

CONSIDERATIONS OF THE SCIENCE-FICTION NOVELS
OF RENÉ BARJAVEL

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DEDICATION

To my loving family--parents, wife and children,
I gratefully dedicate this work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to express my heart-felt gratitude to Dr. David E. Travis, Chairman of the Department of Foreign Languages, Kansas State Teachers College and Dr. Andrew Talton for their unstinting aid and guidance. I should also like to express my profound gratitude to those scholars and amateurs who were so kind as to partake of their valuable time to give me counsel.

L. E. N.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The first act of the drama of the exploration of space is being played out on our television screens before our very eyes; our comedian astronauts (Did you ever stop to wonder where that word came from?) stand on their heads for us and point their color television cameras back at Earth from 200,000 miles away. Robert Borel-Rosny, grandson of the French author Rosny Aîné, answers the question which is interpolated into the preceding part of the paragraph by saying that "Rosny Aîné fut le plus remarquable 'chantre' de la navigation cosmique, écrivait Alexandre Anaoff. Son mérite est grand d'avoir légué aux générations de chercheurs le nom 'ASTRONAUTIQUE'. . . ." ¹ (Italics and capitals in the original). By contrast, therefore, let us consider the fact that at the same time that this noted French scientist² was establishing himself as one of the modern precursors of French science-fiction the head of the American Patent Office was

¹Robert Borel-Rosny in a personal letter to this writer dated April 29, 1969.

²J. H. Rosny Aîné is the pen name of Henri-Joseph Boex, Nobel Prize winner in Physics in 1926 and a member of the academy Goncourt.

turning in his resignation to the Secretary of Commerce because, as he said, "Why stay, when there isn't anything left to discover."³

This writer is hopeful that the tremendous rate of change which is so clearly visible all about us is beginning to filter through to the literary and academic worlds. He remembers very vividly the emotions which he evoked when he told his high school English teachers some ten to fifteen years ago that his favorite type of novel was science-fiction. The general reaction was "What on earth do you read that trash for?" A noted scientist, who also writes science-fiction, has confessed that early in his career he worried quite a lot about the effect that his writing would have on his professional status.⁴ Today the writer of this work is permitted to choose an author of French science-fiction as his topic for his Master's thesis, and justly so to his way of thinking; and a noted British astronomer and author of some of the most notable science-fiction novels in English, Aurthur Clarke, is asked to appear on the C. B. S. coverage of the flight of Apollo 10 as a guest expert.

³Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, le Matin Des magiciens, édition universitaire par Yvone Lenard, (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. xxi.

⁴Isaac Asimov, Is Anyone There, (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1967), p. xii.

The purpose of the writer of this thesis is twofold. First he intends to attempt to create a context. This context will be a brief summary of the state of science-fiction as a separate and distinct subdivision of the novel in France today. And secondly he intends to relate to this context and to study in the light of this context the science-fiction novels of M. René Barjavel. And of course from this analysis he hopes to be able to draw some conclusions; he recognizes from the outset that any such attempt to make definitive statements about an author of so recent an origin can be, and often is, highly dangerous. Nonetheless, it is hoped that the study may benefit those scholars who will undoubtedly study the genre in the future.

CHAPTER II

THE CONTEXT

1. DEFINITION

In order to establish the context or background against which we are going to view the novels of M. Barjavel, it is fitting that we should first attempt to define the limits of the genre known as science-fiction. This is no easy task. As Michel Butor says at the beginning of his article, "la Crise de la croissance de la science-fiction," ". . . le genre Science-Fiction est assez difficile à délimiter--les querelles des experts le provent surabondamment."¹ The definitions of the experts run all shades of preciseness. For example Professor Clarke said on C. B. S. television that, "if it couldn't possibly happen it is fantasy; if it could it is science-fiction."² He added that Tolkien's Lord of the Rings was, probably, the best modern example of fantasy.

¹Michel Butor, "la Crise de croissance de la science-fiction," Cahiers du Sud, XXXVII, Numéro 317 (1er semestre, 1953), p. 31.

²Professor A. Clarke in an interview with Walter Cronkite on May 18, 1969, The Flight of Apollo Ten.

One of the most penetrating studies of the question is that of George Laffly. He deals very clearly with the difference between science-fiction and "anticipation", the term which was most commonly used by French critics to designate the genre until recently. He says that "L'anticipation indique un avenir probable. Il s'agit presque d'une prospective. La science fiction s'étend à tous les avènements possibles, le jeu de l'imagination y est libre."³

M. Barjavel would agree whole-heartedly with M. Laffly. For the purposes of this thesis let us use the definition which M. Barjavel set forth some ten years ago. Having been a journalist M. Barjavel took both the part of the interviewer and the interviewee in the article:⁴

Q--Après une interruption de quatorze ans, vous reprenez avec Colomb de la lune, la série de vos romans de science-fiction. Pourquoi vous confiner dans ce genre inférieur? Manquez-vous de talent?

R--Soyons sérieux. J'ai du talent vous le savez bien. . . .

Q--Etes-vous toujours aussi modeste dans la vie?

R--Si je ne dis pas dans les Nouvelles littéraires, aujourd'hui que je suis un homme plein de talent, personne ne l'y dira peut-être jamais. Passons. C'est à cause de ce tempérament dynamique, de cette large respiration de tout mon être, que je m'exprime en science-fiction. La science-fiction n'est pas un

³George Laffly, "la Science-fiction," la Revue des deux mondes, CXL, Numéro 3 (1 février 1968), p. 395.

⁴René Barjavel, "la Science-fiction, c'est le vrai 'nouveau roman'," les Nouvelles littéraires Arts, Sciences, Spectacles, (11 octobre 1962).

"genre inférieur", comme vous le prétendez avec votre petit sourire, ce n'est même pas un "genre littéraire", c'est tous les genres, c'est lyrisme, la satire, l'analyse, la morale, la métaphysique, l'épopée. Ce sont toutes les activités de l'esprit humain en action dans les horizons sans limites (Italics not in the original with the exception of "en action").

Without a doubt many authorities would feel that this statement is untenably broad; however, this writer feels that being aware of the framework which M. Barjavel has set for himself is extremely important.

2. HISTORY

There is no more agreement as to the date of the beginning of science-fiction among the critics than there is to the definition of science-fiction; however, there is substantial agreement among the critics that the date of the beginning would be set far earlier in time than most uninitiated individuals would tend to believe. For example, Pierre André Touttain says:⁵

En 1926 l'Américain Hugo Gernsback (1884-1967) auteur du roman Ralph 124 C 41 plus (1911) créa le terme "science-fiction" pour désigner des textes qui le plus souvent paraissaient dans des revues aux couvertures bariolées; considérées trop rapidement comme de simples lectures distrayantes ou réservées à un public demeuré dans une phase d'infantillisme prononcé.

⁵Pierre André Touttain, "le Dossier de la science-fiction," les Nouvelles littéraires, Arts, Sciences, Spectacles, Numéro 2153 (26 décembre 1968), p. 14.

Si la science-fiction semblait cependant présenter des images neuves et parfois puériles aux lecteurs du premier quart du XX^e siècle, c'était méconnaître profondément ce qui l'avait précédée et annoncée depuis quelques . . .vingt-cinq siècles (Italics not in the original).

One critic went even further; he put the origin of science-fiction in the distant past of man's first attempts to predict the future with the Livre des morts and the Bardo Thodol of Tibet.⁶ While yet another puts the origin at the time of the advent of Greek myth, "Cette première substitution du merveilleux moderne au merveilleux mystique et fantasmagorique se marque bien avec le Cheval volant."⁷

John W. Campbell, editor of Astounding Science-Fiction for more than two and a half decades, names Sam Moskowitz as "the historian of the science-fiction field."⁸ Mr. Moskowitz's opinion adds weight to the argument that the beginnings of science-fiction can be found with the Greeks; he says:⁹

⁶Michel Carrouges, "le Spectroscopie des anticipations," Cahiers du sud, XXXVII, Numéro 317 (1^{er} semestre, 1953), p. 15.

⁷Jean Jacques Bridenne, la Littérature française d'imagination scientifique (Paris: Gustave Arthur Dassonville, 1950), p. 26.

⁸John W. Campbell in a letter to this writer dated February 17, 1969.

⁹Sam Moskowitz, Explorers of the Infinite, Shapers of Science Fiction (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1957), p. 11.

The form itself can with logic be traced back to the ancient "travel tales" preserved in the Mediterranean basin long before Christ. The most famous of these is Homer's Odyssey, a mixture of fiction, myth and fact which attempted to maintain an "atmosphere of scientific credibility" consistent with the limited knowledge of the time.

Although some critics mention such French works and writers as Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne, Tristan et Iseult,¹⁰ and Morus and Rabelais¹¹ as containing elements which predicted the advent of this genre, the consensus seems to revolve around one name, that of the great visionary and freethinker of the seventeenth century, Cyrano de Bergerac. Sam Moskowitz writes:¹²

There are places where Cyrano obviously is unaware that he has substituted mythology for fact. There are times when his careful scientific explanations fall apart on close examination and he lapses into the prejudice and misconceptions of his time. But for the most part his instincts were correct and he frequently arrived at the right answers despite gaps in his knowledge or error in his method.

When the final history of space travel is written, Cyrano de Bergerac will have to be enshrined as the first man to think of rockets as a propellant for a space vehicle.

Rocketry was not, of course, the only field of prediction to which Cyrano set his mind; as a matter of fact, Pierre

¹⁰Bridenne, op. cit., p. 26.

¹¹Touttain, op. cit., p. 6.

¹²Moskowitz, op. cit., p. 11

Touttain says that his works, The Empires of the Moon and The States and Empires of the Sun, contain "en germ" all of the great themes of the literature of anticipation. He adds that he would consider them as the first true examples of science-fiction.¹³

No author of the eighteenth century is important enough to rate mention by Mr. Moskowitz. The writer of this thesis could not determine whether Mr. Moskowitz thought that none of the writers of the eighteenth century fell within the scope of his own particular definition of science-fiction or whether he made the omission because of space limitations. Other critics do feel that writers of this century warrant consideration. M. Bridenne devotes an entire chapter to this period. Among those that he cites as having contributed to the genre during the eighteenth century are: l'abbé Bordelon, le chanoine Defforges, Marie-Anne de Roumier, M. de La Folie, Rétif de la Bretonne, L. S. Mercier and the counts of Saint Germain and of Cagliostro. Among the better known names appearing in M. Bridenne's chapter are those of Fontenelle and Voltaire.¹⁴

¹³Touttain, op. cit. p. 6.

¹⁴Bridenne, op. cit., pp. 39-56.

Consensus and virtual unanimity return with the opening of the Romantic era. The work voted most likely to embody the true spirit of science-fiction is none other than Frankenstein by Mary Wallstonecraft Shelly. Mr. Moskowitz cites the book as being the first to amalgamate within one cover the previously isolated forms in the field, such as "the travel tale, the fiction-disguised utopian prophecy, and the factual science story." He adds in the same paragraph that this story was to influence "a chain of distinguished authors from Edgar Allan Poe to Nathaniel Hawthorne. . .;"¹⁵ among the names of the authors who Mr. Moskowitz listed are those of two who were to be of essential importance in the development of René Barjavel and of science-fiction in general. The first is Edgar Allan Poe, a genius and crucially important developer of the genre who has had great influence in France; and secondly, through Poe's influence, we have the true father of modern science-fiction, Jules Verne.

Other well known names are also cited from this period as having been among the forerunners of science-fiction. "Guy de Maupassant. . .est un précurseur certain

¹⁵Moskowitz, op. cit., p. 33.

de la science-fiction."¹⁶ M. Touttain also points to Victor Hugo as a writer whose style, when he wrote science-fiction, introduced the theme which anticipates the style of René Barjavel:¹⁷

Victor Hugo "l'homme apocalyptique" comme l'appela Tristan Courbiere, le visionnaire, le témoin de la "bouche d'ombre" se devait figurer dans la littérature d'anticipation: le poème à l'Arc de Triomphe (Les Voix intérieurs) se termine par le spectacle de Paris détruit, mais surtout dans Vingtième siècle (La Legend des siècles), il entrevoit que l'homme visitera les autres mondes de notre système solaire. . ." (Italics not in the original with the exception of the titles).

Among the names of the lesser known figures from this era one finds those of Charles Fourier and Emile Souvestre.

Méconnu de son vivant et oublié après sa mort, Charles Fourier (1772-1837) commence seulement à être redécouvert. Plusieurs de ses "utopies" semble parfaitement réalisables actuellement et de nombreuses pages, débordantes de lyrisme messianique de la Théorie de quatre mouvements mériteraient de figurer dans une anthologie de science-fiction.¹⁸

One can see in le Monde tel qu'il sera by M. Souvestre a pre-statement of the idea of time travel via sleep which M. Barjavel uses so effectively in his prize winning novel,

¹⁶Touttain, op. cit., p. 7. ¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

la Nuit des temps,¹⁹ The story of M. Souvestre is that of a boy and girl who are transported to the year 3,000 by means of sleep only to find that civilization has become totally mechanized and that man has lost his soul. M. Bridenne says, and justly so in the light of the current writings of the author who is the subject of this thesis, "il est extrêmement curieux de voir semblable cri d'alarme jeté plus d'un siècle avant 'l'ère atomique'."²⁰

At the same time that Emile Souvestre was writing the aforementioned work, Edgar Allan Poe was bringing to a close a career which, as we have already said, is of crucial importance in the development of the genre. The one dominating quality of practically all of Poe's works was the quality of logic. Mr. Moskowitz states:²¹

The full range of Poe's influence on science-fiction is incalculable but his greatest contribution to the advancement of the genre was the precept that every departure from the norm must be logically explained scientifically. This made it easy for the reader to attain a willing suspension of disbelief and to accept the usual.

¹⁹René Barjavel, la Nuit des temps (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1958), pp. 315. Each work of Barjavel will have full footnote data given only once and will be listed hereafter by the title and page in parenthesis after the quotation.

²⁰Bridenne, op. cit., p. 63.

²¹Moskowitz, op. cit., pp. 60-61.

One finds in Poe's works a double orientation. One which seems to have been rather typical of many of the Romantics. On the one hand they exhibit a strong interest in the burgeoning development of the science of their time and on the other they exhibit strong tendencies toward the bizarre, the fantastic, and, at times, the supernatural.

"S'il a renouvelé le roman d'aventures, Verne ne l'a pas créé comme on l'a dit parfois, mais on peut considérer qu'il a bel et bien créé le roman scientifique,"²² says M. Bridenne. He and other critics make it clear that this bent for the science oriented story grew out of a strong interest on Verne's part in the writings of E. A. Poe. He is known to have taken some of Poe's stories and to have rewritten them. Sam Moskowitz quotes Verne as having said the following about his novel Five Weeks in a Balloon, a story which is clearly modeled after Poe's Balloon-Hoax, "I have just completed a novel in a new form, one that is entirely my own. If it succeeds I will have stumbled upon a gold mine. In that case I shall go on writing and writing without pause."²³

²²Bridenne, op. cit., p. 119.

²³Moskowitz, op. cit., p. 76.

If Jules Verne found his gold mine, as it now appears that he did, he also found a Midas touch at the same time. For at the time that Verne was writing science-fiction or "anticipation" as it was known in France it was held in even lower esteem than it is today. As a result, much of his work which had real literary merit was passed over by the critics. M. Bridenne states:²⁴

. . . L'indifférence ou l'antipathie de pontifes et de snobs à l'égard de la littérature d'imagination scientifique a peut-être empêché le créateur de Philéas Fogg et du capitaine Némó d'être un Wells avant la lettre, un répondant moderniste à Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, un Loti technicien.

The same can be said for those French writers who have attempted to follow in his footsteps. The prejudice which has classed their work as writings of a juvenile nature fit only for readers in their early teens may well explain the fact that France has to date failed to produce a Wells or a Bradbury; although the writer of this thesis feels that René Barjavel certainly is worthy of being placed, if not exactly equal to these greats, then a very close second. But before going on into the twentieth century, let us complete the nineteenth century by at least

²⁴Bridenne, op. cit., p. 135.

noting the names of those who have attempted to follow Verne in France. They include Gustave Le Rouge, Henri Allorge, Jean de La Hire, Maurice Leclance, André Amandy, Léon Groc and Pierre Devaux, the only author of this group to receive M. Bridenne's unequivocal endorsement, "à lire sans arrière-pensées."²⁵

The route best taken into the twentieth century seems to be by way of three authors, one English and the others French. Of the Englishman, Sam Moskowitz has written the following introduction.²⁶

The question most often asked about science-fiction is: "But is it literature?" To this the science-fiction world has one powerful and overriding answer, and that answer is expressed in the name of H. G. Wells.

The two French authors referred to are Maurice Renard and J. H. Rosny Aîné who cannot be considered as being of the same stature as Wells but who are, none the less, important for the purposes of this paper.

H. G. Wells wrote two novels which are important because of the background they provide. Almost fifty years before Barjavel wrote his time travel tale, le Voyageur imprudent,²⁷ Wells had written his immortal excursion into

²⁵Ibid., pp. 139-79. ²⁶Moskowitz, op. cit., p. 128.

²⁷René Barjavel, le Voyageur imprudent (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1958).

this field, The Time Machine. Wells also gave us his version of the exploration of the moon in The First Men on the Moon, again more than fifty years before Colomb de la lune,²⁸ by Barjavel.

"On peut s'étonner que cet auteur", says M. Bridenne, "dont nous estimons que les nouvelles comptent parmi les plus saisantes de la littérature française. . . ne semble pas plus connu et considérée."²⁹ He is speaking of Maurice Renard whose works, M. Bridenne adds at another point, "donne le frison pour le frisson."³⁰ One sees in his works, as they are described by M. Bridenne, the shadow of Poe; and the fact M. Bridenne does say that ". . . l'auteur du Péril Bleu [the kind of story in which alien beings invade the earth] est le disciple français le plus complet" of Poe.

The name of J. H. Rosny Aîné is often found alongside that of Wells and Verne as a precursor of the modern science-fiction writers.³¹ The writer of this study was directed to write M. Borel-Rosny by Damon Knight. He indicated that M. Borel-Rosny who is a book dealer in Paris

²⁸René Barjavel, Colomb de la lune, (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1962).

²⁹Bridenne, op. cit., p. 211. ³⁰Ibid., p. 209.

³¹Pierre de Boisdeffre, une Histoire vivante de la littérature d'aujourd'hui (Paris: Le Livre Contemporain, 1960), p. 443.

would, in all likelihood, be able to help the writer to obtain materials needed for this thesis. As it turned out, it is evident that M. Borel-Rosny has a very extensive knowledge of the field particularly in regard to those materials relating to the works of his grandfather. The writer therefore accepts with only a little reservation the following information:³²

Sans doute Mr. Damon Knight vous a-t-il parlé [sic] de Rosny Aîné dont il a traduit deux nouvelles: Another World et The Shapes (l'une dans Fantasy and Science Fiction, l'autre en volume "a century of science-fiction"). Rosny a été un précurseur de la "science-fiction" des 1888 et le seul à cette époque à avoir introduit la science pure et la physique moderne dans des romans d'imagination et créé un genre qui lui appartient en propre: "le merveilleux scientifique."

M. Bridenne summarized his introduction of this little known author in the following manner:³³

Rosny Aîné chante l'espèce et ses réalisations il demande amoureusement aux découvertes et doctrines scientifiques les plus étonnantes possibilités de rêveries cosmiques et psychologiques. C'est cette familiarité emue avec la Science et avec les "possibles" qu'elle autorise qu'on retrouve chez lui depuis la fabuleuse histoire des Xipheuz et de Hommes Sangliers jusqu'à cette moderne symphonie

³²Robert Borel-Rosny in a personal letter to this writer dated February 27, 1969.

³³Bridenne, op. cit., pp. 196-197.

philosophique de Compagnons de l'Univers en passant par les indescriptibles découvertes bio-géographique de L'Etonnant Voyage, par les révélations de cette astronautique dont l'ancien président "des Goncourt" a été littéralement le parrain par le phénomène de bipartition étendu à un être humain qui a inspiré Le énigme de Givreuse.

Having set forth this summary of Rosny's themes he then goes on to make a comparison of the position and style of Rosny Aîné with his contemporary H. G. Wells. The writer of the current study said earlier that Rosny Aîné does not rank with Wells; however, it now appears that M. Rosny Aîné does indeed deserve further study and that his works might well lend themselves, perhaps by a comparison of them with those of his contemporary Wells, to the development of a splendid doctoral dissertation. M. Bridenne says:³⁴

Contrairement à ce que d'aucuns croient sans doute J. H. Rosny a devancé Wells dans l'usage du merveilleux scientifique. Mais il s'est courtoisement défendu, s'il ne l'a point imité, d'avoir pu de son côté l'inspirer. C'est ce que sous des ressemblances inévitables ces deux romanciers de la Science diffèrent notablement. Au moins dans ses premiers romans Wells cherche avant tout à impressionner tandis que son émule français cherche toujours à faire méditer lyriquement. Ensuite l'Anglais témoigne de moins d'angoisse et d'un certain flegme intellectualiste devant les possibilités de changement total de civilisations et même d'anéantissement de ses semblables par les puissances naturelles ou par d'autres races. Et en revanche il est plus volontiers "Progressiste" que Rosny Aîné, pourtant soucieux au plus haut point de l'heureuse continuité

³⁴Ibid., p. 197.

de notre espèce, redoutant toujours les faiblesses physiques, sociales, spirituelles de l'homme et que la réalité infiniment plus vaste que sa Science ne déjoue cette dernière.

What then has been the fate of this genre since these three authors ushered in the twentieth century? Most English speaking individuals are at least dimly aware of the popularity of its authors in English speaking countries if only by the fact that they are confronted by as high as twenty to twenty-five titles out of one hundred and forty when they approach a paper back book rack or by the fact that they face seven or eight major periodicals which are exclusively dedicated to the genre whenever they go to buy a magazine. This tremendous development was well under way before the beginning of the second World War. As one has already noted however it has only been in more recent years that the academic world has been willing to accord to some of the works produced by the writers of the genre the literary merit they so justly deserve. The writer has italicized "some" because he well recognizes, along with numerous other students of this field, that much of that which is produced is "trash;" however, as Isaac Asimov points out:³⁵

³⁵ Asimov, op. cit., p. 289.

Embedded in the crud, however, are stories that are entertaining, well-written and exciting--but, more than that, thought provoking in an odd way that is duplicated in no other form of literature.

Sadly enough it appears that the same degree of expansion has not taken place in France or, at least, has not taken place to the same extent that it has in English speaking countries. As M. Borel-Rosny wrote to the writer of this thesis:³⁶

Comme je vous l'avais écrit dans ma dernière lettre, la diffusion des livres de "science-fiction" est fort restreinte, peu de lecteurs donc des tirages limités à cinq mille, six mille, quinze mille exemplaires. . . d'où la difficulté de retrouver en librairies les livres de Barjavel ou autres romanciers.

This writer detects some signs of hope on the French scene, none the less. M. Barjavel and a number of other writers have dared to base a large portion of their reputation and their remuneration of novels of the genre. In recent years two or three science-fiction periodicals have appeared on the scene, Planète, Galaxie, Fiction, and Miroir du fantastique.³⁷ "Une revue intitulée "Fiction" qui parait depuis dix ans en France," M. Borel-Rosny has written the writer of this thesis, "a fait beaucoup pour

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Robert Borel-Rosny in a personal letter to this writer dated March 27, 1969.

37 Touttain, op. cit., p. 7.

faire connaître la littérature fantastique en France."³⁸
Even more encouraging is the fact that Mr. Thomas D. Clareson, editor of Extrapolation, The Newsletter of the M. L. A. Conference of Science-Fiction, said that Professor Bruce Franklin of the English Department of Stanford University "who has recently been on leave in France. . . reports that "while production of s-f was light in France, there was much interest in criticism."³⁹ And finally and the most encouraging of all is the choice that the French people themselves made this past year; they have, for the first time, awarded a literary prize to a science-fiction novel. Les Nouvelles littéraires headlined their article on the awarding of "le Prix des Libraires" as a "Plebiscite pour Barjavel."⁴⁰

³⁸Robert Borel-Rosny in a personal letter to this writer dated February 27, 1969.

³⁹Thomas D. Clareson, Editor of Extrapolation, The Newsletter of the M. L. A. Conference on Science-Fiction in a personal letter to this writer dated April 25, 1969.

⁴⁰Jacqueline Barde, "Plebiscite pour Barjavel," les Nouvelles littéraires, Numéro 2164 (13 mars 1969), p. 3.

CHAPTER III

THE LIFE OF RENÉ BARJAVEL

No authority has written anything which approaches a comprehensive study of the life of M. Barjavel. The writer of the current study was able to locate several short summaries of the author's life to date; and the author himself was kind enough to provide a mimeographed biography which does throw some additional light on the subject. It seems, however, that at least a part of what we say here must be taken for what it, of necessity, is--conjecture based upon the insights which this writer feels he has gained from an intensive study of the works of M. Barjavel.

René Barjavel was born January 24, 1911, less than sixty miles from the point at which Roman architects, practical and visionary at the same time, conceived and built one of the most famous Roman monuments in all of France; the monument is, of course, "le pont du Gard"; and its existence today attests to the mastery of the engineers who built it. Historians have said that Gaul was Rome's richest province; it provided the Roman conquerors with a vast array of products from its fertile river valleys and plains.

It is clear that M. Barjavel's formative years were such that he came away with a profound awareness of this

millenium long tradition of the "good earth". Several of his books are dedicated to:

. . . Paul Paget, mon grand père paysan, qui construisit de ses mains sa maison et creusa son puits, apprit à lire à vingt ans, vécut juste et droit, mourut sans avoir été malade, et qui m'aurait fait enfermé s'il avait vécu assez vieux pour lire ce livre. . . .
(Colomb de la lune, p. 7).

The picture which M. Barjavel paints of the old peasant farmer who is chosen by the omnipotent M. Gé in M. Barjavel's novel, le Diable l'emporte, to be a member of the last survivors of G. M. (Guerre Mondiale) 4 in the "Arche" is a first rate example of the influence which Barjavel's maternal grandfather had upon his writing.¹

Le père Privas était un petit propriétaire de l'Ardeche [an area which is not far removed from Barjavel's childhood home] un chef de famille paysanne reste tel que devaient être ses ancêtres mille ans plus tôt. La terre, morcelée, dispersée sur laquelle lui et ses fils s'archarnaient chaque jour de l'année n'offrait aucune possibilité de motoculture. Le cheval lui-même ne pouvait arriver partout, et c'était une grande mule qui tirait la charrue dans les morceaux les plus escarpés. Sur un tel bien, il n'était pas question de s'enrichir, mais seulement de subsister en y dépensant la peine nécessaire. C'était une peine dure et béni, qui donnait le blé, le vin, le lait. Un grain de blé petit, sec, transparent comme un silex, dont la farine faisait bien gonfler le pain. . . .

Les cheveux coupés ras une fois par mois, le visage sec, une moustache grise encadrant sa bouche, le père

¹René Barjavel, le Diable l'emporte (Paris; Editions Denoël, 1959), p. 189.

Privas buvait un verre de vin par repas et fumait une pipe par jour. Une pipe en terre rouge, au long tuyau qui restait accrochée à la cheminée, et qu'il ne décrochait que le soir, tout travail fini. Il ne faisait pas d'effort désordonné et ne gaspillait pas une miette de ce qui pouvait être consommé par des hommes ou des bêtes. Il ne se pressait jamais parce qu'il n'était jamais en retard. Il ne riait pas souvent parce qu'il n'en trouvait pas l'occasion, mais il était bien le contraire d'un homme triste. Il ressemblait à sa terre, sèche sous le soleil, pleine d'une force mesurée et inusable.

The "good earth" and the bread which comes from it are, for René Barjavel extremely important. He was born the son of a baker and says in his mimeographed biography that he worked with his father in the family bakery while going to school.² And he is the only one of his family who does not earn his living by some manual means. He attended the college of Cusset in the city where some fifteen to twenty years later Pétain was to establish his government under the German occupation. Upon receiving his baccalauréat he set about immediately earning his living; and he has not, apparently, ever done any further study of a strictly formal nature.

His working life has been a highly checkered one from the beginning. He was "successivement pion, démarcheur,

²René Barjavel, an unsigned, unpublished mimeographed biography provided by M. Barjavel, p. 1.

employe dans une banque, enfin, à 18 ans, journaliste dans un quotidien de Moulins."³ In his mimeographed biography M. Barjavel notes that during this time of searching he tried acting, tutoring and lecturing as well; however, once he had started in the field of publishing, he never again abandoned it. This is not to say that he spent his entire time writing. As he says himself, ". . .il y apprend son métier en tenant successivement toutes les rubriques, sauf celle de la politique, et en se passionnant pour les techniques du papier et de l'impression"⁴ (Italics not in the original). His interest in these technical aspects of the publishing industry opened the way to Paris for him shortly thereafter; he became the production supervisor for a large Paris publishing house. While working in this position he also ". . .collabore à divers journaux, dont le Merle blanc, et commence son premier roman."⁵ M. Barjavel indicates that this interest in science and technology began at an early age:⁶

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵René Barjavel, Tarendol (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1946), Livre de poche édition, Numéro 2206, p. 1. Tarendol is not one of M. Barjavel's science-fiction novels; it is without doubt, however, a notable contribution to the world of the literature of love.

⁶Evelyn Vivet, "Avec René Barjavel: Prix des Librairies, 1969," an article supplied to this writer in unbound form by M. Barjavel. No further bibliographical information was available.

---D'où vient votre goût pour l'anticipation?

---D'abord de Jules Verne, qui a illuminé mon enfance, de même que les illustrés de l'époque: "L'intrépide", "Les belles images", qui contenaient déjà des recits de science-fiction. J'étais passionné. . . et j'ai continué. Je dévore toutes les revues de vulgarisation scientifique, j'assiste émerveillé aux tentatives des hommes vers le cosmos. Émerveillé. . . et aussi terrifié. Il suffirait de si peu de chose pour que tout s'écroule. Il faut trouver une solution, empêcher que l'homme se détruise.

He married Madeleine de Wattripont in 1936; and in the three years following they had two children, René and Jean.⁷ With the children came the Second World War which the writer of the present study feels to be of real importance in the development of M. Barjavel's writing and of the attitudes which he exhibits therein. M. Barjavel writes:⁸

L'armée française sachant utiliser ses compétences, fait de lui un cuisinier. C'est armé d'une louche qu'il fait la campagne de Belgique et affronte l'armée allemande. Repoussé jusqu'à l'Atlantique, il est démobilisé. . . .

In the opening pages of le Voyageur imprudent M. Barjavel describes what might well have been a situation which he himself observed:

C'était un vieux cheval brèche-dents et un peu borgne à la robe couleur de terre. Depuis qu'il faisait si froid, Polinet ne le sortait jamais sans protéger son oeil malade par un bandeau taille dans sa ceinture de laine bleue. Une grande amitié unissait ce paysan à la bête asthmatique. La guerre les avait arrachés aux mêmes labours, plongés dans les mêmes incompréhensibles misers. (Italics not in original) (le Voyageur imprudent, p. 13-14.)

⁷Barjavel, mimeographed biography, p. 1.

⁸Ibid.

After the demobilization, M. Barjavel founded a weekly newspaper for young people in the non-occupied zone. Some of the first writings of such authors as "Jacques Laurent, François Chalais, Yvan Christ, Henri-François Ray. . ." appeared therein.⁹ It was during this period, in 1943 to be exact, that M. Barjavel's first science-fiction novel appeared. Ravage¹⁰ was followed by the aforementioned le Voyageur imprudent; this novel was not published, however, until fifteen years after it was written.

Since the end of the Second World War, M. Barjavel has continued to follow his chosen profession of writing. He has not limited himself to any one field however; he has two major essays in print, Cinéma total¹¹ and la Faim du tigre.¹² And in addition he has branched over into the world of radio, television and the movies with a large number of scripts "en particulier la série des Don Camillo. Il a

⁹Barjavel, mimeographed biography, p. 1.

¹⁰René Barjavel, Ravage (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1943), Livre de Poche édition 520.

¹¹René Barjavel, Cinéma total (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1962), pp. 228.

¹²René Barjavel, la Faim du tigre (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1962).

lui-même réalisé plusieurs courts-métrages."¹³ He currently serves as a writer for the television critic of Radio Luxemburg and for the Journal du Dimanche.

This paper will concern itself with his novels only, and of these we will consider only those which clearly fall within the scope of science-fiction. Of the seven which M. Barjavel has written to date only two do not fit within the definition; one is the love story of Tarendol and the other is a retelling of the passion of Christ in modern setting entitled le Jour du feu.¹⁴ The others which do belong to the genre are, in the order in which they were written, Ravage (1943), le Voyageur imprudent (1958), le Diable l'emporte (1959), Colomb de la lune (1962), and la Nuit des temps (1968).

¹³Barjavel, mimeographed biography, p. 1.

¹⁴René Barjavel, le Jour du feu (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1957), pp. 203.

CHAPTER IV

SCIENCE-FICTION. "CHEZ" RENÉ BARJAVEL

In order to have a systematic approach to M. Barjavel's five science-fiction novels, this writer would like to propose the following subdivisions. First, in order to gain an overall grasp of the subject matter let us review rapidly the plot of each of the five novels in the order in which they were written. Secondly, we should attempt to isolate the main character types which make themselves felt in M. Barjavel's novels; and we should, at the same time, attempt to study his style. We should attempt to isolate the themes which are of predominate importance in his works and to relate these to his philosophy as he expresses it.

Ravage opens midway through the twenty-first century. The world has become almost totally mechanized even to the point of food production. Much of what is produced for consumption is either synthetic or grown under automated hot house conditions. M. Barjavel suggests early in the book that mankind has not only benefited from the marvels that his technology is producing but that he has in fact become totally dependent upon it. A rather fuzzily explained alteration in the laws of the physical universe takes place; all electricity disappears and with its disappearance practically everything imaginable comes to a screeching halt. One is forced by the

book to think of the near disaster which was suffered on the East Coast, particularly in New York City, during the recent failure of electrical power there.

The hero of the work, a self-sufficient young man from the country, rescues his wife-to-be, pulls together a small band of stalwarts and their wives and sets out for his home area in the south of France, after wiping out a rival band. The trip is a study in horror; one might add that depiction of scenes of total disaster, the decomposition of piles of corpses, et cetera, is a subject in which M. Barjavel is without a doubt unexcelled. The group finally makes it to the safe haven of the rural south, where the hero, through his uprightness, wiseness and justice becomes the patriarch of a new agrarian society which is organized so as to avoid the folly of Man's ever again becoming dependent upon machines. As a matter of fact when one inventive genius does manage to create a steam engine, he expects to be rewarded by the Old Man, but the patriarch's attitude is far from one of joy. He cries:

Insensé! . . . Le cataclysme que faillit faire périr le monde est-il déjà si lointain qu'un homme de ton âge ait pu en oublier la leçon? Ne sais-tu pas, ne vous l'ai-je pas appris à tous, que les hommes se perdirent justement parce qu'ils avaient voulu épargner leur peine? (Ravage, p. 276).

The patriarch is killed by the maker of the machine who is in turn crushed by his own invention. The abomination is then

destroyed by the Old Man's successor thus insuring the continuation of the true way.

One must realize that Ravage and le Voyageur imprudent were written in the nineteen-forties at a time when France was entirely cut off from the United States if one is to appreciate the true breadth and depth of Barjavel's perception. One needs to look only at the most recent issue of Life magazine to realize that the days of Aldous Huxley's Brave New World are in fact upon us.¹ M. Barjavel said in a recent interview that we are on the verge of a mutation of mankind who "ou bien s'adaptera, ou bien se détruira lui-même".² What is most startling is to realize that M. Barjavel held this attitude as far back as 1943 when he wrote le Voyageur imprudent.

The plot of this novel revolves around the invention of a chemical substance which makes time travel possible and around the uses to which this invention is put. The protagonist of the novel makes several trips into the future and returns to describe what he has found to the inventor of the substance. He is forced to remain behind because of the fact

¹Albert Rosenfeld, "Challenge to the Miracle of Life", Life Vol. 66, No. 23 (June 13, 1969), pp. 38-51.

²E. Vivet, op. cit., p. 4.

that he is immobilized in a wheelchair. It is upon his trips to the distant future that Saint-Menoux, the chief character, discovers that humanity has changed and adapted practically beyond recognition. Each function of the single human being has been split off and given a separate identity. Thus Saint-Menoux says:

Ainsi l'homme est-il devenu peu à peu, au cours des siècles, la cellule d'un corps social parfait. Il ne voit, n'entend, ne sent que ce qui concerne sa tâche dont rien ne le détourne. Il ne connaît ni la souffrance, ni le regret, ni l'envie.

.

Je n'oublie pas que mes explorations n'ont d'autre but que de découvrir le secret du bonheur, sinon pour l'homme, du moins pour les hommes. L'ont-ils enfin trouvé? Il est certain qu'ils ne sont pas malheureux. C'est déjà beaucoup. Sont-ils heureux? Je ne peux résoudre ce problème avant de savoir s'ils connaissent l'amour (le Voyageur imprudent, pp. 131-135).

Towards the end of the novel Saint-Menoux turns his studies toward the past and it is here that he makes the fatal error which is evoked by the "imprudent" of the title. He makes an attempt to change history by shooting Napoleon but ends instead in killing his own grandfather. This turn of events of course creates a paradox in time of the worst nature; for if Saint-Menoux killed his own grandfather, then he would not have existed and, therefore, could not have

killed his own grandfather which would again mean...etc.,
etc., ad. infinitum. M. Barjavel claims that he is
 "l'inventeur en Europe du paradoxe temporel".³

Colomb de la lune was for this writer by far the most difficult of M. Barjavel's novels to comprehend. In the book are four or possibly five stories in one. Two main subplots exist; the first is a very imaginative speculation of man's first conquest of the moon. The method which M. Barjavel proposes was considered and actually used for some space experiments in the early days of American rocket development. He suggests that the rocket could be carried high in the atmosphere by means of balloons and then that if set free to fly off into space, it would save a great deal in the amount of energy needed to put the rocket into orbit. The second subplot revolves around the life of the wife of Colomb, the chosen astronaut. She is, as the back cover of the novel says, involved in "un aventure qui est sans doute plus dangereuse que la conquête des étoiles. Cela se nomme l'amour. . . ." ⁴ Wound in and about these two stories is the dream which the astronaut is having. The system of

³Barjavel, mimeographed biography, p. 1.

⁴Barjavel, Colomb de la lune, back cover.

propulsion which Barjavel proposes would be quite slow; his astronaut is going, therefore, to sleep his way to the moon in a state of suspended animation. The scientists of the space program have Colomb and seventeen other astronauts in training and Colomb has been dreaming since he started. This dream communicates itself to the reader as a rather complex symbolic parable; it is, according to the author of the novel, the story that the astronaut's mother told to him just before she died; and M. Barjavel justifies its inclusion in the novel by saying:

Pourquoi Colomb a-t-il été choisi parmi les dix-sept? Pourquoi lui et pas un autre? Qui l'a choisi?

C'est moi, qui voulez-vous.

Il y avait d'autres candidats. Sans compter ceux à qui on peut donner les noms qu'on voudra et qui n'ont aucune importance, il y avait don Quichotte, Superman, Hamlet, Fausto Coppi. Des champions. Chacun avait ses chances et ses bonnes raisons. Mais quand il s'est présenté, lui Colomb, les autres n'ont plus existé.

Je l'ai choisi un peu à cause de l'histoire que lui contait sa mère. C'est ce qui le rend si léger (Italics not in the original) (Colomb de la lune, p. 40).

The story itself is a rather mystical tale. It tells of a princess who lives on one side of a great forest which no one in the Kingdom has ever crossed and of a Prince who lives on the other side in the Republic which is ruled by the Prince's father, Haroun al Rachid. The Prince is raised and educated by his 61,320 mothers; but he is named by his father. His father calls him Azza which, according to the story teller, means that "ce prince encore petit était le

commencement et la fin et de nouveau le commencement" (Colomb de la lune, p. 33) of his father's hopes. The story teller goes on to say that the same name in French is Christophe and that this means "celui-qui-porte-Dieu".

The story is abruptly stopped by the death of the Astronaut's mother. The Prince is ready to be married and his father has invited M. Gé, le Grand Vizir, to give him the hand of his daughter. But his reply is that he has no children and we are left hanging with the sentence "De l'autre côté de la forêt, la Princesse. . . ." It is certainly no accident that the Prince's name and that of the Astronaut are the same and likewise that the name of the Grand Vizir and that of the chief of the police force which surrounds the villa where the Astronaut's wife and her lover are passing their days are the same.

At the end of the novel the wife has to decide how her husband who is trapped on the moon must die, whether his death would be slow by suffocation or whether the men on the ground should set off the self-destruct mechanism while he is still asleep. She decides in favor of solution number two and then turns to go back to her lover only to discover that he has fled through an open window of her bedroom dressed in a pair of her gold lamé pants and red silk blouse. He is singing a portion of a song which he thinks that he has invented but which is in reality part of a poem which the

King of the Kingdom recites to his daughter on the day that she discovers that she is becoming a woman. The line goes:

Tes seins sont des abeilles
Qui se plantent dans mon coeur. . . .
 (Italics in the original) (Colomb de la lune, p. 223).

The wife's agony is redressed by the fact that she will soon have a baby and they will say to her, "C'est un garçon, il lui ressemble, ses yeux, ses longues mains, sa taille, il danse. . ." (Colomb de la lune, p. 224).

Colomb, having been liberated from the confining requirements of his training, is at last able to take the initiative:

Colomb sait ce qu'il doit faire. C'est si simple Il ne l'a pas su plus tôt parce que la conscience couvrait tout de son manteau d'apparences et de mensonges. Elle s'est effacée comme un dessin embrouillé. La page est redevenue blanche.

Pour la première fois depuis des mois, Colomb déplie son bras droit plié contre sa poitrine. Ce n'est plus impossible et défendu. C'est simple. Il étend son bras. Son bras passe à travers le scaphandre et la mousse, et son index trouve le bouton sur la paroi interne de l'oeuf. Le bouton qui était là et qui attendait. . . . Tout est possible dans le blanc. Il appuie sur le bouton, et la fusée se sépare de l'arbre noir qui l'empêche de poursuivre son voyage, les moteurs s'allument doucement, la poussière s'écarte devant leurs feux roses, la fusée s'enfonce vers la Lune, la vraie, celle qui est au fond de la poussière, celle qui l'attend.

La fusée traverse les kilomètres de poussière, les épaisseurs de terrains et de roches, pénètre au coeur de Lune et se pose derrière la Fôret.

La fusée s'ouvre et Colomb en descend. Ses pieds foulent une herbe épaisse et douce comme un tapis. Devant lui, les jets d'eaux et les roses bordent jusqu'à l'horizon le chemin blanc qui conduit au Palais.

Colomb marche vers le Palais. Et, venant du Palais, marche vers lui la Princesse (Colomb de la lune, pp. 218-219).

Thus Barjavel ties the Astronaut's dream to reality and restates forcefully one of his favorite themes which is that some of our strongest realities are at their core totally inexplicable. Thus in a note written to the reader, he defends his use of a change in the physical laws of the universe in his novel Ravage in the following manner:

Ici Saint-Menoux, malgré son esprit scientifique, commet une erreur. Dans Ravage, qui est le récit de cet événement, de ses conséquences pour l'humanité et des aventures de François, à travers le monde qui s'écroule, jusqu'à l'établissement de sa dynastie, l'auteur qui a étudié les faits autant qu'il était possible de le faire, en arrive à cette conclusion: l'électricité n'a pas disparu, elle a simplement cessé, en un instant et dans le monde entier, de se manifester sous ses formes habituelles. Ainsi les corps jusque la conducteurs brusquement ne le sont plus. Ainsi, il n'y a plus de courant, plus de foudre, plus d'étincelles, plus rien dans les piles ne les accus. Ainsi tous les moteurs, y compris les moteurs atomiques et les moteurs solaires à cellules photoélectriques, s'arrêtent au même instant dans le monde entier. D'un seul coup, tous les véhicules stoppent, tous les avions tombent, toutes les usines cessent de tourner. Plus de transports, plus de courant, plus d'eau, plus de vivres dans les immenses villes qui ont drainé toute la population du XXI^e siècle. C'est un écroulement effrouable et subit, à cause de ce simple phénomène: une des forces naturelles auxquelles l'homme s'est habitué a tout à coup changé d'aspect. Quelles sont les causes de ce changement? L'auteur ne saurait vous le dire. Mais sauriez-vous lui dire quelles sont les causes qui font de l'électricité, aujourd'hui, ce qu'elle est? (Note de l'Editeur) (Italics in the original) (Le Voyageur imprudent, pp. 128-129).

One cannot leave this novel without mentioning three other aspects which are important. The first of these three

is the subplot which exists when a reporter searches out Colomb's older sister in the hope that she will be his passport to the villa and to the big story that he is sure exists there. The second of the three is an off shoot of the space program. One of the astronauts who is in training by having his body temperature lowered refuses to warm up; on the contrary, for some inexplicable reason his body temperature continues to lower until he reaches absolute zero. This astonishing turn of events is followed by one which is even more astonishing; the astronaut, upon reaching this seemingly unattainable temperature, inverts in all respects in relation to our physical universe: up becomes down, black becomes white and he, or rather she, is reversed in time becoming younger as the scientists watch. And finally one should mention that the novel has a preface which amounts to a manifesto on the part of M. Barjavel.

He sets forth a number of ideas in this preface about the nature of writing. In a recent article he said that his name, Barjavel, means "bavarde" in "provençal". He adds:⁵

Ce n'est sûrement pas à moi que ce terme s'applique car je suis très taciturne--et ma famille s'en plaint souvent--mais il s'agit à coup sur d'un ancêtre qui devait autrefois "conter" des histoires au coin du feu à la vielle.

⁵Vivet, op. cit., p. 4.

C'est sûrement de lui que j'ai hérité ce goût d'inventer des histoires ou je me libère du naturalisme ou je fabrique ma propre réalité.

One can clearly see M. Barjavel's awareness of this ancient heritage and of a heritage of more recent origin in what he says:

Un roman c'est une histoire qu'un un-peu-fou s'invente et se raconte, à haute voix dans l'espoir que les raisonnables l'entendront. Il y a des histoires qui attirent toute la famille au coin du feu, et les voisins par les fenêtres. Il y en a qui font fuir même la servante. Il y aussi celles qui endorment même le grand-père qui ne dort jamais, et parfois le conteur. Et celles que personne n'entend, bien que le conteur ait l'impression de parler très fort. Et plus il crie, plus c'est silence.

De toute façon le temps passe et on oublie l'histoire et les mots de l'histoire. Une heure un siècle une civilisation, c'est la même chose: un instant.

Aussi n'y a-t-il pas de quoi, la dernière page écrite se regarder le nombril dans l'espoir d'y trouver un diamant. Le boulanger a fait son pain, quelqu'un l'a mangé cela lui profite, bonne viande ou cellulite, selon le pain selon les dents. Le boulanger recommence, c'est son plaisir c'est son travail. Qui se nourrira du vent de l'histoire? Qui ceux qui ont faim l'échappent, et s'il leur échappe il a de quoi courir.

Cette histoire je l'ai écrite, c'est mon travail, c'est mon plaisir. Elle est à vous maintenant, allez-y, étamez-la. Le début est sec, c'est exprès, pour vous aiguïser les dents. Ça devient vite plus tendre. Et le meilleur est à la fin. Un bon livre c'est comme l'amour (Colomb de la lune, pp. 11-12).

If this novel was for this reader the hardest of M. Barjavel's novels to comprehend, it was also the most thought-provoking. This writer doubts that any of the author's works, with the possible exception of his most recent, la Nuit des temps, contain more depth; and this writer also feels that

there would be few of his works in which one could find deeper insights into his basic philosophy.

The fourth in the series of M. Barjavel's novels, le Diable l'emporte, foretells of the annihilation of mankind, with the exception of one couple, by the third and fourth world wars. A super-capitalist and behind the scenes manipulator of empires and world affairs, M. Gé, tries to save mankind from his fate by bringing together a superb group of young men and women within the safety of the "Arche" which is buried thousands of feet under the butte of Montmartre during the third world war. The war turns out to be something of a false alarm due to the fact that the only ones killed by the atomic holocaust are some penguins at the North Pole. This writer hesitates to ascribe such a gross error to the author; however, since he provides no explanation of how the penguins have arrived there, we are left to wonder if the author is unaware of the fact that penguins are limited to the southern hemisphere, which hardly seems possible, or if he simply ignored this detail in the process of concocting a good story.

The major damage of the Third World War does not, as we have already stated, result from bombs; it is, on the contrary, created by the hundreds of thousands of panic-stricken citizens of every city in the world who try to escape from the obvious targets for the bombs to the obvious safety of

the country. Thousands upon hundreds of thousands of them die of starvation, while still thousands more die of disease due to improper sanitation or from competition with their fellow man for the remaining scraps of food. One gets the impression that the country side is denuded as if a million bands of locust had passed over it. In general those who are forced to remain behind in the city by the lack of a means of transportation fare better; before long, there is some return to normalcy. The war has taught mankind its final lesson, or so it seems; and the survivors quickly set about destroying all the bombs and creating the "Paix Universelle".

However, one soon discovers that it is impossible for mankind to really renounce its age old habits of bellicosity. New and more subtle ways of creating huge numbers of deaths are created. M. Gé, who is dissatisfied with the results of his choice of survivors from the abortive Third World War, chooses this time two families. One is from the city and contains two girls and an adopted son; and the other is from the country and contains, as noted in an earlier chapter, a peasant father, his wife and his son. All are kept within the safety of the "Arche"; but a true Doomsday Machine has been invented and it is loosed upon the world by its Swiss inventor who would rather die than live in slavery. The only hope of survival for mankind is encapsulated in a

rocket by M. Gé and sent into space to circle the Earth in a state of suspended animation for a period of ten years. At which time, M. Gé hopes that this new Adam and Eve will be able to return and start life anew.

There is one ironic twist that should not go unnoticed. It takes place at the end of the novel. Despite M. Gé's careful planning, the young peasant boy, who knows everything that would be of use in a future agrarian society, is, through a strange twist of love and fate, supplanted by the adopted son of the city family whose sole interest throughout his growing up days has been technology and science. This turn of events is caused by the love of a misanthropic scientist, Lucien Hono, for the girl who was originally chosen by M. Gé to accompany the country boy on his journey into space. Hono had been attempting, at M. Gé's bidding, to find some way to undo the damage done by the Doomsday Machine so that there will be something for the young couple to return to besides death; but up until the moment that he takes his chosen Eve into his arms, the scientist has failed to find the catalyst that he has needed to make his reaction work. However, his love for the girl and the chemicals in his own body provide the needed catalyst; and the pair die in a blinding flash of consuming and purifying fire, thus preparing the way for the new age.

Is it possible to create a new twist for the old, old plot of the star-crossed lovers? There are notable examples down through the history of Western literature: Tristan and Iseult, Romeo and Juliet, and Tony and Maria, to name a few. It would now appear that the realm of science-fiction has been given its pair. Their names are Paikan and Eléa; and their dream is played out in M. Barjavel's recent prize-winning novel, la Nuit des temps.

Their story begins as an astounding mystery, one in which the whole world participates. In the words of M. Barjavel: "L'aventure commença par une mission des plus banales, la routine, le quotidien, l'ordinaire." (la Nuit des temps, p. 9). At some time--the immediate future, twenty years from now, at this very moment perhaps, a French survey team is in the process of recording and exploring by means of specialized instruments the surface of the Antarctic continent which is covered by nearly 1,000 meters of ice. Suddenly the survey team registers a signal emanating from below! Thus the mystery begins; what is the source of the signal? With very little calculation the scientists quickly determine that if something were to be buried under the ice it would have to be at least 900,000 years old!

Of course, the world must know what is there, 1,000 meters down beneath the ice:

Là, au point 612 du Continent antarctique, sur le parallèle 88, sous 980 mètres de glace, il y a les restes de quelque chose qui a été construit par une intelligence et ce quelque chose émet un signal. Depuis 900,000 ans ce signal dit: "Je suis là, je vous appelle, venez. . . ." Pour la première fois, les hommes viennent de l'entendre. Allons-nous hésiter? Nous avons sauvé les temples de la vallée du Nil. Mais l'eau montante du barrage d'Assouan nous poussait au derrière. Ici, évidemment, il n'y a pas nécessité il n'y a pas urgence! Mais il y a quelque chose de plus grand: il y a le devoir. Le devoir de connaître. De savoir. On nous appelle. Il faut y aller! Cela demande des moyens considérables. La France ne peut pas faire tout. Elle fera sa part. Elle demande aux autres nations de se joindre à elle (*Italics in the original*) (la Nuit des temps, p. 29).

When the researchers reach the surface of the continent they encounter a strange phenomenon; there are animals and flora; but they can be studied only while they are encased in ice, for as soon as the scientists attempt to cut through to them, they turn to dust and disappear. However, this disappointment does not deter them, for the signal continues; it comes from beneath the surface. When they finally reach the source of the signal, they discover a great sphere of super-hard gold; within the sphere, once they manage to get it open, they discover an egg of gold; and within the egg rest two human beings. As with le Diable l'emporte, they are in a state of suspended animation; this time, however, M. Barjavel is more specific as to the means. They sleep in solidified blocks of pure hydrogen. If this seems far-fetched, perhaps one should consider that there are a number of adherents of the concepts of Dr. Robert Ettenger already "sleeping" in

liquid hydrogen tombs, awaiting the day when an advanced science will be able to restore them to life.⁶

The fact that there are two individuals in the egg, a man and a woman, immediately creates a dilemma for the scientists. Who should be first? Should it out of chivalry be the man, thereby safeguarding the woman's life by giving the scientists increased information to work with; or should it be the woman, thereby protecting the more valuable information of which the man is undoubtedly the possessor? Practicality finally wins and the woman is revived first, thus setting the stage for the tragedy which is to climax the novel.

When Eléa has been successfully revived, the scientists are faced with the problem of keeping her alive for she does not seem to have any great will to live. The first great hurdle is communication; in the end all the master computers of the world are linked together in the greatest mechanical mind ever created in order to break the language barrier. The hurdle is finally surmounted and the visitor from the past is snatched from the clutches of starvation. The key words, and the first to be translated by the giant world-encircling brain, are "the eat machine". It seems that Eléa's

⁶L. Wainwright, "Cold way to new life, the body of J. H. Bedford frozen shortly after death," Life, Vol. 62 (January 27, 1967), p. 16.

society was so far advanced that they had long before abandoned growing things as a source of food. They depended upon pills which were dispensed by small machines which in turn fabricated what was needed through a link with the elemental energy of the universe. Once provided with "the eat machine" which was in the egg along with numerous other artifacts, Eléa is soon revitalized and is able to relate her story by means of a telepathic device. One of the base technicians is able to connect the device to a television set; and she relates how she and her companion came to be in the egg.

The situation could be the world of today. A third world war had devastated the two major world powers. The smaller but scientifically more advanced of the two, Gondawa, had buried its population within the earth; while the far more numerous Enisorai had depended upon their vastly superior numbers to carry them through to victory. It had been a stand off; and both of the great powers had foresworn the further use of atomic weapons. Enisorai had begun almost immediately to equip its citizenry with a hand weapon of limited power. Their use, however, in huge numbers would tend to make them almost irresistible. Gondawa, faced with this threat, had manufactured a Doomsday Machine whose exact nature is never clearly specified; they had informed the Enisorai that the next war would be the last.

Against this background the drama of Eléa and Païkan is played out. The Gondawan society was quite highly organized in a computerized dictatorship. Individuals were studied from birth and from even before birth as a result of extensive genealogical records, and they were carefully matched with a perfect partner at the early age of seven. These matches, the author would have one believe, were almost infallible and, as was the case with Eléa and Païkan, often produced a deep and irrevocable love at first sight.

Thus M. Barjavel describes the day of Designation of Eléa and of Païkan as follows:

La fillette du premier plan, la plus belle de toutes, était Eléa, reconnaissable et différente. Différente moins à cause de l'âge que de la paix et de la joie qui illuminaient son visage. Le garçon qui était debout près d'elle la regardait, et elle regardait le garçon. Il était blond comme le blé mur au soleil. Ses cheveux lisses tombaient droit autour de son visage jusqu'à ses épaules fines où déjà les muscles esquissaient leur galbe enveloppe. Ses yeux noisettes regardaient dans le miroir les yeux bleux d'Eléa, et leur souriaient.

.....

Eléa-enfant regardait le garçon, et le garçon la regardait. Ils étaient heureux et beaux. Ils se reconnaissaient comme s'ils avaient marché toujours à la rencontre l'un de l'autre, sans hâte et sans impatience, avec la certitude de se rencontrer. Le moment de la rencontre était venu, ils étaient l'un avec l'autre et ils se regardaient. Ils se découvraient, ils étaient tranquilles et émerveillés (la Nuit des temps, p. 159).

It comes as no surprise to the reader, therefore, that Eléa and Païkan do their utmost to escape when they find that Coban, Gondawa's foremost scientist intends to separate them.

His purpose is to save mankind from the coming holocaust; and it is to that end that he has turned almost the total resources of Gondawa's great central University. He proposes to give himself and Eléa the only two doses of an immortality serum which he has just discovered and to set out with her on a journey to the future. He has, however, failed to take into account the great love which Eléa and Païkan hold for each other, for they would rather die than be separated.

Païkan manages to break into the tomb just as Coban is about to shut the door upon the war which is raging without. Païkan replaces Coban, but he is badly burned in the process. The reader, of course, does not discover the change until the very end; and Eléa never finds it out. For she is asked to help Coban, who is really her husband, by giving him a blood transfusion since she is the only one in the whole world whose blood is of the right type. She sees her moment for revenge and poisons herself, and in doing so she poisons Païkan whom she believes to be Coban.

And what of mankind? They gain nothing from the possible wealth of knowledge that is within their grasp. All of it is destroyed through deception and intrigue. As a matter of fact, they are forced to abandon the site entirely because one of the scientists has mined the computer. It is close enough to the atomic pile so as to cause the pile to rupture, or at worse, to go into an uncontrolled chain reaction.

But there is perhaps a ray of hope; practically all of what Eléa has reported about the beginning of the war which ended all wars has been relayed to the world and in the closing pages of the novel one finds the following description of events:

Tous les gouvernements faisaient l'impossible pour éviter le pire. Des envoyés spéciaux croisaient des médiateurs à toutes altitudes, dans toutes les directions. On espérait, on espérait beaucoup. La jeunesse bougeait un peu partout. On ne savait pas ce qu'elle voulait. Elle non plus sans doute. Les étudiants, les jeunes ouvriers, les jeunes paysans, et les bandes de plus en plus nombreuses qui n'étaient rien et ne voulaient rien être se réunissaient se mélangeaient, envahissaient les rues des capitales, coupaient la circulation, chargeaient la police en criant: "Non! Non! Non! Non!" Dans toutes les langues, cela s'exprime par un petit mot explosif, facile à crier. Ils le criaient tous, ils savaient qu'ils ne voulaient pas. On ne sut pas exactement lesquels commencèrent à crier le "non!" des étudiants gondas: la jeunesse du monde le criait, . . . (Italics in the original) (la Nuit des temps, pp. 314-315).

2. CHARACTERIZATION

René Barjavel provided a schema for a study of his characterization in his fourth novel, Colomb de la lune. The parable of the Prince and Princess which was mentioned earlier elicits practically every major type of character found in his works. In the second paragraph of the parable one is introduced to the King and Queen who give the impression that they are simply Mr. and Mrs. Average Mother and Father. They are confronted by the same problems faced by all other

parents even down to explaining to their daughter about sex. The Queen says to her, "Ma chérie, ma chérie, . . .émue, ils te serviront à nourrir tes enfants chéris. . . ." And the King tells her "Ne laisse jamais ces goulus s'approcher de ces fleurs, . . . Ils les devasteraient. Il existe aujourd'hui du lait condensé sucre qui est une confiture pour nourrir les enfants." And adds to this counsel the following injunction, "Garde tes seins à l'usage exclusif de l'homme qui t'aimera. Ils sont faits pour son plaisir et pour le tien." The Princess having heard their counsels including part of a poem which the King recites for her:

. . .rêvait. Elle entendait chanter dans sa tête la phrase comme un ruban dans un vent léger. "Tes seins sont des abeilles qui se plantent dans mon cœur."

Alors elle rougit et referma son corsage. Et elle ne les montra plus à personne (Italics in the original) (Colomb de la lune, pp. 124-125).

The Prince, the son of the Emperor of the Republic, is her romantic counterpart. These two are the idealized archetype of a long list of lovers which leads from François and Blanche in Ravage to Eléa and Païkan in la Nuit des temps. The Emperor on the other hand is a superhuman character type. He exercises a God-like power and control over human destiny. The author writes:

La fusée descendit au centre de la plaine et se posa sur la Grande Meule. Ce fut comme un bijou sur un chapeau de paille. L'Empereur prit Christophe par la main et descendit avec lui par l'intérieur de la Grande Meule. . . . Le temps de sa vie n'aurait pas

suffi à un homme ordinaire pour descendre jusqu'à la marche. Mais c'était l'Empereur qui tenait la main du Prince, et ils arrivèrent en bas le temps d'un étage (Completely italicized in the original) (Colomb de la lune, p. 34).

There are two other types which should be considered in order to complete the picture; the first is M. Gé, the Grand Vizir, and his counterpart, the King's prime minister. These are the intelligent individuals who like the exercise of power but lack the internal fortitude or the drive to take the required responsibility upon themselves. They relegate themselves to a secondary position where they can exercise power without responsibility and as a result they are inferior copies of the master type dealt with in the preceding paragraph. The second of the two types mentioned at the beginning of the paragraph is represented by the "servante". She and her counterparts throughout the rest of the novels are not complete in and of themselves, but rather they serve as foils, thereby helping to illuminate the main character or characters. This is not to say that these minor characters are not important; on the contrary, it is clear that these individuals provide extremely interesting sidelights and that they do give distinct and individual illuminations of the world of M. Barjavel which cannot be obtained from any other source. Let us therefore begin with these minor character types in order to see what insights they will give us; and with these types as a background we will then

progress toward the central characterization.

This category of minor characters can be subdivided into several sub-categories: those who are worthy of survival when a major catastrophe arises; those who illuminate the man and woman or family relationship; those who abrogate control of their own destiny; and those who represent M. Barjavel's picture of the scientific community.

Pierre Durillot is the first chosen by François, the hero of Ravage, to be a member of his small band of survivors. He is a mechanic and has a wife who is expecting a child. He is described as "petit, mince, et blond, toujours souriant . . . ," and Barjavel adds that he "s'amusaient à peindre à ses heures de loisirs." His personality is set in relief when he and François join with others in Paris, to fight fire:

A la chaîne, malgré sa petite taille, Durillot s'était montré infatigable et n'avait renoncé, avec François, que devant l'evidence de l'inutilité de tout effort. Les deux hommes revinrent ensemble, et François proposa à son compagnon de coordonner leurs efforts pour subsister et sortir de Paris. Pierre accepta avec joie. Marié depuis un an, il attendait un enfant. Il se sentait plein d'angoisse pour l'avenir, et se déclara prêt à obéir à François qu'il sentait plus fort et plus déterminé que lui. François de son côté, fut heureux de ne plus se trouver seul (Ravage, p. 150).

Narcisse, the second of François' choices, is characterized as:

. . . un sculpteur d'ascendance bretonne, âgé d'une quarantaine d'années, grand et ventru, qui habitait un atelier proche. Ses voisins l'entendaient, d'habitude, chanter en pétrissant sa glaise. Il portait une

barbiche à deux pointes, blonde dorée, de son ton naturel, mais le plus souvent couleur d'argile, par l'habitude qu'il avait de s'y essuyer les mains (Ravage, p. 169).

The third and fourth members of the band are similarly described. George Pellison was a past competitor in La Tour de France. "Il était âgé d'environ trente-cinq ans. Séché par le sport cycliste, il avait de grands membres et un torse filiforme, à peine plus gros que ses cuisses" (Ravage, p. 170). And the fourth member, André Martin, a factory worker, "était court et large, fort comme un taureau. Il avait tout juste vingt ans, des cheveux blonds, un bon visage rond et rose, et des yeux bleus comme le matin" (Ravage, p. 170). It is interesting that Barjavel permits only the first two of these four, the painter and the sculptor, to survive the journey to the promised land. Pellison is killed within the first few days during a scirmish with a rival band. Martin is swept into a chasm as he tries heroically to save some of the group's belongings which have been carried away by the river. M. Barjavel regards the qualities of his sculptor, Narcisse, so highly that it is from his lineage that François, the patriarch, chooses his replacement. Barjavel writes:

C'est un garçon de trente ans. Il se nomme Paul.
Dans ses veines coule le sang breton de Narcisse, le

compagnon d'épopée du patriarche. Ce dernier l'avait remarqué pour son courage, sa générosité et son intelligence, . . . (Ravage, p. 269).

Three short cameos exist as exceptionally good examples of the effect of Barjavel's characterization upon our insight into the relationships which exist between man and woman and within the family. The first of these cameos occurs in Ravage:

Juste au moment où le soleil atteignait ses cheveux, la jeune femme apaisée referma ses cuisses lasses. Avec le couteau qui avait accompli tant de besognes utiles ou tragiques, François coupa le cordon du nouveau-né. C'était un garçon, maigre et rouge comme un chat écorché. A la troisième seconde, il se mit à hurler avec une énergie qui fit fuir son père et combla de joie le cœur de sa mère. Les sommets desséchés des montagnes renvoyèrent tout autour d'eux, dans le pays désert, brûlé à mort, l'écho de la voix nouvelle.

Dans la vallée voisine, il se trouva des oreilles humaines pour l'entendre. Deux vieux habitaient là, le dernier couple d'une très ancienne race de bergers. L'homme avait près de quatre-vingt ans, et la femme guère moins. Ils habitaient les ruines d'une antique ferme au toit bas, en compagnie de quelques brebis, de quatre chèvres, un bouc, un belier et un chien poilu. Ils se nourrissaient du lait et du fromage de leur bêtes et se couvraient de leurs toisons. Ils étaient très ridés et très sales. Ils ne parlaient presque jamais. De temps en temps, quelques mots à leurs moutons ou aux chèvres têtues. Entre eux il y avait bien longtemps que tout avait été dit. Ils continuaient leur vieille vie, sans penser à la mort. Ils savaient qu'elle les prendrait tous les deux à la même heure, et que la montagne recueillerait leur bêtes. Mieux que les bruits de leur corps ils connaissaient tous les murmures et les cent formes du silence des torrents, des arbres et des rochers de leur univers.

Le vieux était en train de traire une brebis quand le cri de femme arriva jusqu'à ses oreilles. Il se redressa sans hâte et s'en fut retrouver sa vieille. Elle était à couper des brindilles dans un fagot sec

pour allumer le feu de midi. Elle entendit. Elle abandonna sa tâche pour aller retrouver son vieux. Ils se rencontrèrent sur le seuil de la cuisine. Ils se regardèrent. Il tendit le bras dans la direction d'où venait le cri renouvelé. Elle hocha la tête. Elle avait bien reconnu ce cri pareil qui poussent toutes les mères quand elles se partagent pour que la vie continué. Elle-même avait eu trois enfants. Le dernier les avait quittés depuis longtemps pour descendre vers le monde. Elle avait encore, à cette époque, des cheveux noirs et quelque dents.

Elle prit un bois, l'essuya du coude, ferma sa cuisine. Il attacha le chien, mit la barre à la porte de l'étable après en avoir fait sortir une chèvre blanche et noire. Il poussa devant lui la bête avec un bâton. La vieille suivit son vieux. Ils commencèrent tous les trois à grimper vers le col que franchissait la voix de femme. La chèvre trotta devant, s'arrêtait pour attendre l'homme, cueillait de ses longues dents l'épi d'une graminée. Le vieux suivait la bête, à pas lents de montagnard qui ne se trompe jamais pour poser son pied. La vieille venait derrière. Elle commençait à s'essouffler. C'était d'émotion. Car à la voix de la femme succédait le pleur vigoureux d'un enfant.

Ils arrivèrent vers le milieu de l'après-midi. Ils trouvèrent dans les fleurs trois hommes nus, une sorte de grande fille qui ressemblait à leur chèvre, et une femme encore saignante. Près d'elle, un petit enfant nu, les yeux et les poings fermés, dormait dans les boutons d'or (Ravage, pp. 250-51).

This is without question a fine example of the power of characterization which René Barjavel has commanded from the very beginning of his career. With a very minimum of description and a maximum of action, Barjavel creates an unforgettable couple whom this reader is compelled to admire and, perhaps, even love.

The second of the cameos is a part of the dream of the sleeping astronaut, Colomb. The cameo is the introduction to the parable that plays such a significant part in this novel.

Colomb is in a state of suspended animation; and according to Barjavel, he dreams slowly as a result of his slowed metabolism. He began his dream over fourteen months ago at the beginning of his training period. But the author asks, is it really a dream?

. . .Il écoute une histoire que lui conte sa mère. C'est une image lente, et les mots et les phrases que sa mère prononce il les connaît déjà, elle les lui a déjà dits quand il était enfant. Elle est assise près de la cheminée où brûle du bois d'olivier, elle est assise bien droite dans le fauteuil de paille dont les accoudoirs de noyer luisent doucement à la flamme. Le noyer est un bois gras et doux sous les doigts qui même dans l'ombre luit. Elle se tient bien droite par volonté, car elle est lasse. Elle a été très malade et elle va mieux, mais elle va mourir bientôt. Elle ne le sait pas et lui dans son rêve le sait. Il est assis à ses pieds et il la regarde et l'écoute. Elle est belle, elle est lasse et elle va mourir. Elle connaît des histoires qu'elle a entendues quand elle était enfant et sur lesquelles elle rebrode des couleurs de l'amour pour son fils qu'elle aime et qui brûle d'amour à ses pieds comme le bois d'olivier. Le bois brûle et le petit Colomb écoute et brûle d'amour pour sa mère. Mais où est son père? Mais où donc est-il? A la guerre sans doute. Les pères sont toujours en train de faire une guerre, et quand ils en reviennent, les enfants ont grandi et les mères sont mortes (Colomb de la lune, pp. 25-26).

As we have seen the dream merges with reality at the end of the novel as Colomb, trapped by the soft surface of the moon, plunges his rocket to the very center of the planet and finds the Princess waiting for him.

The third example is the portrait M. Barjavel creates of the mother of Colomb's wife, Mme Raise ne Anoue. At the end of the book when M. Gé brings the news of Colomb's

entombment it will be she and not her daughter who will decide. Without hesitation when the fate of Colomb is questioned she says:

Y a pas à hésiter! . . .Ce pauvre petit! Quelle horreur! Si vraiment on ne peut pas aller le chercher on ne va pas le laisser mourir tout seul! Pendant qu'il dort au moins, il ne sentira rien! (Colomb de la lune, p. 216).

She is introduced to the reader early in the novel; and her chief task in the novel is to set off the self-centeredness of her daughter. For her concern is primarily outgoing; albeit, she does at times fall into bourgeois sentiments. Barjavel depicts her as follows:

. . .Elle porte le deuil de son mari avec une chère élégance. Rien que du noir. C'est un brin de femme. Des hanches et une poitrine de séminariste janséniste, des talons aiguille pour parvenir jusqu'à un mètre soixante, des cheveux noirs depuis qu'elle est en deuil, de grands yeux noirs qui au-delà de dix centimètres ne voient que du brouillard. Elle les tient écarquillés par discipline, car elle aurait tendance à plisser les paupières pour essayer vainement d'y voir plus clair. Il ne faut pas, à cause des rides.

Elle choisit ses robes presque sans les voir, ses chapeaux au toucher du bout des doigts, à la silhouette dans la fumée d'une glace, ses bijoux au prix et au poids. Sans fesses ni seins, rectangulaire, petite, elle réussit à se donner une apparence exquisément féminine. L'ensemble est toujours parfait, surprenant, juste du bon côté à la limite de l'extravagant et du réussi. C'est l'instinct de la femme.

Pour le reste, elle réfléchit.

Elle a meublé la maison de sa fille en fronçant les sourcils, regardant chaque meuble qu'on lui proposait à travers ses grandes lunettes d'or, hésitant longuement entre deux horreurs avant de se décider pour la plus laide. La table aux poissons lui a beaucoup plu. C'est le genre d'objet qu'elle peut comprendre et aimer (Colomb de la lune, pp. 14-15).

One sees her place in the novel clearly depicted in the paragraph which follows. She is a hindrance to her daughter whose only goal is to achieve her own satisfaction. The author says: "Ses yeux sont vagues. Elle ne voit rien. Rien que sa mère qui la gêne et qu'il faut qu'elle renvoie" (Colomb de la lune, p. 15). With these representative examples of the man and wife, mother-daughter, mother-son relationships in mind we now turn our attention to the third category of minor characters, "those who abrogate control over their destiny."

Among the best of the examples of this category are the boy who becomes the lover of Colomb's wife and the young baker who is chosen to be among the survivors in the "Arche". One does not know a great deal about the boy beyond the facts that he is a band leader, that he is relatively sexually experienced and that he is overpowered by Marthe, Colomb's wife. As a matter of fact, he permits her to lock him up in the bedroom for weeks; however, in the end, he does take his destiny back into his own hands by escaping through the bedroom window. There is no escape for the young baker who finds himself locked up in the "Arche" with twelve beautiful women. This situation is brought about by M. Gé's misanthropic right-hand man, Lucien Hono. He wishes to see what the results will be when the women are brought to believe that the baker is the last man in the world. Great

suspicion and jealousy immediately arise among the women and the situation quickly deteriorates, primarily because of the baker's lack of action. Barjavel comments on his passiveness:

Il aurait pu, en très peu de temps, ramener le calme s'il avait fait preuve d'un peu d'autorité, s'il avait donné son avis, distribué quelques gifles, ou fait l'amour à l'une ou à l'autre, ou à toutes. Mais son coeur était si tendre et son sens de la justice si aigu qu'il en oubliait son propre point de vue pour épouser entièrement leurs angoisses (Diabole l'emporte, p. 109).

This abrogation on the part of the baker of his rightful power leads to his death. One of the women is able to drug the others so that they are not on the qui vive; and she uses the opportunity to slip out of the central sleeping hall to the baker. Such an event is what Lucien Hono has been waiting for and he awakens the remaining women. In their state of fury they proceed to tear to bits their deceiver and her partner. Thus, through the death of the baker, we have the illumination of the character who is ultimately to save mankind, Lucien Hono; and we see one of M. Barjavel's primary concerns clearly stated: that is to say, that mankind is losing control over its own destiny by its passivity and by its dependence on machines.

For the purpose of limitation, it is necessary to choose between the ten individuals who represent the scientific community in Barjavel's five novels. Three criteria will be used in the process of selection. They

are the location of the character within the novel, their representativeness and, in the case of Noël Essailon and of Yves Rameau, their exemplification of the horrendous mischaracterizations of which M. Barjavel is guilty on occasion. The four selected representatives will be Dr. Fauque from Ravage, Dr. Noël Essailon from le Voyageur imprudent, Yves Rameau from Colomb de la lune, and Brivaux from la Nuit des temps.

Dr. Fauque is one of the members of François' band of survivors. When François first goes to look for him, he has need of the doctor for Blanche, his wife-to-be, who is ill. Barjavel describes him as, "un grand Lyonnais brun, barbu et bavard qu'il connaissait pour un brave homme et bon praticien." One finds later in the novel that he is more than generally acquainted with the science of his day and that he has arrived at an explanation for the disappearance of electricity similar to that of the author which we cited earlier. He says:

Mais l'électricité n'a pas disparu, mon jeune ami. Si elle avait disparu, nous n'existerions plus, nous serions retournés au néant, nous et l'univers. . . . Rien ne peut en disparaître, ou tout disparaîtra ensemble. Ce qui se passe, c'est un changement dans les manifestations du fluide électrique. Un changement qui nous bouleverse, qui démolit tout l'édifice de science que nous avons bâti, mais qui n'a sans doute ni plus ni moins d'importance pour l'univers que le battement de l'aile d'un papillon (Ravage, p. 138).

Unfortunately, the doctor's insatiable curiosity and scientific skepticism eventually leads to his demise. The band of survivors finds its way into a mental hospital on the outskirts of Paris where research is being done on a special type of ray which has just been discovered. This ray has been found to be marvelously effective in the cure of physical illnesses; and the institute has been testing it on some of their incurable inmates. The result, however, seems to have been the reverse of that which was expected; the inmates seem to absorb the rays and to apply them to a deepening of their malady to the extent that their particular malady becomes a reality--a girl who believed herself to be Joan of Arc burned up and a man who believed himself to be Hercules broke out of his cell and began to do his tasks again. There were two psychos remaining in the experimental group; one of them believed himself to be Jesus Christ and the other thought that he was the incarnation of Death. When François and the Doctor investigate the cells where the experiments were conducted, they discover that two of the cell doors are still closed. They open one and find a dead man who then arises and walks and talks to them. Having seen this example of the effect of the rays, François cautions Dr. Fauque against opening the last door, but the doctor persists and falls dead. The rest of the party is

saved only by the quick action of François who is standing close enough to the door to slam it shut again.

A similar curiosity leads one of the three main characters of le Voyageur imprudent to his death. Noël Essaillon describes himself as "physicien et chimiste." As we have indicated earlier he is confined to a wheel chair; as a result it is not until the hero Saint-Menoux has thoroughly tested Essaillon's time travel device that Essaillon himself will undertake to use it for travel of any distance. He is finally driven to it by his curiosity, however. A debate ensues when Essaillon announces to Saint-Menoux that he will accompany him on the next trip. Saint-Menoux says:

Il avait levé les bras pour mieux exprimer sa réprobation. Il heurta le globe électrique qui se balançait au bout de son fil.

--Ne démolissez pas mon installation! dit Essaillon en souriant. Pourquoi serait-ce une folie? J'ai traité une chaise de fer à la noëlite. Je partirai assis. J'arriverai de même. Une fois arrivé, le vibreur me mettra à l'abri de tout. Je veux voir au moins une fois le monde futur.

--Je comprends votre curiosité, dit Saint-Menoux en hochant la tête. Je n'en désapprouve pas moins votre projet. . . (le Voyageur imprudent, p. 147).

These words of Saint-Menoux are indeed prophetic, for at the end of the journey to the future, upon their return to the present, Essaillon meets with a bizarre accident. A hole has been torn in the time travel suit and upon returning to the present he is cut in half and that part of him which

is in front of the crack remains in the future.

Saint-Menoux's journal poetically relates his feeling:

J'ai enterré mon bon maître au pied d'un bouleau dans le jardin qui commence à perdre ses feuilles. Ma peine est grande. Cher Noël Essaillon, si gourmand des joies de l'esprit, si curieux de l'avenir, voici qu'il n'existe plus pour vous ni avenir, ni passé, ni présent. Je vous suppose maintenant à même de connaître ou débouche ce tunnel qu'est notre temps de vie, si je me rappelle bien votre comparaison. Je souhaite pour vous que ce soit en un lieu d'infinie clarté où rien ne demeure caché aux âmes avides, comme la vôtre, de tout savoir (le Voyageur imprudent, p. 162).

Here then is the picture of the critical, curious scientist, a seeker of the Truth before anything else. How then can Barjavel, once having established this character so firmly in this mold, expect his reader to accept the ridiculous reversal which follows? Once Saint-Menoux recovers from his shock, he realizes that he can do for Essaillon that which Essaillon had done, some years earlier for his old servant, Philomène. She had succumbed to food poisoning and Essaillon had used his invention to stop her from eating the thing that killed her, thereby restoring her to life. When Saint-Menoux does the same thing for Essaillon Philomène convinces the scientist that their actions are against the will of God. The scientist, Barjavel would have us believe, renounces life because of the old peasant woman's superstition. It is simply not credible; and it is without a doubt one of the weakest points in René Barjavel's five novels.

Barjavel allows no such lapse in le Diable l'emporte; but then, Lucien Hono is the only real scientist in the novel; and one would hope that he is atypical. In Colomb de la lune, Barjavel creates an unrealistic flare up on the part of his Director of Operations of the space program; but this tantrum is not nearly as serious as Barjavel's ill-prepared attempt to cram Noël Essailon into the clothing of a God-fearing conservative.

Yves Rameau is the director of operations to whom we just had reference. Barjavel describes him as:

. . .grand et de contours un peu arrondis comme sont les anciens champions de natation. Cheveux châtain en brosse longue, avec quelques bouclettes sur les côtés; une courte barbe châtain frisée. Il est un des ces rares hommes sur qui la barbe n'a pas l'air d'un déguisement. Un nez solide, des dents de granit, des mains à casser une noix entre le pouce et l'index.

Il est capable de se passionner pour tous les problèmes. Rien ne lui est indifférent. Il est toujours joyeux, prêt à aider tout le monde. Il dispose d'un énorme capital d'énergie vitale. Il l'emploie pour et non pas contre. Ainsi l'augmente-t-il au lieu de l'épuiser (*Italics in the original*) (Colomb de la lune, p. 56).

Later in the story Yves and his fellow scientists are in the process of bringing Colomb back to consciousness when Yves erupts at a technician who has made a mistake. He screams at him, "Vous êtes fou, saboteur, salaud ou con, ou quoi?" This situation is out of place and contrived; it simply should not have happened; but one must add that these are the only places where Barjavel's characterizations are not entirely convincing.

The final scientist in the group of four which were chosen, at the outset, as representative of Barjavel's characterization of the scientific community is Brivaux, a member of the French expedition to the South Pole in la Nuit des temps. If among these minor characters there is one character who represents an amalgam of those qualities which Barjavel holds in highest esteem, Brivaux would appear to be that character. He is, as M. Barjavel describes him:

. . .le fils d'un petit paysan-montagnard de Haute-Savoie, le dernier de son village à continuer d'élever des vaches au lieu de traire les Parisiens entassés à dix par mètre carré de neige ou d'herbe pelée. Le père Brivaux avait entouré son morceau de montagne de barbelés et de poteaux "Défense d'entrer", et dans cette prison vivait en liberté.

Son fils avait hérité de lui ses yeux bleu clair, ses cheveux noirs et sa barbe rousse, son égalité d'humeur et son équilibre. Il voyait des ruines, comme tous ceux qui étaient là et qui savaient interpréter un profil. Et qui n'y croyaient pas. Lui y croyait parce qu'il les voyait. S'il avait vu son propre père sous la glace, il se serait étonné une seconde, puis il aurait dit "Tiens, papa. . ." (la Nuit des temps, p. 17-18).

And a few pages later the reader is informed:

Le seul qui acceptât l'événement avec placidité, c'était évidemment Brivaux. Le seul qui fût né et eût été élevé à la campagne. Les autres, dans les villes, avaient grandi au milieu du provisoire, de l'éphémère, de ce qui se construit, brûle, s'écroule, change, se détruit. Lui, au voisinage des roches alpines, avait appris à compter grand et à envisager la durée (la Nuit des temps, p. 24).

Thus like the hero of Ravage, Brivaux is a man of the country who has never lost touch with the fundamental elements

of nature. He has turned his back on the possibility of a highly remunerative career in industry in order to study these elements at first hand. And he is endowed with the almost innate ability to overcome those obstacles which are posed by modern technology, such as machines which are set on the wrong frequency. Perhaps Barjavel has that quality in mind which is often referred to in this country as "Yankee ingenuity", but which is certainly not the exclusive property of Americans.

To return to the parable of the Prince and the Princess and to the schema which the parable provides for the study of Barjavel's characterization, Mr. and Mrs. Average Mother and Father were the first important character types to be introduced. The foremost married couple in M. Barjavel's novels are M. et Madame Collignot of le Diable l'emporte.

As the novel opens we find them at the ocean on their summer vacation. They and their two daughters, Irène and Aline, are in the process of getting dinner in a restaurant:

Les Collignot attendaient qu'on les servît. De la main gauche, M. Collignot cassait en menus fragments le morceau de pain posé près de son assiette, portait ces miettes à sa bouche et les suçotait.

.

--Te gave pas de pain! dit Mme Collignot à son mari tout à l'heure tu mangeras plus rien!

--Pour ce qu'il y a à manger! dit Irène.

Elle souriait. Elle avait vingt-deux ans. Elle était riche de chair et d'humeurs équilibrées. Elle se regardait dans la glace devant elle, par-dessus l'épaule de sa mère, elle se souriait, elle était satisfaite. Plus loin, dans un reflet troublé, ses yeux myopes apercevaient des silhouettes, parmi lesquelles elle devinait les hommes.

La serveuse apporta des maquereaux frits.

--Ce qu'il y a de bien, ici, dit M. Collignot, c'est qu'on a du poisson frais.

--Il manquerait plus que ça! dit Mme Collignot.

.

--Quelle vacances! repeta Mme Collignot.

--Ce n'est pas ma faute, dit M. Collignot, s'il pleut (le Diable l'emporte, pp. 10-12).

Thus we have the typical family dispute in process. The girls would like to go to le Côte d'Azur; but this was beyond the means of M. Collignot who is a minor functionary for UNESCO in Paris. Mme Collignot would like to go to Normandy where it does not rain all the time; but M. Collignot prefers Brittany; and the family therefore spends a large portion of its vacation debating the relative merits of their particular choice.

Madame Collignot is characterized in the following paragraph:

Mme Collignot machait soigneusement et se taisait. Elle était assise, bien droite, massive, sur la banquette, elle ne pensait à rien d'autre, pour l'instant, qu'à

mâcher. Elle était parvenue au bout de la maturité, à cet âge où les femmes qui se résignent à paraître leur âge ne paraissent plus aucun âge précis. Elle laissait blanchir ses cheveux noirs, jaunir ses cheveux blancs. La graisse avait aligné son menton et ses joues en une base rectangulaire. Sa poitrine s'était soudée en une seule masse. Elle l'avait recouverte, ce jour-là, parce qu'il faisait froid, de deux pull-overs et d'un veste tricotée. Mais parce qu'on était en vacances, elle avait gardé son short d'où sortaient, sous la table, ses grosses cuisses violacées par le vent marin (le Diable l'emporte, p. 12).

One comes to know M. Collignot as the novel progresses. He is clearly Barjavel's prototype of the common man. He loves his daughters, worries about his job, and worries, as do his contemporaries, about the possibility of a third world war; as Barjavel says, "Les hommes n'ignoraient pas qu'une nouvelle guerre signifirait, comme dirent les journaux, la fin de toute civilisation. Et M. Collignot croyait à la civilisation" (le Diable l'emporte, p. 18). When the war does finally come and he and his wife are huddled in the basement of their apartment building, he worries about what he can say to her that will be reassuring; but he can think of nothing. Yet in spite of his seeming impotence when compared with a man of power such as M. Gé, it is M. Collignot, the common man, who keeps M. Gé's carefully laid plans from crashing into oblivion. Lucien Hono once again intervenes; and as the love-crazed scientist pulls Irène out of the rocket, M. Collignot quickly replaces her with his younger daughter, Aline. Thus, in the end, it

is the common man and not the all powerful manipulator of empires who is responsible for the survival of mankind.

One will recall that the powerful are represented in the parable by three individuals, the Emperor and his right hand man, M. Gé and the King's prime minister whose name changes. Within the novels four or five characters fit into this mold. These characters are Jérôme Seita of Ravage, M. Gé of le Diable l'emporte and of Colomb de la lune, Lucien Hono of le Diable l'emporte and Coban of la Nuit des temps.

Jérôme Seita represents the powerful executive of the twenty-first century. In the opening pages of the novel the reader finds that he is powerful enough to take a justly won prize away from the hero, François, to have the power and water service to François' apartment cut off, and to isolate Blanche with who François is in love. He is, however, totally incapable of dealing with the disaster which is precipitated by the change in the nature of electricity:

Pour Seita, c'était plus que la fin d'une ère, c'était vraiment la fin du monde, de son monde. Il se sentait comme un voyageur abandonné nu au milieu du désert. Qu'allait-il devenir, lui qui ne se déplaçait jamais que par le secours des moteurs, qui parcourait volontiers quelques milliers de kilomètres dans sa journée, mais à qui cinq cents mètres paraissent une distance terrifiante s'il s'agissait de la couvrir à pied (Ravage, p. 119).

This weakness is nowhere visible in Barjavel's first description of him; one is lead, on the contrary, to believe that his capabilities are of quite another order. Barjavel writes:

. . . Jérôme Seita portait ce soir-là une combinaison d'un rouge éclatant qui s'ornait au col, sur la poitrine, à la taille et le long des cuisses jusqu'aux chevilles, d'appliqués vert tendre, sous lesquelles se dissimulaient les fermetures magnétiques.

Assis à son bureau, il le dépassait d'un maigre buste. Les meubles massifs qui garnissaient la pièce ne paraissaient pas à son échelle. C'était un homme de courte taille. Assis ou debout, il dressait la tête avec une assurance qui ne faiblissait jamais. Il était coiffé et rasé selon la mode inspirée par une récente rétrospective du cinéma américain. Une raie médiane séparait ses cheveux très noirs, collés, et sous son nez pointu une moustache filiforme dessinait une mince accolade.

Sa bouche, aux lèvres minces, souriait rarement. Le sourire appartient aux enfants, et aux hommes qui leur ressemblent. Pour ceux dont l'esprit est occupé de choses d'importance, sourire est du temps perdu.

Ses yeux ronds et son front lisse eussent pu faire croire qu'il existait en lui une certaine naïveté, mais sa voix tendue comme ses muscles dorsaux faisait vite oublier l'apparence candide du haut de son visage (Ravage, p. 29).

Seita soon disappears from the novel; he is killed; but even at the very end, as one sees in the following scene, he is unable to comprehend the fact that his power is gone.

Seita se précipita devant le cheval. La vue de ce véhicule, qui lui permettrait peut-être de fuir vers des lieux plus hospitaliers, lui avait rendu un peu d'énergie. Le jardinier, un homme d'un cinquantaine d'années, à grosse moustache grise, tira sur les guides, arrêta sa bête, et demanda d'un voix rude:

"Qu'est-ce que vous voulez?"

--Monsieur, nous avons avec nous, comme vous le voyez, une jeune fille malade. Ayez la gentillesse de la conduire jusque chez mon ami, à Montparnasse, sur votre voiture. . .

--J'ai pas le temps! Vous savez donc pas ce qui se passe? Que rien ne marche plus dans cette ville! Moi je m'en vais. Allez, faites-moi place! Débrouillez-vous."

Seita sourit. Il pensait à la toute-puissance qu'il portait sur lui, à laquelle rien ni personne n'avait jamais résisté. Il s'accrocha d'une main à la bride du cheval et, de l'autre, fouilla dans une de ses poches. Il en sortit une poignée de billets de banque.

"Tenez, reprit-il, je vous donne ça. Cinq mille francs pour un petit détour. C'est tout de même bien payé!"

--Je me moque de votre argent!

--Je vous achète votre cheval. Le prix que vous voudrez! . . .

--Mon cheval vaut plus que tous vos billets. Allez, laissez-moi!"

Comme Seita s'accrochait toujours, le gardien se pencha en avant et, à toute volée, le frappa à la tête du manche de son fouet.

Seita s'écroula. Le cheval et le véhicule lui passèrent sur le corps (Ravage, p. 130-131).

Of all of the characters within this category M. Gé is the most successful in his use of his immense power; although, and as we have seen, his plans are almost entirely set awry; and would have been, if it had not been for a common man. Barjavel says that M. Gé is one of these practically unknown men who:

. . .exercent un pouvoir sans limites sur les multitudes, au moyen du propre argent et de la sueur desdites multitudes.

Il était né le 2 janvier 1900, d'un père hollandais et une mère américaine, à bord d'un paquebot allemand qui se rendait d'Angleterre en Russie. Son âge est facile à calculer. Dix-huit ans en 1918, quarante ans

en 1940 et maintenant une mince silhouette qui passe inaperçue, que l'on voit le plus souvent de dos ou en profil effacé, des cheveux blancs, des sourcils noirs, des mains soignées aux doigts minces, une voix que le téléphone transforme et qui change d'accent avec les frontières.

.

M. Gé lui-même, pendant la G. M. 2, avait fourni du ciment pour le mur de l'Atlantique, de l'aluminium pour les avions de la R. A. F., du pétrole pour les chars russes, de l'acier aux Japonais et du minerai d'uranium aux usines atomiques des U. S. A. (le Diable l'emporte, pp. 22-23).

Why then does a purveyor of death and destruction do an about face and build a special shelter in which to attempt to save some remnant of mankind from their own folly? Barjavel explains that it was not that M. Gé wanted war, but rather that he simply recognized that war is a plant which will inevitably bloom and flourish wherever mankind exists and all M. Gé did was to cultivate the ground around its roots and to give it water. However, Barjavel writes that M. Gé realized that ultimately:

. . . ses milliards n'étaient que chiffres vains, gri-bouillages, ses marchés jeux d'enfants qui pèsent de la poussière dans des couvercles de boîtes. Après tant d'activité, tant de profits, il n'était qu'un homme comme les autres, un certain homme à une certaine place, dans un certain emploi, un axe, un pignon, un ressort de la machine, un homme, cinquante-neuf kilos de vie inexplicable (le Diable l'emporte, p. 24).

He was made to realize this fact, the author explains, by the explosion of the atomic bomb and Hiroshima; and therefore, the author adds, since:

M. Gé savait et pouvait. Son esprit, habitué à obéir, à la logique, l'amena à cette conclusion: il avait pensé à construire l'Arche, il avait les moyens de la construire, il la construirait (le Diable l'emporte, p. 25).

But as Seita failed to understand, so, too, has M. Gé, for all his worldly power and competence, failed to understand; and it is this lack of understanding which is at the root of the nearly catastrophic dénouement. Lucien Hono almost puts his finger on the problem when he says:

-- . . .et si je croyais qu'il faut sauver l'homme, je mettrais cette intelligence à l'abri. Elle serait plus précieuse que les biftecks bien taillés que vous avez emmagasinés dans votre garde-manger souterrain. Vous êtes un médiocre, vous n'avez pensé qu'à perpétuer la belle bidoche, les hommes n'ont jamais compté pour vous qu'en quantité. Tant de bouches à emplir, tant de poitrines à crever, tant de millions de quintaux de blé, tant de millions d'obus. . . (le Diable l'emporte, p. 74).

The word is almost; for Lucien, for all his capabilities, is unable to solve the problem of the Doomsday Machine until he is fortuitously provided with a catalyst. The catalyst is love. This is the fatal element which is missing in M. Gé's makeup. It takes a whole man, not a superman to be the savior of mankind.

The M. Gé who returns in Colomb de la lune has had the scope of his power somewhat reduced; but he continues to follow the same type of life--keeping track of other people's business, that is. He has learned a little from his previous existence, so that when he meets Suzanne, Colomb's sister,

outside the villa where the wife and the boy are leading their merry existence, he is able to respond without the slightest hesitation to the question which Suzanne asks him. She says:

. . .Qu'est-ce qui lui est arrivé? Elle est folle?
 --C'est l'amour, dit Monsieur Gé.
 --Oh! l'amour, dit Suzanne, je sais ce que c'est. . .
 --Non, dit Monsieur Gé.
 Interdite, elle le regarda de nouveau. . .
 --Peut-être vous avez raison. Mais si c'est ça, j'aime mieux pas. Et je me demande à quoi ça sert. . .
 --Vous le savez bien, dit Monsieur Gé. Elle ne le sait pas encore.

--Qu'est-ce qu'elle sait pas encore?

--Elle est enceinte, dit Monsieur Gé.

Il alluma à son tour une cigarette. Suzanne ne s'étonnait pas qu'il sût cela avant celle qui aurait dû le savoir la première. En le regardant, elle admettait qu'il pût savoir cela, et bien d'autres choses.

--Elle commence à s'en douter, dit Monsieur Gé, mais elle ne veut pas en être sûre. Elle confond les dates, exprès, elle ne veut pas savoir. Elle croit seulement qu'elle aime et que l'amour c'est l'amour et ça suffit. Elle est enceinte: c'est à ça que ça sert l'amour. S'il n'y avait pas ça il n'y aurait pas l'amour (Italics not in the original) (Colomb de la lune, p. 164).

Lucien Hono's enigmatic shadow is spread over the entire length of le Diable l'emporte. Is he the Devil of the title? The question presents itself almost from the very outset; but is never definitively resolved. None the less one can say that there is a great deal of the imagery of the Devil about him. To begin with and most obvious, of course, is his name; it takes only a slight change to shift Lucien to Lucifer. M. Barjavel depicts him standing before M. Gé:

. . .Le dernier sourire des petits nuages se posait sur Hono debout en face de lui, humanisait un peu son teint verdâtre et allumait deux étincelles rouges dans ses yeux de houille.

.

Hono prit place sur une chaise aux pieds écartelés. Les muscles de ses mâchoires se contractaient sous la peau de ses joues creuses. La peau crispée de son front rapprochait l'un de l'autre ses sourcils plats comme des virgules d'encre. Il n'avait pas un poil blanc parmi ses cheveux coupés très court, "à la chien" [sic], comme ceux d'un garçonnet. Et cette frange noire sur son front bas, ses yeux brillants, ses oreilles décollées comme celles d'un bébé qui a dormi sans serre-tête, lui donnaient un air très jeune. Il était à peine ridé, mais la peau de son visage paraissait par moments tannée comme celle d'un centenaire. Ainsi se trouvait-il parfois pareil à un enfant parfois pareil à un vieillard. Il semblait se situer hors de la mesure ordinaire de l'âge (le Diable l'emporte, p. 72).

As we have seen, he despises mankind to such an extent that he is not above tinkering with the destiny of the members of the "Arche" as if they were no more than the pieces of an erector set. Likewise, he undertakes his attempt to discover a remedy for the horrendous results of the Swiss scientist's Doomsday Machine not from any noble desire to save that which he terms, ". . .de petits vers rouges hurleurs et merdeux" (le Diable l'emporte, p. 73); but rather because it is a challenge to his intellectual capabilities.

In any case Hono is without doubt the incarnation of the King's prime minister. To M. Gé, he is "Je-suis-votre-Serviteur." He watches the girls in the "Arche" and in

particular Irène, with whom he later falls in love, and thus deserves the name of "Je-Vous-Regarde". And his overall disrespect for his contemporaries merits him the name of "Gratte-Moi-Le-Pied".

Coban is a figure cloaked in darkness. One knows only that he was a great scientist and the head of the great Central University of Gowanda. His values are hidden from the reader until Eléa recounts her first meeting with him. At this meeting she is told by Coban that she has been selected by the computer to accompany him. He gives as his reason for his actions a desire to preserve human life; but an argument ensues. Eléa accuses him:

Ce n'est pas la vie que voulez sauver, dit Eléa, mais votre vie. Et vous avez fait rechercher par l'ordinateur les cinq plus belles femmes du continent pour choisir celle qui vous accompagnera! (Italics in the original) (la Nuit des temps, p. 200).

Coban's answer is that had he been free to choose he would have chosen his daughter. She is the only person in all of Gondawa whom he loves and who loves him. His purpose, therefore, is in no way selfish; he is in fact sacrificing his daughter's life in order that the best of which represents the men of his day may live. Finally, he says to Eléa:

--Voilà, . . .vous savez où nous en sommes. Il n'y a plus de place pour les sentiments. Nous entrerons cette nuit dans l'Abri. Mes assistants vont vous

preparer. Vous allez, entre autres soins, recevoir la seule dose existante du sérum universel . . . Si par miracle rien ne se passe, vous y aurez gagné d'être la première à jouir de la jeunesse perpétuelle. Dans ce cas, je vous promets que la dose suivante sera pour Païkan (*Italics not in the original*) (la Nuit des temps, p. 203-204).

As was the case with M. Gé, Coban has failed to realize the true value of emotion, and in particular, the true value of the most noble emotion of all--love.

The central figures of the parable in Colomb de la lune are the lovers, the Prince and the Princess. The chain of love runs at flood tide throughout the five novels upon which this study is based. In nineteen-forty Barjavel was creating François and Blanche; and his couples stretch from this pair of wanderers in the wilderness to his Romeo and Juliet of la Nuit des temps.

François is described by Barjavel as being:

De tempérament actif, il aimait se servir de ses muscles, possédait le goût d'intervenir partout, chaque fois qu'il pouvait le faire de façon utile, et nourrissait l'ambition de diriger sa vie, au lieu de se laisser entraîner par les événements. Enfermé dans ce bolide, il s'estimait réduit à un rôle trop ridiculement passif. Chaque fois qu'il prenait le train ou l'avion, il éprouvait la même impression d'abdiquer une partie de sa volonté et de sa force d'homme. Autour de lui se jouaient des forces si considérables qu'il se sentait bien plutôt leur proie que leur maître (*Italics not in the original*) (Ravage, pp. 15-16).

With the arrival of the alteration in the behavior of electricity, François is put to the test and he acquits

himself in an outstanding manner. In the beginning of the disaster his chief concern is for Blanche, whom he loves. He rescues her from Seita and he takes her to his home. She, like François, reflects her country origin. Barjavel describes her as she is when Seita calls her to his office:

Elle portait encore son costume de scène, un costume de l'an 2000, jupe courte, pantalon de soie bouffant serré aux chevilles, corsage très décolleté. Elle avait nettoyé rapidement son maquillage. Ses joues, échauffées par l'ardeur de la répétition, resplendissaient d'émotion et de santé. Elle était blonde, rose et dorée de peau comme un enfant qui a longtemps joué au soleil. Ses grands yeux bleus brillaient de joie. Ses cheveux nattés et roulés la couronnaient d'or (Ravage, p. 30).

After a period of concern for her life because of a serious illness which attacks her and many other young girls, Blanche slowly begins to fall into the background. She is mentioned in the previously quoted scene with the goatherds as "une sorte de fillette qui ressemblait à leur chevre". And she is mentioned toward the end of the novel once again as the beloved first wife of the Patriarche. This reference informs the reader that she bears François his only daughter; and that François gives the daughter the name of Blanche in honor of his wife. Thus, the author can be accused of presenting a somewhat unbalanced portrayal in this his first attempt at the study of love.

Barjavel goes to the opposite extreme in Colomb de la lune. One knows quite a lot about Colomb's wife and only a bare minimum about her lover. In his 1962 interview for the Nouvelles littéraires, he accuses the modern novel of turning man's perspective totally inward. He says:⁷

R. --Ne dites rien. Je sais que la fonction de reproduction, qu'on la traduise sous forme de sentiments éthères, de passion brûlante ou de toutes les variétés de sensations sexuelles, est la fonction essentielle de l'espèce humaine, et mérite qu'on s'y attarde. Mais nous ne sommes plus au temps des semailles, cher monsieur, nous en sommes à la germination! L'espèce humaine est en train de pousser un tige jusqu'aux planètes, demain elle fleurira dans les étoiles. Et le roman classique, au lieu de s'élever avec elle, enfonce de plus en plus son nez dans la terre. Il se débat en vain, il s'asphyxie, il meurt. Ce qu'on nomme curieusement le "nouveau roman" en est une preuve clinique. Ce n'est plus une respiration de l'esprit, pas même un rale, c'est un hoquet. Ses auteurs sont comme des vieillards qui s'en vont à reculons vers la mort, les yeux fixés sur leurs barbe, leur attention tout occupée par les calpotements du potage dans leur estomac. Ils ne digèrent plus, c'est leur tragédie.

In the light of these statements one has no difficulty in understanding Marthe and her "boy" and their weeks on end in the bedroom. It is a full blown broadside satirizing the classical novel. One will recall that even their manner of

⁷Barjavel, "la Science-fiction, c'est le vrai 'nouveau roman.'" "

parting is a travesty. Marthe has just decided the fate of her husband; the boy has crawled out the bedroom window wearing a pair of her gold lamé pants and a red silk blouse.

With Eléa and Païkan, Barjavel's lovers become balanced and complete. From the beginning of the adventure one can never doubt Elea's total dedication to Païkan; none the less, there is a triangle in the book. Dr. Simon, the base doctor for the French expedition, is the first man to see Eléa when the egg is first opened and he is immediately overcome with her beauty. In the first pages of the novel one is brought to know him and to know that he has suffered a devastating loss:

Ma bien-aimée, mon abandonnée, ma perdue, je t'ai laissée là-bas au fond du monde, j'ai regagné ma chambre d'homme de la ville avec ses meubles familiers sur lesquels j'ai si souvent posé mes mains qui les aimaient, avec ses livres qui m'ont nourri, avec son vieux lit de merisier où a dormi mon enfance et où, cette nuit, j'ai cherché en vain le sommeil. Et tout ce décor qui m'a vu grandir, pousser, devenir moi, me paraît aujourd'hui étranger, impossible. Ce monde qui n'est pas le tien est devenu un monde faux, dans lequel ma place n'a jamais existé.

.....

Le Dr. Simon, les mains dans les poches, le front appuyé au mur de verre de sa chambre, regarde Paris, sur lequel le jour se lève. C'est un homme de trente-deux ans, grand, mince, brun. Il est vêtu d'un gros pull à col roulé, couleur pain brûlé, un peu déformé, usé aux coudes, et d'un pantalon de velours noir. Sur la moquette, ses pieds sont nus. Son visage est mangé par les boucles d'un courte barbe brune, la barbe de quelqu'un qui l'a laissée pousser par nécessité. A cause des lunettes qu'il a portées pendant l'été polaire,

le creux de ses yeux apparaît clair et fragile, vulnérable comme la peau cicatrisée d'une blessure. Son front est large, un peu caché par les premières boucles des cheveux courts, un peu bombé au-dessus des yeux, traversé par une profonde ride de soleil. Ses paupières sont gonflées, le blanc de ses yeux est strié de rouge. Il ne peut plus dormir, il ne peut plus pleurer, il ne peut pas oublier, c'est impossible. . . (Italics in the original) (la Nuit des temps, pp. 7-8).

It is the doctor's thinking and daring which galvanized the world and made the connection of the world's largest computers into a single monstrous brain possible. He broadcasts Eléa's plight on world-wide television and the men of the world react. A business executive says, "This boy is right, 'honte a nous si nous ne faisons rien.'" And he orders his company's computer put at the disposal of the link. Men everywhere rise up together with the same sentiments.

The Doctor cares for Eléa and attempts, in every way at his disposal, to make her feel at home in the strange world to which she has reawakened. Finally in a truly touching scene, he tells her of his love:

--Eléa... Je suis avec vous... tout seul avec vous... pour la première fois... peut-être la dernière... Et vous ne comprenez pas... Alors je peux vous le dire... Eléa mon amour... ma bien-aimée... je t'aime... mon amour, mon amour... je voudrais être près de toi... sur toi... dans toi très doucement... te rassurer, te réchauffer et te calmer, te consoler, je t'aime... je ne suis qu'un barbare... un arriere sauvage... je mange de la bête... et de l'herbe et de l'arbre... je ne t'aurai jamais... mais je t'aime, je t'aime... Eléa, mon amour... tu es belle... tu es belle... tu

es l'oiseau, le fruit, la fleur, le vent du ciel...
Jamais je ne t'aurai... je le sais, je le sais...
mais je t'aime...

Les mots de Simon se posaient sur elle, sur son visage, sur ses bras, sur ses seins découverts, se posaient sur elle comme des pétales tièdes, comme une neige de chaleur. Il sentait dans ses mains sa main s'adoucir, il voyait son visage se détendre, sa poitrine se soulever plus calmement, profondément. Il vit les paupières se baisser très lentement sur les yeux tragiques et les larmes enfin couler.

--Eléa, Eléa, mon amour... reviens du mal... reviens de la douleur... . . .

Il sentit la main d'Eléa étreindre la sienne, il vit son autre main se soulever, se poser sur le drap, le toucher, le saisir et d'un geste inhabituel, d'un geste incroyable, le ramener vers elle et couvrir ses seins nus.

Il se tut.

Elle parla.

Elle dit, en français:

--Simon, je te comprend...

Il y eut un court silence. Puis elle ajouta:

--Je suis à Païkan...

De ses yeux clos, les larmes continuaient de couler (la Nuit des temps, pp. 271-272).

Thus one finds himself thinking, in the end, of three rather than two. Eléa, unknowingly poisons Païkan, whom she so dearly loves, and Simon is forced to stand and watch her die. It seems that it should have been Eléa, Païkan and Simon rather than Eléa and Païkan when Barjavel writes:

Eléa et Païkan...

Leur histoire tragique s'était prolongée jusqu'à cette minute, où la fatalité forcenée les avait frappés pour la deuxième fois. La nuit les avait rejoints au fond du tombeau de glace et enveloppait les vivants et les morts, les liait en un bloc de malheur inévitable dont le poids allait les enfoncer ensemble jusqu'au fond des siècles et de la terre (la Nuit des temps, p. 310).

With these characters René Barjavel brings to his reader, with force and drama, the author's dark vision of the world of the future. This is not to say that Barjavel is pessimistic; on the contrary, many of his characters, such as François in Ravage or M. Collignot in le Diable l'emporte, demonstrate his fundamental faith in man's ability to adapt or to overcome the difficulties which beset him. François had to live so that Blanche, whom he loves, could live. He faced and overcame unending series of trials because he was fortified from within by this strongest of all human emotions. The loving father quickly adapts to the problem of a berserk scientist in order that his children may live.

3. STYLE

Jean-Didier Wolfrohm, critic, says, "M. Barjavel nage dans la fiction comme un cosmonaute dans le vide. C'est sa dimension d'écrivain."⁸ Barjavel fills this space which we call the future with a truly poetic vision. His black humor is noted by M. Bridenne in commenting on Barjavel's stylistic ability:⁹

⁸Jean-Didier Wolfrohm, in an article from an unidentified source provided by M. Barjavel.

⁹Bridenne, op. cit., p. 252.

Sans conteste et qu'il le veuille ou non, il est donc un des plus pittoresquement désespérants d'entre les auteurs actuels, d'autant qu'il est servi par un brin de plume lui conférant par moments une haute puissance d'évocation, une particulière aptitude à donner le frisson. Mêlant l'anticipation positive à l'Idéalisme amer et sans illusions, la gravité épique et vaticinante à l'humour noir et quelquefois à la gauloiserie. . . .

One needs only to review rapidly the citations which have been used in the preceding study of characterization in order to feel the justice and inherent correctness of M. Bridenne's evaluation. After the scenes of carnage and destruction which accompany the escape of François and his band, what could be more heroically poetic than Barjavel's description of the baby's birth.

As for humor, it seems necessary to cite only one short anecdote in order to get a grasp of the author's penchant for black humor. In le Diable l'emporte, an experiment in the use of irradiated grains and the feeding of chickens goes awry. The use of these grains as feed had been tremendously effective. Chickens fed small quantities grew at prodigious rates and to tremendous sizes. One day a chick got loose and ate a whole bag of grain. The result was a monster chicken the size of a mountain. After denuding a major portion of northern Africa, eating whole herds of elephants and hippopotami like so many beetles and laying a monstrous egg atop man's newest and fairest city, the chicken dies and begins to putrefy. The chicken is, in

the long run, decomposed by giant microbes which are spawned by the chicken's body. They in turn die from lack of anything of sufficient size to feed upon. But the problem of the monster egg remains:

Diverses propositions furent émises: lui atteler une fusée à réaction qui l'emporterait dans l'éther. Mais ce n'était pas sans risque de casse. Et alors quelle pluie!

Le cuire sur place par radar et en distribuer les morceaux aux populations affamées de l'Inde. L'Angleterre s'y opposa, de crainte que les Hindous ne devinssent géants.

.

On cherchait, on ne trouvait point. Une prime d'un million de dollars fut promise à qui fournirait une solution acceptable (le Diable l'emporte, p. 174).

It goes without saying that this is undoubtedly the largest chicken joke of all time.

In all, one can say that Barjavel is an excellent representative of those qualities which make science-fiction so appealing to members of the modern generation. One can trace the clean, eminently logical story line back to Poe. One finds no meaningless side excursions into endless trivia in the novels of good science-fiction writers. This can, of course, be said of other genres as well, but it is without question a quality which has been amplified and greatly refined within the genre of science-fiction. The world which the science-fiction writer creates is believable without any great effort on the part of the reader. Yet,

at the same time, no flights of the author's imagination are prohibited as long as he cleaves to the principle of logic. This precious amalgam is one of the genre's greatest contributions to the field of literature. Barjavel has been quoted as saying, "Mais je n'écris jamais rien que ne soit scientifiquement envisageable. . . ."10

4. THEMES

Barjavel's works can be treated thematically under two main subheads. The first is his concern with the effects of technological progress. Twenty years ago the writings of René Barjavel were among the first trickles of what today has become a rushing torrent of criticism. The undaunted optimism of the nineteenth century has rapidly disappeared under the weight of two world wars and the advent of the atomic bomb. The second is his concern with Man himself. Pierre Masteau said in his review of la Nuit des temps, "'Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est l'homme,' a-t-il coutume de répéter, . . ."11 Barjavel studies man through

¹⁰Vivet, op. cit., p. 4.

¹¹Pierre Masteau, "la Nuit des temps," Revue de l'ameublement, (décembre, 1968), p. 107.

the optic of his finest emotion, love. This theme is a mainstream which courses from its source in the burned, austere and forbidding moments of Ravage to the mature and tragic romance of la Nuit des temps.

Barjavel was quoted earlier as having said that a way must be found to stop mankind from destroying itself. Here one must not be overly eager to adopt the obvious, for he is not simply prophesying a self-destruction which may come about as a result of our unending wars; he is warning against the subtler danger that is posed by technology and our dependence upon it. Almost one-hundred years ago Barjavel's predecessor, J. H. Rosny, developed the theme that man is not a finished product but a species in the continuing act of evolution. Barjavel has carried this idea to its logical conclusion; he warns us against the stultifying overuse of technology which will sap man's vital ability to adapt.

At the same time he warns us against uncontrolled experimentation and development. The scientists and engineers are, in his eyes, tinkering with the lock of a monstrous Pandora's box. He poses the question: Will mankind have learned enough about itself in time? Will we be able to control, constructively, the titanic forces which we have so recently begun to set free; or will we,

as we have done since time immemorial, turn them upon ourselves? A micro-organism three times as deadly as the Black Death brought back from the moon by our astronauts would be just the kind of tragic cosmic joke which M. Barjavel has tried so gallantly to warn us about.

The lesson is clearly written; if we wish to avoid the type of mistakes which bring about the catastrophic events that terminate la Nuit des temps, we must avoid the errors of the Gés and the Cobans. Pierre Masteau summarizes beautifully in his review:¹²

Barjavel a écrit là son maître livre, le plus beau chant d'amour qui soit dans notre littérature moderne et que l'éditeur peut sans ridicule mettre en parallèle avec ceux de Roméo et Juliette ou Tristan et Yseult, le message aussi le plus poignant qui soit pour mettre en garde contre la folie meurtrière, la soif de puissance, l'éternelle conquête du pouvoir scientifique et politique.

We must listen more closely to those voices which emanate from the very center of our humanity; the strongest of these, from Barjavel's point of view, is love in its many and varied forms.

¹² Ibid.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

René Barjavel stands athwart the middle of the twentieth century with his eyes and acute power of observation trained ahead upon the twenty-first. He sees many dark clouds and towering rugged mountains. His childhood was marked with one world war and he fought in the second. It is not surprising, therefore, that these two great conflagrations cast ghostly light and hideous shadows over the world of the future which one finds in his works.

Barjavel sets forth with frightening clarity the dangers that modern man faces. He fears that man may become a static, dependent creature, a creature doomed to extinction along with the ant if there should be a sudden shift in the world environment. He warns clearly that man must maintain his flexibility and adaptability if he is to survive in a world whose rate of change is on an exponential curve. Man must never, in his view, consider himself or his institutions as finished products.

Barjavel has clearly shown as well his command of the current frontiers of science. He also indicates a strong awareness of the fallibility of modern science. He warns us unceasingly that the majestic structure which man

has created is in fact based on a quick sand whose very substance is unreal. As it has ever been so is it now; the unreality and magic of today are tomorrow's science.

There are times when he seems unclear in his position, however. If man must take care not to become the slave of his technology, how then can Barjavel propose that man turn his most prized freedom, the choice of his mate, over to a computer as he does in la Nuit des temps? The idea has, of course, already proven quite successful, but one cannot help viewing his suggestion that it be used on a society-wide basis as rather inconsistent.

Many authors of science-fiction have depicted the dangers of the future, but few have done it with a higher degree of style and depth than René Barjavel. Fewer of them have thought to look to man's ability to love as a possible source of saving grace. And even fewer still have considered it important enough to make it one of their main themes in their novels. When the final history of science-fiction is written the name of René Barjavel will stand with those of the first rank, for he has contributed so much to the humanization of this genre which is leading mankind forward to the future.

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