

## ***Ravage* (1943) Reloaded: René Barjavel’s Vision and the Fragility of Today’s Technological Civilization**

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### **Abstract**

René Barjavel’s *Ravage* (1943) offers a powerful exploration of the vulnerabilities inherent in technological civilization, anticipating systemic crises that continue to resonate with contemporary concerns. The novel depicts society’s total reliance on electricity and material infrastructure, revealing how abrupt disruptions in vital flows precipitate institutional breakdown, societal collapse, and the radical reconfiguration of human relations. Barjavel emphasizes that survival rests not only on material resources but also on collective ingenuity, cooperation, and the creation of stabilizing social routines, anticipating modern debates on organizational resilience. His reflections on logistical facilities, energy systems, social cohesion, and ecological balance provide a compelling lens through which to examine present fragilities, ranging from cyberattacks and energy shortages to climate disruption and institutional failure. By situating *Ravage* within current literatures on collapse and survivalist practices, the article demonstrates that Barjavel’s novel transcends the historical context of its writing and continues to offer lasting insights into resilience in a hyperconnected and ecologically vulnerable world.

**Keywords:** Critical infrastructure, Cybersecurity, Ecological vulnerability, Literary dystopia, Resilience, Social cohesion, Technological civilization, Urban collapse

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### **1. Introduction**

René Barjavel (1911–1985) holds a distinctive position in 20th-century French literature, situated at the intersection of popular fiction, scientific speculation, and cultural critique. Trained as a journalist before turning to fiction, he cultivated a style that combined clarity with reflection, aiming to expose human vulnerability in the face of technological modernity. To classify his work solely as science fiction is reductive, as it belongs to the broader tradition of the *roman extraordinaire*, where narrative experimentation converges with philosophical inquiry. From *Le Voyageur Imprudent* (1944) to *Le Diable l’Emporte* (1949) and *La Nuit des Temps* (1968), Barjavel explored the ambivalent nature of progress, navigating fascination with technological innovation and concern over its potential excesses. Far from occupying a marginal position, he reached a vast audience: his stories circulated in both literary circles and the wider public sphere, shaping collective imaginaries of catastrophe and survival. Although deeply anchored in the cultural and political context of post-war France, his writings achieve universal resonance through the questions they pose: What does it mean for humanity to create tools it no longer controls, and how can dignity be preserved amid the collapse of social and economic systems? The enduring significance of his work resides in this tension.

As Boßhammer (2024) highlights, Barjavel’s *romans extraordinaires* occupy a distinctive space between narrative experimentation and speculative imagination. Rather than following the aesthetic preoccupations of contemporaries associated with the *Nouveau Roman*—a post-war French literary movement exemplified by Nathalie Sarraute, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Claude Simon, which emphasized stylistic innovation, narrative experimentation, and the psychological interiority of characters at the expense of traditional plot—Barjavel structures his novels around the interplay of societal dynamics, ethical dilemmas, and imaginative projections of the future. His engagement with motifs drawn from U.S. science fiction is measured and selective: Barjavel embraces the potential of anticipation to probe human choices and societal trends yet rejects sensationalist or monstrous narratives that overshadow reflection. At the same time, he draws on European literary traditions—such as utopian thought, satire, and fantastic literature—integrating them into a framework that combines narrative accessibility with intellectual depth. Boßhammer (2024) emphasizes that this careful negotiation between literary heritage and imaginative speculation exemplifies Barjavel’s originality, allowing him to create works that challenge readers’ perspectives without succumbing to stylistic virtuosity for its own sake. This distinctive approach lays the groundwork for analyzing the thematic and structural innovations in *Ravage* (1943), where these literary strategies become particularly evident.

Among his novels, *Ravage*—published two decades later in the United States as *Ashes, Ashes* (1967)—marks a decisive turning point in both theme and form. It anticipates ecological concerns while portraying the collapse of technological society and the tension between urban sophistication and rural resilience (Leroy, 2021). As Lloyd (2013) observes, the upheavals caused by 20th-century wars generated a vast body of literary works attempting to make sense of individual and societal transformations, many grounded in documentary realism; in this context, *Ravage* resonates with such traditions, reflecting environmental and cultural concerns emerging from the war's disruptions. Written during the turmoil of the Nazi occupation in World War II, the story depicts a futuristic society (2052) suddenly deprived of electricity and collapsing within days. The central theme is the vulnerability of advanced civilizations once their technological foundations vanish. The narrative transcends mere apocalyptic spectacle; it conveys the anxieties of an era shaped by war while prompting reflection on the limits of modernity. *Ravage* emerges less as escapist fiction than as a critical meditation on the fragility of complex societies, a theme later theorized by Tainter (2014 [1988]). More than 80 years after publication, its relevance persists: in the context of climate change, digital dependency, and geopolitical tensions over scarce resources, Barjavel's warning retains force. To reread *Ravage* today is not to turn backward, but to interrogate the persistence of collective fears in societies destabilized by proliferating crises.

A retrospective approach opens a stimulating perspective for research in the humanities, affirming that literature is not merely a mirror of social realities but a reservoir of critical knowledge that informs analysis and guides collective action. By confronting imaginaries with moments of rupture, literary narratives disclose tensions that scientific or technical discourses often fail to capture. Wenzel (2015), for instance, demonstrates that the novel generates an image of reality (*Zeitgeist*) by mobilizing cultural, spatial, and temporal dimensions to uncover the underlying logics of social structures. Green (2006) similarly emphasizes the heuristic role of literature within action research, highlighting its capacity to foster reflexivity and active thought. Ricoeur (1990 [1984]) underscores fiction's function as a vehicle of narrative understanding, enabling readers to mentally test decisions and their ethical or social consequences. Jameson (2005) adds that science fiction shapes perceptions of historical crises and transformations, anticipating emerging social and technological tensions. Building on these contributions, the article advances the hypothesis that *Ravage* demonstrates how fiction serves as a powerful instrument of intelligibility and anticipation, producing forms of strategic knowledge that no single discipline can fully provide.

## 2. Foundations and Consequences of Civilizational Collapse

*Ravage* portrays with remarkable clarity the collapse of a civilization entirely dependent on electricity and its technological infrastructure. The narrative follows François Deschamps (later FD), a young French scientist, and his companions as they confront the sudden disappearance of the energy sustaining modern urban life. As Paris plunges into chaos, its inhabitants—cut off from communication, transport, and access to essential resources—fall into panic, looting, and violence, exposing the psychological and social vulnerabilities of city dwellers. In response, a small group of survivors led by FD undertakes a journey beyond the city, traversing a devastated France and confronting critical choices for survival. Barjavel demonstrates how the breakdown of logistical, political, and social systems intertwines with the necessity of recovering basic skills and rebuilding human ties in an environment once again rendered hostile. The narrative alternates between urban crisis and an initiatory journey, probing the tensions among technological dependence, individual adaptation, and solidarity. Grounded in the protagonists' lived experiences, *Ravage* ultimately exposes the systemic fragility of modernity and formulates the central question of human resilience in the face of disrupted vital flows.

### 2.1. Systemic Vulnerability to Electrical Failure

*Men have unleashed the terrible forces that nature had carefully kept in check. They believed they could master them. They called it Progress. It is a progress accelerated toward death. For a time, they used these forces to build, but one fine day—because men are men, that is, beings in whom evil predominates over good, and because their moral progress has lagged far behind the progress of their sciences—they turned these forces toward destruction* (Barjavel, 1943, p. 77, translation by the author).

In his novel, Barjavel vividly demonstrates modern society's complete reliance on electricity. FD, a member of the wealthy elite, inhabits a hyper-technological Paris where urban planning, mobility, and essential services are electrified and automated. Elevators, trams, water systems, and communication networks all cease functioning the moment electricity disappears, instantly paralyzing the city and exposing its residents' inability to act without technical mediation. The abrupt collapse reveals the erosion of traditional skills and transforms daily life into a struggle for survival. Inhabitants must improvise to obtain food, secure mobility, and protect the vulnerable,

while the absence of communication intensifies collective panic. Barjavel underscores a modern paradox: the very infrastructure designed to ensure stability becomes the primary source of fragility, and civilization emerges as an unstable equilibrium resting on an immaterial flow. Izzo (2016) stresses the dystopian dimension of the novel, where technological excesses turn against humanity, underscoring systemic dependence on electricity. The blackout functions as both social and psychological revelation, exposing institutional weakness and the disorganization of individual behavior.

The human dimension of society's reliance on electricity emerges clearly in the protagonists' responses to social collapse. Panic, dismay, and sporadic violence spread within hours, affecting all segments of the Parisian population. Immobilized elevators turned skyscrapers into death traps, and the suspension of public transportation isolated entire neighborhoods, making evacuation impossible. FD and his companions quickly recognized that survival depended not only on material resources but also on the capacity to maintain minimal order and cooperate under extreme conditions. Jenvrin (2009) emphasizes that Barjavel exposed fundamental human behaviors, blending fear, mistrust, and solidarity. The narrative's symbolic and biblical resonances amplify its universal significance: the fall of Paris evokes Babylon, while FD's group undertakes an exodus toward a Promised Land. *Ravage* transforms technological dependence into an existential concern: electricity becomes a vital fluid rather than a mere convenience, revealing modernity's fragility and complexity. The novel prompts reflection on the necessity of discipline, mutual aid, and human resilience, demonstrating that survival relies as much on ingenuity and solidarity as on control of material resources (Rabinovich-Berkman, 2016).

### 2.2. Breakdown of Physical Infrastructure

*Do you know what happened? All the airplane engines stopped yesterday at the same hour, just as the electricity was failing everywhere. Everyone who was descending to land on the terrace fell like hail. Did not you hear anything down there? Me, in my little apartment near the garage, it is a miracle I was not flattened. When the bus on line 2 fell, I jumped up to the ceiling like a pancake. Go look outside—you'll see the wonderful work!* (Barjavel, 1943, p. 118, translation by the author).

The sudden power outage triggered an immediate breakdown of physical and logistical infrastructure. FD and his companions witnessed cities, organized around mechanized and centralized networks, come to an abrupt standstill. Electric trains halted, and food supply chains collapsed: stocks spoiled rapidly, turning famine into a tangible threat rather than a distant medieval abstraction. Water and sanitation systems also ceased functioning, rendering the urban environment both unsanitary and hazardous. Pagacz (2012) notes that Barjavel anticipated a radical critique of modernity later conceptualized by Ellul (1964 [1954]) in France, highlighting the dangers of excessive centralization and total reliance on both material (product logistics) and immaterial (information logistics) flows. From that moment, the protagonists were forced to develop unprecedented improvisational skills, devising solutions to feed, move, and protect themselves. This compelled return to a "make-do" ethos underscores the profoundly humanist dimension of *Ravage*: resilience and cooperation become as crucial as mastery of available resources for the survival of entire communities. Every decision—from rationing to organizing movement—demonstrates the interdependence between human adaptation and infrastructure breakdown, showing that survival depends as much on ingenuity and collective discipline as on material means (Ibrahim, 2014).

Logistical challenges intensify when FD and his companions leave Paris for rural areas. They traverse long distances on foot, navigating devastated neighborhoods, destroyed roads, and zones exposed to multiple hazards, both natural and human. The group must locate and secure resources, organize rationing and travel routes, identify drinking water sources, improvise medical care in the absence of hospitals, and anticipate the unpredictable actions of other groups. Each decision carries life-or-death consequences, making logistics a central determinant of survival. More broadly, Barjavel gradually transforms the city and countryside into a "learning field," where improvised solutions and adaptive strategies ensure the effectiveness of actions. Montoneri & El Hajj (2022) note that this experience functions as a genuine social laboratory, demonstrating how planning and collective cooperation can restore minimal order in an environment rendered anarchic. Without explicitly naming it—since the concept was scarcely articulated in 1943—Barjavel illustrates that logistics extends beyond technical management, emerging as a vital tool for sustaining life and social cohesion when material infrastructures fail.

### 2.3. Leadership and Social Coordination in Crisis

*One of the first measures FD had adopted was the destruction of books. He organized search teams that scoured the ruins throughout the year. The books found during the twelve months were solemnly burned on the evening of the last day of spring, in the village squares [...]. The art of writing was*

*reserved for the privileged class of village leaders. Writing allowed for speculative thought, the development of reasoning, the soaring of theories, and the multiplication of errors. FD insisted that his people remain attached to solid realities. To assess their harvests and count their children and livestock, the peasant did not need to line up numbers in groups of three* (Barjavel, 1943, pp. 267-268, translation by the author).

*Ravage* demonstrates how the paralysis of material infrastructure precipitates an almost immediate social and political breakdown. From his position as a scientific observer, FD notes that administrative bodies and political authorities lose the capacity to coordinate population movements during the crisis, while police and military forces, accustomed to rigid hierarchies, prove powerless amid the dissolution of all authorities. In the streets, collective panic rapidly escalates into chaos: looting, clashes over essential resources, and outbreaks of violence expose the fragility of social order. Jenvrin (2009) emphasizes that Barjavel shows how the legitimacy of modern institutions depends on interconnected infrastructures and adherence to an order above individual interests—an essential condition for “forming a society.” *Ravage* also illustrates the spectrum of human responses to catastrophe: some adapt, cooperate, and attempt to uphold minimal discipline, while others succumb to selfishness, fear, or violence. This ongoing tension between collective survival and primal instincts amplifies disorder, compelling the protagonists to invent new rules and highlighting the complexity of social reconstruction in an unpredictable, unstable post-apocalyptic environment.

Within the group, FD gradually assumes the role of “*logistician in chief*,” coordinating the protection of individuals, rationing resources, and directing movement through an urban landscape rendered hostile and devastated. Montoneri & El Hajj (2022) highlight that managing human relations in this chaotic context constitutes a crucial social learning process, where leadership and authority function as essential survival tools, offering a striking parallel with organizational practices in business. Interactions with other residents demonstrate that the absence of moral and institutional benchmarks intensifies tensions and conflicts while fostering the emergence of new forms of social organization adapted to the emergency. FD quickly recognizes that establishing rules, delegating tasks, and negotiating effectively are vital to maintaining minimal cohesion and preventing descent into anarchy. Izzo (2016) underscores the constructive dimension of Barjavel’s dystopia: the collapse of modernity enables pragmatic reorganization grounded in cooperation, discipline, and relational intelligence, illustrating that survival depends as much on the regulation of human interactions as on the control of material flows.

#### 2.4. *Reconstructing Society through Cooperation and Routine*

*Humanity barely cultivated anything in the soil anymore. Vegetables, grains, flowers—all of it grew in factories, in trays. There, in water enriched with the necessary chemicals, the plants found food far richer and easier to assimilate than that sparingly provided by the harsh stepmother, Nature. Carefully calculated waves and colored lights, controlled atmospheres, accelerated the growth of plants and made it possible to obtain continuous harvests, sheltered from seasonal weather, from January 1 to December 31* (Barjavel, 1943, p. 37, translation by the author).

Following the collapse of infrastructure, FD and his companions confront a radically transformed reality, where survival demands continuous adaptation to an environment that has reverted to a wild state. The group departs Paris, where a virgin forest has reemerged, and traverses a desolate France, characterized by devastated landscapes, abandoned villages, and diffuse threats. Hazards are both natural—wild animals, disease, fires—and human—hostile groups, looting, and opportunistic predation. Each journey requires a disciplined approach: calculating rations, locating water sources and testing potability, building reserves, securing shelters, and establishing guard posts. Ibrahim (2014) highlights Barjavel’s emphasis on the reinvention of fundamental practices, from hunting and toolmaking to shelter construction, reflecting human capacity to reorganize in response to technical and societal collapse. The group’s spatial progression functions as a *true filter*: those unable to detach from machine dependence perish quickly, while the most adaptable learn, transmit knowledge, and stabilize operational routines. Gradually, improvisation evolves into simple, auditable protocols that reduce uncertainty and sustain the group’s cohesion. These practical adaptations ultimately ensure survival on a day-to-day basis.

Throughout the journey, the group’s experience functions as a laboratory for “social recomposition.” Pagacz (2012) underscores its ecological and philosophical significance: catastrophe compels a reevaluation of existence, from human relationships with the land to modes of collective living. Practical learning occurs through rules that are tested and refined: sharing food, prioritizing usage, mapping water sources, assigning roles, and applying graduated sanctions. Montoneri & El Hajj (2022) highlight that this return to nature,

exemplified by the establishment of a “patriarchal society” in New Provence in southern France, is simultaneously material, psychological, and social; it relies on trust, discipline, and symbiotic solidarity. Survival extends beyond technical mastery, depending equally on cooperation, delegation, knowledge transmission, and the stabilization of collective routines. Collapse does not terminate civilization; rather, it redirects its foundations toward adaptability, frugality, and shared responsibility. Each decision becomes a vital learning experience, and the reinvention of forgotten practices proves as essential as resource management, sustaining life in a world that has largely reverted to a primitive state. From this perspective, the lessons of *Ravage* remain highly pertinent for understanding contemporary challenges.

### 3. Contemporary Relevance of Barjavel’s Insights

In *Ravage*, Barjavel envisions a future France where the abrupt collapse of technological civilization plunges society into chaos. He anticipates contemporary challenges such as dependence on technology, the vulnerability of critical infrastructure, the fragility of social bonds in hyper-individualistic societies, and ecological threats jeopardizing the very foundation of technological civilization. These issues resonate today amid crises including cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, social tensions amplified by climate disasters, and challenges linked to the energy transition. The 2021 ransomware attack on the Colonial Pipeline by the DarkSide group, which connects the Gulf of Mexico to the East Coast of the United States, has largely faded from public memory. Yet it disrupted fuel supply for millions of consumers for a week, exposing the fragility of modern critical infrastructure. The event evokes Barjavel’s dystopian scenario, where overreliance on technology produces catastrophic consequences. From this perspective, *Ravage* provides a relevant framework for analyzing and understanding contemporary vulnerabilities, emphasizing the necessity of preparation, adaptation, and solidarity in the face of crises that are likely to intensify in the coming years.

#### 3.1. Critical Infrastructure Vulnerabilities

*Across the Seine, a molten stream of flaming quintessence reached the cellars of the Chaillot barracks, the former Trocadéro, striking the ammunition depot and the gunpowder research laboratory. A tremendous explosion tore open the hill. Sections of walls, columns, boulders, and tons of debris rose above the river, falling upon the kneeling crowd, who groaned in a mixture of worship and fear, splitting skulls, tearing limbs, shattering bones. A massive block of earth and concrete flattened, in a single blow, half of the faithful in the Gros-Caillou parish. At the top of the Tower, a jet of flames snatched the monstrosity from the hands of the terrified priest* (Barjavel, 1943, pp. 156-157, translation by the author).

The hyperconnected society of the 21st century depends on complex, interdependent digital infrastructures, including Internet networks, telecommunications systems, and cloud platforms, which sustain both the global economy and daily life. This largely invisible dependence generates critical vulnerabilities: each cyberattack or major outage can immediately disrupt essential services, such as hospitals, energy provision, and public security (Olorunlana & Mohammed, 2025). The increasing integration of information and industrial systems amplifies this exposure, creating opportunities for sophisticated threats from state or terrorist actors. Addressing these risks requires digital resilience strategies that combine real-time monitoring, automated alert systems, and comprehensive business continuity plans. Zhang *et al.* (2024) highlight that participation in digital global value chains can reduce energy resilience, emphasizing the need for diversified and decentralized infrastructure to mitigate single points of failure. Nguyen *et al.* (2024) further highlight that resilience extends beyond technology, encompassing adaptive social organization in which local preparation, institutional coordination, and information sharing strengthen communities’ capacity to respond effectively to crises.

Barjavel anticipates the consequences of a society entirely dependent on vital infrastructure. The sudden loss of electricity instantly paralyzes communications, supply chains, and public order, generating disorganization reminiscent of the vulnerabilities faced in today’s digital age. Residents, unable to operate without machines, are rendered destitute, and panic transforms the city into a chaotic environment. The fictional scenario of *Ravage* closely parallels contemporary risks of digitalization: just as a blackout undermines the material foundations of modern society, a global digital failure could simultaneously disrupt supply chains, energy systems, healthcare, and financial networks. Contemporary analyses of organizational adaptive capacity, as summarized by Hassel & Cedergren (2025), resonate directly with the novel: only those capable of improvising, cooperating, and reconstructing collective routines endure. Likewise, the active engagement of local communities, emphasized by Nguyen *et al.* (2024), reflects one of Barjavel’s enduring lessons: population survival relies as much on social organization and solidarity as on the continuity of technical and logistical systems.

An important distinction must nevertheless be drawn between the catastrophic collapse imagined in *Ravage* and the types of technological disruptions observed in contemporary societies. In the novel, the sudden disappearance of electricity produces an immediate and universal breakdown of modern civilization: transportation, communications, industry, and urban life collapse simultaneously, leaving populations without technological support. By contrast, failures affecting today's critical infrastructures tend to occur in a more fragmented and localized manner. Cyber incidents, network outages, or attacks against specific systems typically generate partial disruptions that propagate unevenly across interconnected infrastructures (Islam *et al.*, 2023). Modern technological systems also incorporate redundancy, backup capacity, and crisis-management protocols designed to ensure continuity of essential services and facilitate progressive recovery. (Trump *et al.*, 2025). However, even limited disruptions can generate significant social and psychological effects, particularly in societies characterized by deep technological dependence. Temporary service interruptions may produce uncertainty, panic buying, or logistical difficulties, revealing the fragility of complex socio-technical systems. In this sense, although the operational dynamics of contemporary infrastructure failures differ from the total blackout depicted by Barjavel, the novel remains analytically valuable for understanding perceptions of vulnerability associated with technological dependence.

### 3.2. Energy Dependence

*As for milk, its chemical production had become so abundant that every household received it at home, alongside hot water, cold water, and ice water, through pipelines. One only had to attach a charming little chrome device to the milk tap to produce, within minutes, a pat of excellent butter. Every installation included a low tap, fitted with a warming mechanism, to which a nipple could be attached. Mothers fed their dear infants there* (Barjavel, 1943, p. 39, translation by the author).

Barjavel underscores modern society's total dependence on electricity, which, when abruptly lost, triggers an immediate collapse of social, economic, and technological systems. Residents, deprived of light, heat, communication, and transport, are unable to maintain essential activities, highlighting the extreme vulnerability of centralized infrastructure. While expressed in literary form, this observation resonates strongly in the contemporary world, where energy networks constitute the backbone of modern societies. The integration of information systems with energy distribution networks increases potential attack surfaces and elevates the risk of major disruptions, whether from cyberattacks or physical failures (Aghazadeh Ardebili *et al.*, 2024). Barjavel's narrative can be interpreted as anticipating the absolute necessity of strategic planning to ensure energy resilience in technological civilization, including diversification of sources, redundant systems, and emergency mechanisms. A contemporary reading of *Ravage* emphasizes that energy continuity depends not solely on technology but also on the capacity of societies to anticipate, coordinate, and respond effectively to unforeseen events, such as a major geopolitical conflict, placing energy security at the center of systemic risk management.

Barjavel's reflections on energy acquire concrete relevance when considering contemporary resilience challenges. In *Ravage*, the sudden loss of electricity triggers an immediate collapse of human activities, demonstrating how dependence on a vital flow undermines social and economic structures. Today, this vulnerability emphasizes the necessity of ensuring the continuity of critical infrastructures, including transport, healthcare, communication, and food supply. Resilience depends on strategies that combine technological robustness, preventive maintenance, and organizational coordination, fostering collaboration between public and private actors to protect sensitive systems (Gritzalis *et al.*, 2019). Continuous training and operational preparedness of energy-sector professionals, alongside clear and shared governance protocols, enable anticipation of incidents and mitigation of their effects (Yigit *et al.*, 2025). Barjavel's analysis provides a conceptual framework for understanding the importance of proactive planning and resilience in the face of systemic risks, demonstrating that energy security remains central to societal stability. Alazzam (2018) complements this perspective, highlighting that anticipation literature examines social, political, and technological fears related to infrastructure and the future—a theme evident in Herbert G. Wells's novels—underscoring that the fragility of technical systems is invariably accompanied by significant human consequences.

### 3.3. Social Cohesion and Resilience

*Nothing is sold in the new world, which does not know the meaning of the word "merchant." Each family weaves and spins flax, hemp, and wool, tans leather, and shapes wood and stone according to its needs. Tools and household utensils are distributed by the village chiefs. They are no longer made of iron or steel, but of bronze. Iron has become brittle since the cataclysm. Heated to red, it crumbles to dust under the hammer* (Barjavel, 1943, p. 266, translation by the author).

One of the most salient aspects of *Ravage* lies in the fragility of social bonds when infrastructure and institutions collapse. Shamsi (2015) broadens the analysis by showing that urban modernity, as described by Thomas S. Eliot, exacerbates isolation and loneliness in cities: the erosion of family and social ties, widespread indifference, and a moral decline weaken communities, emphasizing the importance of strengthening social capital to withstand crises. Partial failures of essential systems in contemporary emergencies similarly test solidarity and social cohesion. During the Covid-19 pandemic, trust in institutions and cooperation among citizens were critically challenged, revealing both extraordinary acts of solidarity and opportunistic behaviors (Bavel *et al.*, 2020). Extreme climate events, including hurricanes, wildfires, and floods, demonstrate that human responses oscillate between cooperation and competition, confirming Barjavel's insights that social bonds are inherently fragile and vulnerable to systemic shocks. The literature on community resilience underscores the need for collective preparedness and the capacity of social networks to absorb and redistribute stress, thereby maintaining cohesion during crises (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Pfefferbaum *et al.*, 2017).

The study of social interactions in disaster contexts demonstrates that rebuilding social bonds requires far more than the restoration of physical infrastructure. Success depends on mutual trust, clear communication, and active coordination among all stakeholders. Contemporary research on social resilience emphasizes that practical measures—such as civic preparedness education, local community engagement, and the development of sustainable support networks—enhance a society's capacity to maintain cohesion and mitigate the effects of major disruptions (Cutter *et al.*, 2014). In *Ravage*, characters relearn to cooperate for survival, organizing protective structures, sharing resources and information, and establishing collective routines to preserve group life. This narrative underscores the central role of solidarity in resilience. Empirical studies further confirm that societies capable of mobilizing social capital and fostering local cooperation more effectively absorb the destructive impacts of crises and rapidly restore their social fabric after severe disruptions (Béné *et al.*, 2016). From this perspective, Barjavel provides a prescient analytical framework: collective survival depends as much on technical competence as on the strength of social ties, and reinforcing these ties is essential for navigating systemic crises in a hyperconnected world.

#### 3.4. Environmental Limits

*Caravans of boys and hardy girls set out singing, cleared brush, reclaimed land, settled new valleys and provinces, fought the savages of the forests of Auvergne and the deserts of the Loire, spread throughout France, Europe, and Africa, and everywhere they established the wise laws of FD. Two of the most important among these laws forbade a man to own more land than he could walk around from sunrise to sunset on the longest day of summer and prohibited more than 500 families from living together in the same village* (Barjavel, 1943, p. 266, translation by the author).

*Ravage* anticipates ecological awareness well ahead of its time, portraying Humanity as compelled to leave the city and return to a form of enforced rurality. The scenario highlights civilization's critical dependence on resource flows and ecological balance, echoing contemporary crises such as climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion (Rockström *et al.*, 2009). Rapid urbanization and intensive industrialization exacerbate pressures on ecosystems, reproducing the imbalances implicitly criticized by Barjavel. Current debates on degrowth, agroecology, relocation of activities, and sustainable food systems converge on the principle that adapting to planetary limits requires a renewed focus on frugal lifestyles that respect natural cycles (Foley *et al.*, 2011). Barjavel's work proves prescient, emphasizing that human survival depends as much on environmental stewardship as on technological competence. Contemporary ecological policy and resource governance choices testify to this urgency, directly extending *Ravage's* insights into the systemic risks arising from excessive dependence on fragile infrastructures and ecosystems.

The "return to the land" depicted by Barjavel, sometimes criticized for its apparent glorification of a conservative social order (Sobanet, 2007; Dalens, 2013), extends beyond narrative devices to engage social, economic, and political dimensions that resonate with contemporary sustainability and ecological resilience challenges. While Barjavel's depiction of rural life emphasizes environmental adaptation and frugal resource use, it is also rooted in ideological frameworks that merit critical attention. Some elements of *Ravage* resonate with the so-called "*Pétainist utopia*" (Sobanet, 2007; Rémy, 2025), emphasizing agrarian self-sufficiency, population dispersion, and hierarchical rural communities. These conservative undercurrents complicate the novel's lessons for modern democratic societies, where inclusivity, equity, and pluralism are central values. Recognizing this tension allows contemporary readers to interpret Barjavel's narrative not as a prescriptive social model, but as a cautionary illustration of the interplay between ecological limits and societal organization. By decoupling ecological insights from the novel's conservative social prescriptions, policymakers and scholars can extract lessons on resource stewardship, rural revitalization, and socio-ecological resilience in ways

compatible with democratic governance. In this sense, *Ravage* remains prescient, highlighting humanity's dependence on natural systems, while pointing toward the necessity of embedding environmental adaptation strategies within socially equitable and participatory frameworks.

Building on these insights, contemporary climate crises demonstrate that societal adaptation to a changing environment is imperative (Klein *et al.*, 2014). Sustainable natural resource management, environmentally sensitive urban planning, and the strengthening of rural communities are increasingly essential to reduce vulnerability to future ecological disruptions. Barjavel's vision, in which humans relearn to live in close connection with nature, resonates with current approaches to socio-ecological resilience, emphasizing production relocation, diversification of food systems through short supply chains, biodiversity preservation, and the integration of local knowledge, community engagement, and adaptive governance structures. Implementing coordinated policies that combine climate adaptation, ecosystem protection, and support for local populations is crucial to ensure food security, social stability, and equitable access to resources. In this broader perspective, *Ravage* offers a valuable analytical lens for examining the interplay of environmental, social, and technological factors. Adopting sustainable lifestyles thus emerges not merely as a constraint but as a strategic necessity, requiring innovation, collective organization, and proactive measures to navigate complex ecological crises while safeguarding the continuity and resilience of human societies.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

An analysis of *Ravage* gains substantial depth when considered alongside other major novels examining the disintegration of technological civilization. Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), for instance, portrays a world stripped to its darkest extremes, highlighting the extreme fragility of social bonds and the preoccupation with immediate survival. Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) presents a biotechnological dystopia in which unchecked innovation precipitates societal collapse. Despite differing cultural contexts, these narratives converge on a common insight: modernity harbors structural vulnerabilities that can escalate into catastrophe. The external validity of Barjavel's analysis is reinforced by this convergence, supported by studies demonstrating how collapse fiction translates collective anxieties amid contemporary ecological and technological crises (Trexler, 2015; Johns-Putra, 2016). Viewed within this broader literary landscape, *Ravage* emerges not as an isolated or outdated work, but as a milestone within a tradition that employs apocalyptic imagination to interrogate the conditions of human survival. Its thematic proximity to other dystopian narratives underscores Barjavel's enduring contribution to universal reflections on the fragility of technological civilization. From this perspective, it is striking that the author remains relatively underrecognized, particularly in France (Compte, 2025), despite the work's lasting relevance to debates on societal vulnerability.

*Ravage's* place within the tradition of the *roman extraordinaire* naturally opens the way to reflection on its contemporary social relevance, particularly through the lens of prepping practices. Active primarily in North America and Europe, preppers anticipate systemic collapses by developing strategies for energy, food, and medical autonomy. They enact imaginary anticipated in *Ravage*: a forced return to basic survival organization. Recent research shows that prepping combines a culture of fear with a pursuit of resilience (Barker, 2020; Paché, 2025). As Garrett (2021) observes, prepping embodies dual tension: rejection of technological dependence and a desire for radical autonomy in the face of globalized market systems deemed inherently vulnerable. In this sense, the parallel between *Ravage* and contemporary prepping extends beyond anecdotal comparison. It demonstrates how literary fiction can inspire, inform, and even legitimize contemporary social behaviors. The circulation of imagination between literature and practice ultimately attests to a productive feedback loop, in which dystopian narratives illuminate and structure collective or individual responses to perceived threats.

The correspondence observed between Barjavel's narrative and modern survivalist practices underscores the necessity of a structured analytical framework capable of integrating literary, social, and cultural dimensions. To this end, the present study is explicitly framed as a qualitative conceptual synthesis rather than an empirical investigation, allowing for reflective and interpretive engagement with the material. Drawing on textual interpretation, comparative literary reading, and critical analysis with relevant theoretical and ethnographic literature, the article examines recurring motifs, narrative strategies, thematic structures, and cultural imaginaries across *Ravage* and related collapse narratives. This approach acknowledges its limits: it does not quantify behavioral outcomes or test reception empirically, nor does it claim to generalize across populations. Nevertheless, it provides a *heuristic lens* for understanding how literary representations of societal fragility resonate with real-world social practices, shaping ethical reflection, anticipatory behaviors, and cultural perceptions of risk. By explicitly situating the study as a conceptual synthesis, the analysis clarifies that its



insights are interpretive and analytical, offering a coherent framework for exploring systemic vulnerability while suggesting pathways for future empirical investigation and interdisciplinary dialogue.

Autard (2025) recently shows that the cultural imaginaries anticipated in Barjavel's *Ravage* continue to find expression in contemporary neo-rural communities. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in 26 alternative settlements in the Southern Alps between 2019 and 2023, Autard (2025) documents remarkable continuities with earlier post-apocalyptic narratives, even among newcomers with no direct exposure to previous movements. In these communities, practices of self-sufficiency, risk anticipation, and cooperative organization reproduce strategies and ethical choices depicted in *Ravage*. Although collapsology and post-apocalyptic fiction are not uniquely French, the ethnographic observations indicate that shared cultural frameworks and imaginative repertoires shape real-world behaviors and social arrangements. Autard (2025) further notes that parallels extend beyond material practices to encompass language, storytelling, and symbolic frameworks encoding notions of resilience, autonomy, and survival. By situating *Ravage* within this wider sociocultural landscape, one can appreciate how Barjavel's work functions not merely as literature but as a source of heuristic insight, influencing collective reflection on ecological vulnerability, technological dependence, and the ethical challenges of human adaptation. Overall, this evidence strengthens the argument that literary imagination continues to guide contemporary responses to systemic risk.

Building on these insights, the connection between *Ravage*, collapse literature, and contemporary survivalist practices carries important theoretical implications for literary studies and broader cultural analysis. Lanouette (2024) highlights that post-collapse narratives enable reflection on the reconstruction period, showing how survivors' interactions with technology mediate societal recovery—a perspective that resonates with Barjavel's depiction of civilization's fragility and potential regeneration. Indeed, *Ravage* functions as a narrative device that constructs a language-based interpretation of modern vulnerability, linking technical fragility with collective destiny and human behavioral responses. This perspective aligns with debates in ecocriticism, which consider fiction a tool for examining environmental, social, and ethical crises beyond strictly empirical analyses (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014; Heise, 2016). In this regard, *Ravage* is not merely a mirror of collective anxieties but a significant work producing an original discursive framework for analyzing modernity and its impasses. Clark & Szerszynski (2020) further argue that literature does not simply reflect reality but actively shapes the ways societies conceive of the future, anticipate risks, and prepare for potential disruptions. The significance of *Ravage* lies precisely in this discursive dimension: it offers a privileged lens for exploring how language, narrative, and imagination construct cultural representations of societal collapse and guide reflection on human adaptability.

The article, however, has several limitations that must be acknowledged to contextualize its contributions. It focuses on a single work, *Ravage*, which restricts the diversity of perspectives and prevents a comprehensive understanding of the variety of collapse representations across contemporary literature, as well as in film and television. Moreover, the chosen lens—logistical, energetic, and social—leaves aside other important dimensions, such as aesthetics, narrative style, or rhetorical strategies, which could enrich the analysis and provide a fuller reading of the work. The absence of an empirical methodology is also a notable limitation: conclusions rely on textual and comparative interpretation and have not been tested against reception studies or quantitative analyses, limiting their generalizability. Finally, drawing parallels with contemporary crises, while relevant for demonstrating the modern resonance of Barjavel's insights, risks anachronism by attributing to the author a prescience he likely would not have claimed. Acknowledging these limitations does not diminish the analysis' value; rather, it situates its scope and points the way toward complementary, interdisciplinary, and empirically informed approaches.

These findings open multiple avenues for future research. The first avenue involves broadening the comparison to non-Western corpora, to determine whether the motif of collapse is interpreted similarly or manifests in distinctive forms, for instance in Asia or Africa. A second avenue concerns the study of *Ravage*'s current reception, particularly within ecological, survivalist, or critical communities of technological modernity, enabling an understanding of how its imaginaries circulate in contemporary public discourse. A third avenue focuses on the intersection between literature and foresight, using *Ravage* as a heuristic tool to analyze systemic vulnerabilities and collective representations of the future, particularly in the education of younger generations. Finally, a fourth avenue entails deeper interdisciplinary dialogue among linguistics, sociology, management, and environmental studies, examining fiction as a laboratory of ideas where collapse scenarios can influence social representations. Together, these research directions demonstrate that *Ravage* cannot be reduced to a dated dystopia written during World War II; it remains a seminal work capable of illuminating pressing economic, cultural, and political challenges of the 21st century.

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