is that the Arabs are a desert-loving people, and therefore they created one out of Palestine. He illustrates this at the end of "Ma Coeur," saying that Bedouin attacked and chased away farmers who were trying to revive the land.[162] Here, Michener indulges in the orientalism he attacks, and is also incorrect about what happened. Indeed, many forests were destroyed, but this was done by the Turks in World War I as a defensive tactic and to get more wood for railways.[163] There are similar instances of this in "Twilight," the chapter on the initial steps of Zionism. "Twilight" is striking for the fact that Michener does not use the word Zionism at all, although this is clearly what is going on: Russian Jews arriving in Palestine to buy

[162] Ibid., p. 750.
[163] Ilan Pappe, ***A History of Modern Palestine : One Land, Two Peoples*** (New York ; Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 64.

plots of land. He manages, and I think this is where Leslie Fiedler's complaints from chapter 2 come in, to disassociate the movement from its political alliances, preferring to tell it as a story of human courage of individuals or small groups. His focus on Shmuel Hacohen, sway-backed and small, but tenacious in his pursuit for land, reveals this quite strongly. Shmuel's vibrancy is contrasted with the depiction of the town of Safed as static and decaying. This gives the reader the impression that all of Palestine is like this, not at all revealing the dynamism that existed in Palestine at the time. Michener relies on the myth that Palestine was a backwater without much hope, meaning that the arrival of the Zionists brought back the potential of the land, a point he further makes in "Rebbe" when Ilana Hacohen, Shmuel's granddaughter and Eliav's first wife, weeps at the site of malaria ridden swamplands, and she wishes that the land had never been allowed to fall into "alien hands."[164] The idea of the land falling into disrepair only to be brought back to life by the newly immigrated Jews is highly problematic, and indeed is a classic orientalist position.

Michener also argues that the Arabs "left at the urging of political leaders," and furthermore, did so "against every plea of the Jews."[165] It is Eliav who says this to Tabari, who does not question Eliav's assessment of the reason for departure. Israeli historian Benny Morris has shown that this is a grossly simplified version of what happened in 1948, arguing that in most cases the flight from Palestine was precipitated by attacks or fears of the various Jewish military groups including Haganah and the Israel Defence

[164] Michener, ***The Source***, p. 937.
[165] Ibid., p. 1068.

Force.[166] This, Morris argues, is not to say that it was necessarily pre-planned and systematic, which is the Arab version of events.[167] Aligned with this is Michener portraying Eliav as wishing that the Palestinians had remained, to the point that we are told by Tabari that Eliav went down to the beach and begged boat loads of departing refugees to stay.[168] This is highly disingenuous, especially so since Eliav is meant to be representing the position of modern Israel. As Morris points out, there were strong currents within the Zionist movement prior to the 1948 war towards the idea of 'transfer,' which was the belief in moving "the large Arab minority out of the Jewish State" in order to create a state of greater stability.[169] A more accurate reaction would be David Ben-Gurion's comments in 1938; Morris quotes him as saying "I support compulsory transfers. I don't see anything immoral in it."[170]

A further myth that Michener relies on is the idea of 'David and Goliath'. This is the idea that the 1948 war was fought by the Israelis (David) against the surrounding Arab nations (Goliath) with very little support, and yet they managed to emerge victorious. In "Rebbe," Michener shows this by depicting the battle at Safad, which actually did occur, where the Jews emerged victorious against overwhelming numbers; Eliav, early in the chapter, sits down and reasons that the Arabs outnumber the Jews by 11:1.[171] The myth is further highlighted by the use of a weapon that actually existed, the David-ka, meaning 'little David.' In addition to this, Michener particularly points to the British role in the

[166] Morris, ***Birth,*** 294.
[167] Morris, ***1948***,
[168] Michener, ***The Source***1069.
[169] Morris, Birth Revisited, 39.
[170] Morris, Birth Revisited, 50.
[171] Michener, ***The Source***p. 928.

war, depicting them as lending support to the Arabs over the Jews. Michener argues that this was due to fact that Jews were never fully accepted by the English, but upper class Arabs often were, having fought alongside the British against the Turks,[172] and also because where the Arabs deferred, the Jews wanted to be treated as equals.[173] Their actions are then understandable when, during the siege of Safad in "Rebbe," the British leave, turning "all fortified positions, the food supplies, the field glasses and the extra armament over to the Arabs."[174] Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, however, indicates that the British did not really plan so decisively in Palestine, and were rather acting on self-interest as opposed to partiality towards either side.[175]

Strikingly, this final chapter has even been criticised by Arabs in letters written to Michener who said they were at the battle. Whilst on the one hand the letter-writers commented favourably that Michener had not derided the Arabs in the novel, on the other hand they believed Michener had some things very incorrect, arguing that the numbers were weighed more favourably towards the Jews, and that the British gave the Jews the best military positions in the turnover. All of them, according to Michener, "expressed the opinion that [he] had been tricked by a legend that had not really happened." Michener argued it seemed that these correspondents somehow hoped that they would one day wake up and find that Safad was still in Arab hands; however, the impression

[172] Ibid., p. 961.
[173] Ibid., p. 964.
[174] Ibid., p. 960.
[175] Ilan Pappe and St. Antony's College (University of Oxford), ***Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1948-51*** (Basingstoke: Macmillan in association with St Antony's College, Oxford, 1988), p. 7.

that the comments in these letters convey to me is that the defeat itself was not the issue, but rather Michener's portrayal of the defeat.[176]

Michener did attempt to answer his critics. He says that "he took every precaution…to avoid depicting Muslims as inherent enemies of Jews" because "throughout history they have not been."[177] He is correct in saying this; in fact the most Islamic chapter, "Desert Rider," depicts Muslims as tolerant and willing to allow Jews to practice their faith, albeit after brief persecution of pagans. Christians, really, are depicted as a far greater enemy than any Muslim. It did seem to cause Michener a great deal of regret that he did not get the chance to write his novel about Islam, for *The Source* "was interpreted as being pro-Jewish and therefore anti-Arab. Even now no claim of impartiality will be accepted. I am sorry. It was not intended to be this way."[178] We must bare in mind that there is a difference between Michener's own beliefs and intents, how readers will appreciate the novel, and what Michener in fact does actually set down in the novel. Michener rightly implies that being pro-Jewish (or pro-Israel) does not mean anti-Arab. However, as Orfalea points out that it is difficult to get a sense of the problem of the Palestinians after the many pages of focusing on the Jews as the 'evidence' is "so overwhelming in detail – and even reverence – there is no refuting it."[179] Orfalea has a very valid point here; it feels almost as if Michener has tacked the problems of the Palestinian refugees onto the end, even if perhaps it is there to show one of the many problems facing Israel in the future. What is the reader to think, with no depiction of the Palestinian refugees? What

[176] Michener, "Israel: A Nation Too Young to Die," p. 68.
[177] Michener, ***A Michener Miscellany: 1950-1970*** p. 232.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Orfalea, "Literary Devolution: The Arab in the Post-World War Ii Novel in English," p. 119.

would the reader think of Israel's role in the six day war? Although Israel acted pre-emptively, she would now seem fully entitled to do so given the years of laying down to be killed, of mass suicides, of the Crusaders, of the Inquisition, not least of all the Holocaust.

Furthermore, Orfalea points out that Tabari refuses Eliav's offer to join him when Eliav is offered a position in the Israeli cabinet, arguing that in doing so, Tabari is shown to be rejecting compromise. Whilst I think the refusal is more a rejection of Eliav's optimism, as Tabari wants more decisive results than Eliav will be able to provide, rather than one of cooperation, Michener has effectively argued elsewhere, most particularly in his article for *Look* magazine "Israel; A Nation too Young to Die," that the first overtures for peace should come from the surrounding Arab nations. Furthermore, Michener posits a Jewish creative energy that is found lacking amongst the Arabs, cast as a desert-loving people who allowed the Holy Land to fall into the state that it did, even though as we have seen this was more the fault of the Turks. Becker rightly asserts that one of the tragedies of the novel is that the Arabs have not remained in Israel to share in the fruits of productive labour,[180] although this is not a tragedy that truly besets the Arab-Israeli conflict. *The Source* may not be inherently anti-Arab, but, it is so pro-Israel in its structure, that despite his protestations, Michener's sympathetic understanding of Islam and the Palestinian refugees, as well as his awareness of the complications of custodianship, are ultimately undermined.

[180] Becker, ***James A. Michener***, p. 80.

This is the history, then, that well over 2.5 million readers encountered. This history of the Jews and the Holy Land, deeply affected by pro-Israel myths that have since proven to be incorrect, does not allow the Palestinians a voice within that history. Of course, it is intended as a history of the Jews, not of the Palestinians. However, the events of 1948 play an inextricable part in both histories; as a war of victory and independence on Israel's part, and as the beginnings of the current refugee situations on the part of the Palestinians. Whilst readers may not necessarily believe the narrative that is being presented to them, Michener presents an historical argument that is so tied in with its epic structure that, as Orfalea says, "there is no refuting it."[181]

The Source, above all, is a novel about the connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel. Michener's intended readership, however, is not Israeli Jews but rather middlebrow Americans of all ethnic backgrounds, although it would be safe to say that this is predominantly gentile. These are the citizens of a nation that is Israel's strongest and most loyal ally. His interpretation of Jewish history might not be exactly Zionist, but it is undeniably sympathetic. And as Michener implicitly argues that the initial overtures for peace should be coming from the Arab side, the support of readers, and by extension, of the USA, will side inevitably with the Israelis at the Palestinians' expense. Popular history of the docudrama genre, presented as it is in narrative form with educative intentions, is thus seen as thoroughly accurate. Docudramas such as *The Source* have enormous ability to affect perceptions of major world issues. *The Source* thus played a highly important role in determining perceptions of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and should therefore be given considerably more attention than it has previously been granted.

[181] Orfalea, "Literary Devolution: The Arab in the Post-World War Ii Novel in English," 119.

Conclusion

The intention of this thesis was to explore and examine the issues surrounding the presentation of the history of the Holy Land in a popular genre. Through *The Source*, Michener presents the reader with a popular history of Israel and the Jews. Middlebrow readers bought this docudrama as they were eager for knowledge in an easily digestible format. Michener 'teaches' his readers about Judaism and the history of the Jews, and he wants to reveal an ancient yet vibrant culture and people. He also considers the then newly founded state of Israel, and offers no easy answers to the problems that the Israelis face. However, as chapter 2 showed, narrative history can tend towards myth-making. In *The Source*, the reader is presented with an epic narrative that, although highly researched, is very much based on myths about Israel's development which have since been proven to be either incorrect or vastly more complicated than Michener depicts them. Considering the enormous sales of Michener's novel, there can be little doubt that it is his vision of the history of Israel that is more widely read than works by professional historians, and very likely accepted. The disputes of citizenship and land rights for Palestinians are complex, but *The Source* in no way helps these matters. Rather, it reaffirms Israel's right, if not entirely to the land, then at least to defend herself. This should remind us that this is not a novel about the distant past; Michener is right to assert that he writes about the here and now, and the Arab-Israeli conflict is as contentious, violent and thoroughly ambiguous as it was when *The Source* was first published.

Lawrence Stone pointed out in "The Revival of Narrative" that after many years on focusing on the structural and analytical history, professional historians began writing

narrative again to make their findings accessible to "an intelligent but not expert reading public," meaning, of course, the middlebrow audience. Stone argued that this audience was eager to learn what the new methodologies revealed, but were not so keen to read "indigestible statistical tables, dry analytical argument, and jargon-ridden prose."[182] Michener had already figured out the best way to appeal to this very public. The narrative form is particularly attractive, and in docudrama form, even more so, as it is a narrative that is meant to educate as well as entertain, and it is backed by the credo of detailed research. Further, it is satisfactory as a story. The epic sweep of history is unambiguously portrayed, and delivers a definite conclusion.

Having explored how *The Source* works as a history of Israel, we could also consider more broadly what other popular works about Israel offer. For instance, it would be worth also considering Leon Uris's *Exodus*, doing a comparison between the reception of it and *The Source* and their accounts of history. It would also be worth while attempting to fully grapple with how Michener researched the novel, including an examination of his papers and extending the examination in chapter 3 of the historical myths Michener uses to the rest of the novel.

What I hope this thesis has achieved is the sense that history presented in popularised formats ought to be considered far more seriously than it has often been. This is especially important with an issue as relevant and contentious as the Arab-Israeli conflict. How should professional historians answer the kind of history that works such as *The*

[182] Lawrence Stone, "The Revival of Narrative: Reflectionss on a New Old History," ***Past and Present*** November, no. 85 (1979): 15.

Source present? This question does need to be considered. Should there be attempts to effectively beat makers of docudramas and historical fiction at their own game by turning to film making and novel writing in order to reach a mass audience? Should they perhaps best stay within their own field of expertise, but offer more rigorous critique in scholarly journals and offer more courses on popular history? Or is there another alternative?

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