

## **Popular Culture and the Ecological Gothic: Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns***

By Pramod Nayar

The traditional Gothic was fascinated by empty moors, steeples and labyrinths, all peopled by dangerous creatures. Twentieth century versions of the Gothic have relocated many of these atmospheric conditions of emptiness, threatening settings and dangerous creatures to the city, as exemplified in numerous filmic and literary urban Gothic works (from thrillers like Brett Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* to the cyberpunk fiction of William Gibson and films such as *Blade Runner* or *Terminator*).

This paper examines popular Gothic literature for its conscious or unconscious ecological themes. I take as a case study what is arguably one of the most famous (definitely one of the most successful) graphic novels of all time: Frank Miller's cult work, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986, hereafter *TDKR*), which consists of 'The Dark Knight Returns', 'The Dark Knight Triumphant', 'Hunt the Dark Knight' and 'The Dark Knight Falls'.<sup>1</sup> *TDKR*, this essay argues, presents a particular version of the Gothic: what I call the ecological Gothic.<sup>2</sup>

'Ecological Gothic' is the horror, the nightmare and the suffering that arise from misalliances and imbalances among the various elements of life in a particular ecosystem. It is the horror that results from the presence, permeation and persistence of waste (wasted humans as well as other waste) in a system. Ecological Gothic in contemporary popular culture, I suggest, is often seen in the thematization of urban outcasts, the constant emphasis on a city's repressed, on the city's (filthy, disease-and-poverty ridden) underside, a repressed parallel world that intrudes into and is in conflict with the 'true' one. Thus, if Gothic is the

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Miller, with Klaus Janson and Lynn Varley. *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (New York: DC Comics, 2002 [1986]). Includes Parts 1-4. All in-text citations are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> That the Batman films are persistently Gothic is such an obvious point that it need not be emphasized. Catherine Spooner provides a quick catalogue of the films' Gothic features: secret organizations, madness, the return of the repressed, underground spaces and trauma. Catherine Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* (London: Reaktion, 2006), 159-162.

name and figure of the tension between performance (and one can easily locate the costumed hero as instituting this ‘performance’) and depth, as Catherine Spooner has argued, then the ecological Gothic is the tension between the surface, ‘civilized’ developments of a city and the intrusion of the persistent, undesirable, ‘primitive’ darker depths.<sup>3</sup> Like the traditional Gothic, which explored the dark side of human nature, the ecological Gothic locates the dark side deep inside the city itself, a dark side that seems to rot the city’s internal systems.

### **Dark (K)Night Atmospheres: The Climate of Fear**

*TDKR* is climatically given to horror and fear. It is not accidental that the four part series is at both ends concerned with the weather and environment: a scorching summer (‘The Dark Knight Returns’) and a (limited) nuclear winter (‘The Dark Knight Falls’), the first leading to excessive violence and crime, the last leading to excessive magnetic pulses that ruins electrical activity all over the US and converts an entire desert into ‘blackened glass’.<sup>4</sup> Throughout Miller’s

harrowing recreation of Batman, he delves into the ecological and psychogeographical effects of vigilante culture and metropolitan civilizations.

*TDKR* opens with three crucial environment-related images in its first pages. The first is the representation of Gotham city baking in the heat. The visual medium of the graphic novel is able to deliver this with a punch: it shows white heat waves circling, weaving and coiling over the city.<sup>5</sup> Adjacent to this Miller introduces his second key theme: white noise as pollution. Of the 11 panels on this page, 10 are devoted to the TV screen.<sup>6</sup> The TV set announces in its weather report: ‘it’s ninety-seven [degrees Fahrenheit] with no relief in sight’.<sup>7</sup> The third is again a TV report, this time combining atmospheric conditions with terror – and marks the inaugural moment of the ‘ecological Gothic’. The newscaster reads, “This heat wave has sparked many acts of civil violence here in Gotham city ... the most hideous of which has to be the brutal slaying of three nuns last week by the gang

<sup>3</sup> Spooner, 27-8.

<sup>4</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 177.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Reynolds points to the excessive use of TV screen as panels in *TDKR* as Miller’s satire on the ‘medium’s inanity’. Reynolds, *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology* (London: BT Batsford, 1992), 97-8.

<sup>7</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 11.

known as the mutants.”<sup>8</sup> Soon after, a different news report announces that the mutant gang has ‘butchered’ ‘every member of the family’. The news reporter then turns to a medical consultant with the following question: ‘but surely this heat wave is a factor, right, doc?’ and the doctor agrees.<sup>9</sup> Beneath this is a second panoptical view of Gotham, this time showing the rising sun and heat waves *over* the city rooftops.<sup>10</sup> Reports of the rising heat repeat in the 46-page opening tale.<sup>11</sup> The weather is, announces the weatherman on TV, about to ‘break’. The immediate next visual set shows Bruce Wayne switching off the TV and the deciding in his head: ‘the time has come’.<sup>12</sup> Miller works the metaphor of Wayne’s change via weather and TV. Miller shows the weather forecast being watched on TV announcing a change, and soon after *Wayne* decides to make the change to/in himself. The verbal text is also analogically linked. The weatherman, Dave, says ‘right, Lola [Lola is the news reporter on TV], right as *rain*’ (emphasis added). On the facing page Bruce Wayne *showers* and cools off.<sup>13</sup> The impending break in Gotham weather is linked to the impending change in Gotham’s crime scene: the return of the Dark Knight after a decade of retirement. But there is a touch of irony here, of course (and this is what makes the book such a powerful text). When the visual shows storm clouds over Gotham and the (graphic) roar of thunder, the TV news says: ‘power lines are down all over the suburbs ... like the wrath of God, its headed for Gotham’.<sup>14</sup> A bolt of lightning fills a panel with the city’s skyscrapers in silhouette, even as two violent crimes are in progress.<sup>15</sup> When the kids are being threatened by the mutants in the arcade we see first a panel with a cloaked figure followed by a panel with just a gloved hand in a jet of water (recall here that we last saw Bruce Wayne in a *shower*, just before the storm clouds over Gotham). In the next panel we see a mutant thug with Batman blades

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<sup>8</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 14.

<sup>11</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 21, 24.

<sup>12</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 25.

<sup>14</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 27.

<sup>15</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 28-30.

stuck in his arm screaming.<sup>16</sup> Then back to TV, with the newscaster announcing in its regular news (the announcement follows an earlier one reporting new hair replacement techniques) the momentous occasion: ‘a large bat-like creature has been sighted on Gotham’s south side’.<sup>17</sup> Something – or someone – has come to Gotham. Once again the dramatic tension is built up through electronic noise: the TV news now flashes the Batman signal in the background.<sup>18</sup>

Miller makes it clear that what heads for the crime-ridden city is not just an atmospheric storm. The coming storm is the return of the city’s famous vigilante, and the storm is both a portent and a metaphor. Four pages later that we see the Dark Knight, now in full costume.<sup>19</sup> What Miller does here is to clearly link weather and atmosphere to the crime rate, the deteriorating city and the return of the Dark Knight. The Dark Knight represents a change of weather. Miller brilliantly builds up the tension in the atmosphere (both literal and metaphoric) – the blazing weather, the high crime rate, the imminent change in the weather, the cooling, the calm and then the storm. When the Dark Knight returns to Gotham, everything in the climate changes and a new climate of fear is launched, but this time for the criminals of the city.

Miller’s tale comes full circle also via weather. When the Dark Knight is to be hunted down by order of the police, Superman is ordered to bring him in. And Superman, looking back at their two careers believes ‘now the storm is growing again’.<sup>20</sup> The new Robin also perceives a similar atmospheric change when the Batman rides out to finally cleanse Gotham: ‘only feels like there’s a storm coming’.<sup>21</sup> This time the storm is also of community-building: Batman manages to unite Gotham behind him, and even the new police commissioner (who has issued a warrant for Batman’s arrest) stands quietly. After the nuclear

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<sup>16</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 32.

<sup>18</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 33.

<sup>19</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 34.

<sup>20</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 139.

<sup>21</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 173.

explosion and its aftermath, 'it's still dark at high noon in Gotham city. It's still winter in August'— a nuclear winter has set in.<sup>22</sup>

### **Dark Knight Spaces: The City and the Sewer**

Rod Giblett in his study of postmodern cultures of wetlands argues that cities have their own repressed spaces— the sewers and swamps that the city covers up.<sup>23</sup> The repressed, in Giblett's reading, has a spatio-ecological dimension. The contemporary ecological Gothic of *TDKR* challenges urban stability with the repeated return of the repressed spaces from deep below the metropolis in the form of the underground.

If, as Nigel Morris suggests, the 'Gothic cracks the surface to reveal the forces it contains', *TDKR* is premised on a city's *internal* forces as necessary to battle what is above the ground.<sup>24</sup> *TDKR* in its opening pages explains Batman's return through an interesting juxtaposition of causes. Wayne admits that he is unable to sleep in the Wayne mansion: 'it's the night – when the city's smells call out to him, though I lie between the silk sheets'.<sup>25</sup> Then, when Bruce Wayne walks down Crime Alley where his parents had been killed all those years ago he is attacked by the mutant gang – and it reinforces his view that the city needs the return of the vigilante.<sup>26</sup> Miller's brilliance is to make the narrator double-voiced: 'the city's smells call out to *him*, though *I* lie between the silk sheets' (emphasis added, 'him' being Batman and 'I' being Wayne). Miller here signals the dualism of both the Batman and the city: the Batman is the restless unconscious inside Wayne, the city's smells are the city's unconscious that 'call out', that do not sleep. The city's smells call out, and they call out as the repressed of the city to the repressed within Wayne. The juxtaposition of the unconsciously repressed

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<sup>22</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 184.

<sup>23</sup> Rodney James Giblett, *Postmodern Wetlands: Culture, History, Ecology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 55-100.

<sup>24</sup> Nigel Morris, 'Metropolis and the Modernist Gothic', In Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace (eds) *Gothic Modernisms* (London: Palgrave, 2001), 188-206, cited from 191. Interestingly Morris is writing about Fritz Lang's urban Gothic film, *Metropolis*

<sup>25</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 13.

<sup>26</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 14.

aspects of the city/person and the real spaces of the exterior – where Wayne is attacked – initiates the theme of the repressed in *TDKR*.

In order to emphasize the repressed within civilization, Miller returns to the origins of the ‘bat’ – the accident in the rabbit hole and the nightmarish encounter of the boy Bruce Wayne with the bats inside the cave.<sup>27</sup> The bats are described as ‘ancient’, almost an equivalent of the ‘collective unconscious’.<sup>28</sup> But Miller also emphasizes the sewers and the labyrinths of Bruce Wayne’s mind. Will Brooker has pointed out that Miller’s extensive use of the interior monologue helps us look into the Batman’s mind.<sup>29</sup> When Batman comes on TV to say ‘our personal demons can be defeated’ he is speaking of himself.<sup>30</sup> Miller draws a clear analogy between the caverns of the city, the caverns of Wayne/Batman’s mind and the caverns of the collective repressed.

The mutants occupy the non-spaces of the city, the metaphorical sewers, here identified as the town ‘dump’: ‘The dump stretches out of sight from the far bank of the West river ... it smells of rot and rust – it’s a breeding ground for insects and rodents’.<sup>31</sup> The dump is where the city really ends, and it is where the city’s current crop of trouble is harvested: the mutant gangs. Miller’s tale works in ingenious ways here. He uses the older image of the Batcave as the classical underside of the city, but an underside where the city’s most famous law-keeper lives and works. Here the Batcave is a repressed space, but one which gives rise to a powerful force. On the other hand, the dump is the true underground, the ‘breeding ground for insects and rodents’. Considering that the vigilante is a ‘bat’ – traditionally, not a favoured animal either – one can argue that Miller brings the rodent image out of the sewer. But terrifyingly, the repressed is more or less in control and the mutants who terrorize the Gotham do not reside inside the city’s belly – they live on the outside, albeit on the margins. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have shown how the sewer and the dump became metaphors of moral as

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<sup>27</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 17-19.

<sup>28</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 19.

<sup>29</sup> Will Brooker, *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 267.

<sup>30</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 17.

<sup>31</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 73.

well as physical depravity in 19<sup>th</sup> century England.<sup>32</sup> The town dump in Gotham becomes such a space where ecological waste and human excesses (and also, therefore, waste) co-exist, and which call for radical cleansing/sanitizing operations.<sup>33</sup> It comes as no surprise that in the battle between Batman and Dick, the mutant leader, the Batman transforms the nature of the dump and the battle itself. Batman tells Dick “You don’t get it, boy... this isn’t a mudhole ... it’s an operating table. And I am the surgeon”.<sup>34</sup> Filth – moral and physical – demanded medical attention, and Miller’s Batman unerringly turns to the same analogy when he is about to kill the mutant leader in a cleansing ‘operation’. With this Batman transforms the nature of the dump itself. From a place where filth and waste accumulates, it becomes the source of hope. The wastes of Gotham – the mutants – declare “[T]he mutants are dead. The mutants are history. This is the mark of the future. Gotham city belongs to the Batman... Let Gotham’s criminals beware. They are about to enter hell”.<sup>35</sup> When the clash of the titans – Superman and Batman – ends, Batman’s heart stops. In the middle of this fight Robin has already made her escape – through (what else?) a water main – once again gaining access to the city’s inner depths.<sup>36</sup> When Batman, who has faked his death, is ‘dug up’ by Robin he returns to the caverns beneath the old Wayne manor.<sup>37</sup>

### Dark Knight Wastes: Urban Disasters

Zygmunt Bauman has persuasively argued that waste is a product of modernization. No-man’s lands – territories designated as unfit for human habitation – are now ‘open to (clamoring for!) colonization and settlement’.<sup>38</sup> Then, particular classes of people were deemed excessive or redundant and

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<sup>32</sup> Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), 125-148.

<sup>33</sup> This framing of urban waste is borrowed from Zygmunt Bauman’s arguments about modernity’s wastes and outcasts and their dumping grounds outside the city in *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (London: Polity, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 101

<sup>35</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 102

<sup>36</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 194

<sup>37</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 198

<sup>38</sup> Bauman, 5.

therefore kept out, and often consigned to specific regions of the globe (what Bauman terms ‘dumping sites for the human waste of modernization’).<sup>39</sup> Now those who were deemed excessive or redundant – human beings ‘bereaved of their heretofore adequate ways and means of survival’ – have begun to exert pressure on the city resulting in ‘security fears’.<sup>40</sup>

What Miller maps is the wasting process. *TDKR* deals almost entirely with wastes – electronic rubbish, human wastes, wasted earth and land. Batman’s parents are wasted, the mutants are the city’s wastes and the dump itself is a wasteland. But there are other images of waste that come to surface with a close reading.

When *TDKR* opens we have nuns slain and families butchered. As the tale hurtles to its climax in ‘Hunt the Dark Knight’, wasting quickens and deepens in intensity. A drug pusher and an addict are ‘hacked to pieces’.<sup>41</sup> The Joker – Batman’s greatest enemy – is brought on a TV show to prove that he is not insane, and he escapes by killing all 200 people in the studio, including the psychiatrist who is trying to prove he (The Joker) is sane.<sup>42</sup> This wasting of people is also linked to an earlier theme I have raised: the return of the repressed. Ecological Gothic depends on the repeated (endless?) return of the dark side. When the Joker slays the TV audience he marks the return of the very things that ‘civilized’ Gotham sought to put away. That he does so by way of a constant pollutant of modern lives – TV and its white noise – adds to the surreal effect: when the repressed returns it does so as a spectacle that is telecast live.

It is in the waste dumps that Batman first confronts the mutant leader, Dick. The writing here is significant: ‘I make him eat some garbage ... Then I help him swallow it’.<sup>43</sup> The battle between Gotham’s latest scourge and its famous vigilante is symbolically located in the town dump. Injured, Batman is rescued by the new Robin and the mutant leader is imprisoned. Later, determined to finish the fight and defeat Dick in the presence of his comrades, Batman

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<sup>39</sup> Bauman 5-6

<sup>40</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 7

<sup>41</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 113.

<sup>42</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 128.

<sup>43</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 79.

engineers Dick's escape from prison. Escaping, Dick realizes he is in a duct and that ducts contain rats. He thinks to himself: 'remember – rats carry diseases, don't eat any'.<sup>44</sup> When he emerges from the pipe, straight into mutant headquarters – the dump – Batman is waiting for him. The battle for supremacy is conducted in a mud-pool, with both Dick and Batman unrecognizable as muddied bodies, a kind of dust-to-dust metaphor. After the defeat of the leader, the mutants metamorphose into 'Sons of Batman' and become vigilantes. In 'The Dark Knight Falls' Batman turns to these very violent soldiers from the dump in order to cleanse Gotham of the Joker's men.<sup>45</sup>

If the city is about the 'urbanization of nature',<sup>46</sup> *TDKR* shows how the repressed and the wastes – the non-urban, so to speak – always return, intrude to alter the ecosystem of Gotham. When urbanization produces waste – as Bauman has argued – the accumulated waste seems to produce life forms of its own: the disaffected, the unhappy, the dissident, the poor. Batman represents the revenge of Gotham's ecosystem by seeking to retrieve the city from the clutches of evil, even as he fights the criminal waste of the mutant gang.

But the question of waste acquires a dimension far greater than the mutants or Gotham individuals any more. In the 'Dark Knight Falls', the Russians have unleashed a nuclear weapon on Corto Maltese island. We are given specifics of the bomb's power.<sup>47</sup> A pilot on a space shuttle estimates the extent of damage: 'the fires might spread to mainland South America' and there is an anxiety over the electromagnetic pulses and waves the explosion might release.<sup>48</sup> The pilot signs off with a final note: 'my last thoughts will be a prayer for you, for humanity, and for planet earth'.<sup>49</sup> The bomb is codenamed 'Coldbringer': 'it's

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<sup>44</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 98.

<sup>45</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 172-4.

<sup>46</sup> Erik Swyngedouw and Maria Kaïka, 'The Environment of the City ... or The Urbanization of Nature', in Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (eds) *A Companion to the City* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 567-580.

<sup>47</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 165. There is considerable intertextuality in Frank Miller's work. Harlan Ellison appears in a few panels (165-6). The island of Corto Maltese recalls both hardcore noir novel *The Maltese Falcon* and the then-new cyberpunk novel, William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) whose chief villain is a cyborg-man named Corto.

<sup>48</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 165, 166.

<sup>49</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 168.

designed to cause maximum damage to the environment'.<sup>50</sup> Superman turns the bomb away from its course and experiences the explosion himself. Superman then runs a series of ecological thoughts for us – Miller's contribution to the anti-nuclear movement – as he is hit by the explosion:

You cannot touch my planet without destroying something precious...Even her deserts are abundant ... There were birds, here, who she blessed with chest feathers absorbent enough to carry water for miles to their children ... bullfrogs ... Now, there is only blackened glass.<sup>51</sup>

The power of the explosion is such that Superman himself wilts, and needs the sun to revive – though the sun itself will be blotted out by the dust thrown up by a nuclear explosion.<sup>52</sup> The electromagnetic pulse of the explosion ruins the electrical and radio equipment. And the weather changes, of course.

### **Conclusion: The Dark Knight's (True) Nature Returns**

The ecological Gothic in Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* is never simply about the environment. While urban environments and ecological damage are, as I have shown, constantly in the foreground in the work, Miller also analogically and metaphorically gestures at other spatial and psychological environments such as the collective repressed of Gotham. The horror in Miller emerges in the awkward and often tragic changes that occur in the ecosystem of Gotham city – the mutants who become the law, one vigilante superhero (Superman) who is tasked with killing another (Batman) and the Batman himself as an extra-legal force who is supported by James Gordon, the Police Commissioner. The ecological Gothic depends upon these kinds of misalliances, which upset the balance.

The ecological Gothic is also the unending horror of what Gotham is and is likely to be, but with a crucial difference. This difference might very well be a resolution of the ecological Gothic, and is figured in two crucial moments in 'The Dark Knight Falls'. First, when Batman sets out to cleanse Gotham of the Joker's

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<sup>50</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 168.

<sup>51</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 176-7.

<sup>52</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 177

men and dangerous devices, he does so in the aftermath of a massive electrical breakdown produced by the nuclear explosion. Urban technology has broken down, even though the Joker's tools of poison gas work. Batman has to abandon his state-of-the-art technology – his gadgets and his beloved Batmobile. Instead Batman returns to Gotham city heroically on horseback. The panel wherein Batman arrives at the dump (once again the description is given to us – ‘the breeding ground for insects and rodents’) is large as life, with Batman on his rearing horse, which is grey and muscled, filling the page.<sup>53</sup> He is now cast as the Knight of legends. He refuses guns and then declares: ‘our weapons are quiet, precise ... Tonight we are the law, tonight I am the law... Let's ride’.<sup>54</sup> Subsequent pages show him riding, with the horse's legs towering over the mutant gang (now transformed into Sons of Batman).<sup>55</sup> And once more, a page filled with a grimacing, snarling Batman like a Western cowboy, lasso in hand, riding hard at the head of his army, racing towards Gotham city – a cinematic full-screen shot which Douglas Wolk accurately describes as ‘corny and over-the-top, but... as huge a moment as he [Miller] wants it to be anyway’.<sup>56</sup> My point is this: faced with the horrors of a technological break-down and horror (nuclear war), *TDKR* turns to an ancient order of battle, with horses and Knights. This rejection of the urban-technological is a shift within the ecological Gothic itself where Batman has to (re)turn to nature and an older system of warfare to clean up Gotham. Like the bat, described as ‘ancient’, Batman is shown returning to his ‘true’ nature – an historic warrior, a Knight.

The final panel shows Wayne sitting surrounded by his new army of vigilantes, as he explains an old map and plan of the new headquarters he will build. If the map is a way of recolonization and the very opposite of the repressed and the dark side, as Rod Giblett has argued, Frank Miller's Dark Knight shows how the repressed underside can itself become the source of sustenance.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 177.

<sup>54</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 173

<sup>55</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 174,176.

<sup>56</sup> Douglas Wolk, *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What they Mean* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2007), 176.

<sup>57</sup> Giblett, 65-71.

[H]ere in the endless cave, far past the burnt remains of a crimefighter whose time has passed ... it begins here ... an army ... to bring sense to a world plagued by worse than thieves and murderers.<sup>58</sup>

If in traditional romances the cave and the underground are where the hero descends to before his ascent, the caverns in *TDKR* represent the spirit of the true hero, who stays underground so that the surface can be cleaned up. It is important to understand that when *TDKR* ends, Wayne is pointing to *natural* sources of water inside the caverns. Wayne and his acolytes have returned to the earth. We have been told that the trappings of civilization that Wayne had – his mansion, his wealth – are all gone. Thus crime will now be fought from a *de-urbanized* state. The Dark Knight returns to the state of nature.

Miller resolves his ecological Gothic by pointing to what Bauman has called the ‘culture of waste’: the ‘horrifying spectre of disposability’ that drives people to seek human comfort, even though we are distracted from this by consumer cultures and commodities.<sup>59</sup> When *TDKR* ends the solitary Batman has now developed a community. He has withdrawn from the urbanized splendour of the Wayne mansion to the primitive underground and state of nature with this community. In the face of continued rejection, abandonment and ‘disposability’ – wastage – the Batman and the mutants construct a new operative community in the state of nature. The rejection of Gotham is a rejection – however temporary – of the urban condition and its materials of exclusion. The ecological Gothic offers its own natural treatment for the degradation and waste that is Gotham.

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<sup>58</sup> Miller, *Batman*. 199

<sup>59</sup> Bauman, 131.