

# Detailing Gothic Aesthetics and Architecture in *The Batman* (2022)

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## Abstract

What sums up a whole scenario? The small details. The detailing units are combined to create a more excellent picture. Every artist one sees or the artwork one can call a masterpiece, is a work heavily dependent on the little details. Every artist who creates masterpieces, whether it is a movie, painting, scripture or novel, pays attention to the details to enhance the quality of the work. This article on Gothic aesthetics in detail will explore how the little details of the Gothic elements added together come up with a greater and enhanced picture with a more impactful appeal to the audience and how it is responsible in breaking the stereotypes of gender fashion and creating a genderless fashion sense. This article takes help of several shows and movies for comparison but primarily it will use *The Batman* (2022).

**Keywords:** *Gothic Aesthetics, Gothic Architect, Gothic Fashion, Alternative Reality, and Deconstruction.*

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Who could imagine that the term 'Goth,' which today is used to describe a fashion sense, actually has its roots in ancient Germanic tribes?

Although they did not identify as goths, this is how we today recognise them. When the renowned painter and brilliant architect Giorgio Vasari first used the term 'Goth,' it went from being a Germanic tribe to becoming a well-known architectural style that emerged in France. Then, in his book *The Castle of Otranto*, which has the subtitle 'A Gothic Tale,' Horace Walpole used the term 'Gothic' for the first time in literature, and not for the story but for the castle whose style is of Gothic like Horace's own house named 'The Strawberry Hill House.' Gothic emerged as a new literary genre named 'Gothic Fiction' and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which is inspired by a serial killer named Dracula represented Gothic vibes and enhanced its aesthetics. But it is clear and not to be confused that horror and Gothic are different things. Horror is a part of gothic fiction just like fantasy, mystery, romance, etc. What is horror can be Gothic, but what is Gothic cannot

always be Horror. Later in history, when Goth Rock was presented by bands like the Bauhaus (1978–2008) and its famous song 'Bela Lugosi's Dead' which came in the year 1979, Alien Sex Fiend (since 1982), and The Cult (since 1983), it transitioned from architecture and literature to songs with a mixture of heavy rock and synth-pop like one can see it in the fourth season of 'Stranger Things' (since 2016) which came out in 2022 created by 'Duffer Brothers' where the character of Eddie Munson played by Joseph Quinn goes in another world named as the 'Upside Down' and starts playing rock guitar to give his friends cover from the evil bat-like flying creatures and some time to accomplish the immediate target to kill the Antagonist Creature 'Vecna.' The main theme of that show is properly made on synth music and the scene where Eddie Munson dies playing a heavy metal rock song is purely Gothic with details of Eddie's Punk Gothic outfit, makeup, Goth rock, the dark clouds thundering in dark red lights while bat-like small creatures fly through the whole sky and Vecna's castle also known as his Mindlair inspired by



Figure-1: Vecna's Castle in Gothic Setting

gothic architecture having pointed arches, flying buttresses, Gothic ornamented interior, leaves vast spaces which creates a room for horror and enhances mysterious scenes as you can see in the screenshot given below as Figure-1, captured from the show's youtube channel.

But, the fashion sense of these Gothic bands—which signified gloom, misery, and melancholy— was what stood out to the public. This fashion sense included things like dark makeup, leather clothing, wicked symbols, etc.

Later it rapidly spread and blossomed into a subculture where numerous new Gothic fashion trends emerged, including Post Punk (Eddie Munson, *Stranger Things*), Trad Goth (Maila Nurmi) Cybergoths (Neo, *The Matrix*), Goth

Lolita (Harley Queen) which are in the figures - 1, 2, 3, and 4 and other gothic looks. But, there were some things which can be said to restrict or bind the fashion sense as it fixed the gender-constructed meaning like only women wear corsets or only men have short haircuts. Although traditionally a part of women's clothing, corsets are worn by women to conceal their abdominal fat from onlookers because, in British civilization, class and representation were the most important factors at the time. Men wore waistcoats for the same reason, but as cross-fashion began, where women began wearing men's clothing, men also began wearing corsets. Today, corsets are becoming more popular in men's fashion, much like boys' haircuts in women's are. Yet, after a while, males began wearing corsets, and Gothic fashion became genderless.



Figure-2: Eddie Munson in Punk Gothic, Figure-2: Maila Nurmi in Trad Goth



Figure-3: Neo in Cybergoth



**Figure-4: Harley Queen in Goth Lolita**

Goth, however, has come a very long way from being a Germanic Tribe to a Subculture and has thus covered a great deal of ground, but when it entered the mainstream, although it is not restricted to certain boundaries, it only managed to cover a few things. For instance, in the 1999 film *The Matrix*, Keanu Reeves' character Neo is dressed in cybergoth fashion, which makes sense in the context of the story but does not fully represent the history of Gothic. It will need a great deal of attention to detail in everything from architecture to make-up to symbols to colours to clothing to music to reflect the entire Gothic situation.

When Gothic first entered the mainstream, or one could say into the movies, it was only able to cover a few things, but later with more works to deliver the audience's fascinating demands for the darkness and Gothic representation as people started to understand the beauty of the dark colours and separated it from the evil or satanic mindset and even started accepting the satanic beauty and developed an alluring affection towards it, mainstream started delivering it.

#### ***The Batman (2022)***

The character of Batman is in itself Gothic because it is made from a bat, which is a Gothic element. Batman (Bruce Wayne) is a superhero appearing in American comic books published

by DC Comics. The character was created by artist Bob Kane and writer Bill Finger and debuted in the Twenty Seventh issue of the comic book *Detective Comics* on March 30, 1939. This paper takes a look at how the 2022 film has worked on the detailing part of Gothic aesthetics.

When it entered the mainstream with the movie *Batman Begins* followed by the other two films *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises* all three films directed by Christopher Nolan, it didn't follow the Gothic style completely, although one can argue that there are gothic elements in the movie like the castle, costume, music, etc., but it somehow lacks in the detailing and colours and the darkness which incompletes the whole scenario of pure Gothic aesthetics, but recently in 2022, in Matt Reeves' direction came *The Batman*, which excels in the detailing part of the Gothic Aesthetics; Batman played by Robert Pattinson has excelled in this role. Unlike the previous movies by Nolan, in this one, the characters of Batman and Bruce Wayne both are wearing eye makeup for the first time. Batman has more darkness than any of the other Batman films; even the logo, which appears briefly at the beginning of the film right after the DC logo within the same colour pattern, is made up of a black bat silhouette on a dark red background Batman logo which is also there in the *Dracula Untold* (2014)'s credit scene when the name of the movie comes, it comes



Figure-5: The Batman logo with a bat silhouette



Figure-6: Dracula Untold logo in the fire

with the impressions of bats flying inside the logo while the logo is in fire, both of which you can see in the figures-5 and 6.

A spooky, suspenseful background score played on a violin and a small amount of slow synth also adds to the tension. Then around 09:55 minutes, Robert Pattinson as Batman, covered in the whole black outfit comes out from the darkness, but just a few seconds back from him coming out around 09:45-09:55 minutes, an orange light emerges from the metro station's very background which can signify one of two things: either industrial lights or the beginning of a foggy morning. In either case, it ultimately contributes to the enhancement of Gothic aesthetics as it is a part of adding neon lighting for beauty enhancement for cinematographic purposes. It contributes

to the techno-colouring that is a crucial component of the Cybergoths, a part of the goth sub-culture, as one can again find a significant use of the techno colours later in the scene at 1:18:58 hours of the movie when the Batmobile is revealed with neon lightings of light smoky-blue light like the moonlight coming from the silencer of the car and the same dawn-like-orange from the engine part of the vehicle representing a thematic contrast of night and day, cold and warm, good and bad, despair and hope, chaos and calm. But, the combination of the colours here deconstructs the individuality of fixed meanings of the colours and neutralizes the contrast it generally creates and the vehicle is used throughout the night only unlike the other batman movies where the vehicle is revealed used in the daylight as well.



If one pays close attention to that scene, one will note that just a few seconds after the Batmobile appears, the background music changes from ominous heavy synth to chaotic tense music, which is representative of the noise made by bats when a colony is disturbed. Discussing the theme of the movie, one again goes back to the entry scene, after the first fight at the metro station, after he says his first on-screen dialogue "I am vengeance!" also feels Gothic because of the revolting tone. Bruce notes down everything in his diary in which he was speaking at the start of his monologue while listening to the sound track 'Something in the Way' by 'Nirvana' recorded in 1991 which from being a

soundtrack goes diegetic with action when Bruce starts riding the bike and becomes a part of the movie but this version is different by 'L'Orchestra Cinematique' - producing, nonetheless, a melancholic, depressed atmosphere that is once again a Gothic aspect added to the intricacies - Then, at 20:23 minutes, as Bruce Wayne's face is unveiled, one finds him sporting an entirely Gothic appearance, including spiked hair, dark-black eye makeup, and all-dark attire that emphasises the character's affinity for the gothic style and dark hues, in figure-7.

When the interior of the Wayne House is revealed at 23:23 minutes, one can see how truly

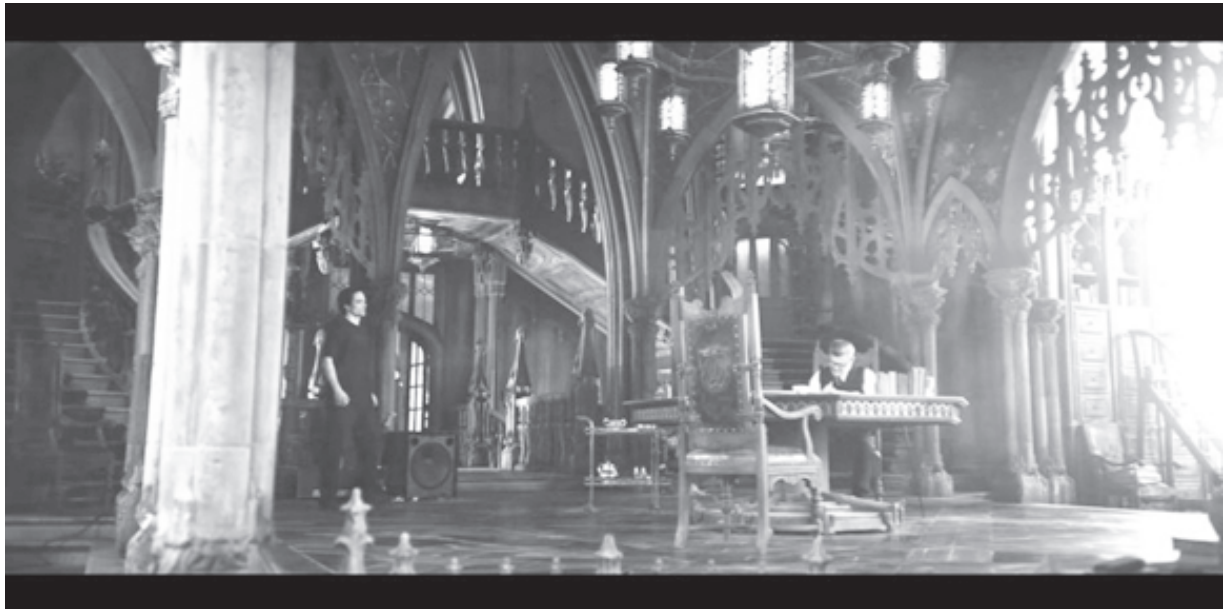


**Figure-7: Bruce Wayne in Vamp Goth**

gothic it is, with pointed arches all over supported by the flying buttresses, providing space for the ornamentation and light to enter via the enormous panes as in figure-8.

Cat-woman first appears in the movie at 29:47 minutes wearing leather clothing with

pointed high heel knee length boots, but her upper body lacks any darkness in terms of clothing. Later, when she dons her Cat woman costume, which was modelled after a black cat significant in witchcraft and a key component of Gothic fashion, one sees her wearing a completely black outfit. She is a redhead and dressed



**Figure-8: Wayne's House in Gothic Architecture**

in a black leather outfit in a Cybergothic style when Batman sends her on a mission at roughly 45:50 in the video, with techno lights and synthpop music playing in the background.

Following that, at 57:50 minutes, when Bruce exits his car in front of 'Gotham City Hall,' he is dressed in Victorian Goth Style, in which nothing else—not the music, not the architecture (even when they enter inside, there are no gothic elements of architecture), not even the makeup—indicates that the gothic details were purposefully added to highlight the Batman character's gothic aesthetics, not Bruce Wayne's.

Later on in the film, when the Batmobile is revealed in technologies in moonlight blue from the silencers and dawn-like orange from the engine (Figure-9), a car chase scene occurs where the Batmobile is introduced chasing the suspect's car and gaining a dominant position. To represent that dominant situation, heavy trumpet background music plays at 01:19:49 hours which enhances the dominance of the Batmobile, but, later it fades in with the cars' noises, and when a crash occurs where the Batmobile then emerges from a

blast, the synth waits and the bat-like metal sound comes in. The other vehicle is then struck by the Batmobile, which causes it to crash and flip over on the highway, then, as Batman exits the Batmobile and begins to walk towards the suspect known only as 'penguin,' the background music begins to play heavily trumpets, bells, and synthesiser to dramatise his steps (Figure-10). His outfit is then visible as a dark silhouette against the neon orange dawn-like light emanating from the blast that just occurred on the backside. Batman wearing dark clothes, heavy boots, dark cape, which can be seen in a flipped view from Penguin's perspective, bends to see inside the car where one can see him wearing his bat-head dark mask, with his eye makeup of kohl all around the eyes inside the mask easily visible from the outside.

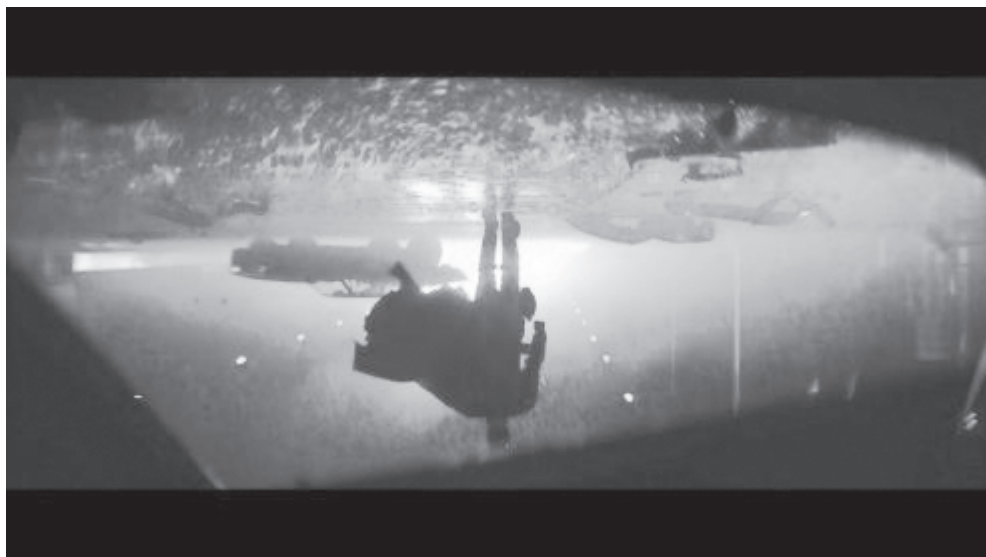
At 01:36:45, Batman and Catwoman are both visible in their costumes standing against the sunlight emerging from behind the clouds, which represents a paradigm-shifting viewpoint because, while Bat and Cat are typically associated with evil and are frequently used by witches,

necromancers, and other practitioners of black magic, here they stand for the dawn, the hope, and a new morning that is only possible because they fought in the dark.

At around 01:57:56 hours, the Catwoman appears again in a cybergoth look wearing light pink hair with a black leather corset inside her full-length leather pants which shine out from



**Figure-9: Batmobile in Technocolours**



**Figure-10: Batman in Technocolours**

her clothing. Many people consider that corsets should only be worn by women and not by men. But Gothic fashion theories which are also a part of the Gothic aesthetic theories convey that no such restrictions or boundaries are there in fashion. After Punk Goth and Trad Goth, in Gothic

fashion, men started wearing corsets which people - who don't know about Goth fashion - thought were worn only by girls when women of British civilization wore corsets and no men were seen wearing corsets rather tight waistcoat instead, but women wore corsets, like the fash-



ion of Goth Lolita. But to represent how mainstream conveyed a corset-wearing man can be seen in the movie *Dracula Untold* (2014). The character of Vlad the Impaler who becomes Count Dracula played by the actor Luke Evans can be seen wearing a corset. However, another curious thought can be that if Batman also comes wearing a corset, would the audience love that? Would the audience show the same amount of affection towards Batman or not? Well, people may love the character of Batman wearing cross-gender fashion. But, why is it that the makers have not done that yet? Is it a coincidence? Well, these questions would fall under the categories of curiosity or creativity but people may also not love that because Batman represents masculinity and the audience would not love Batman wearing a girly corset and fighting. The makers know this and this is why one needs Batman to go more Gothic. Gothic goes beyond just the darkness and evil symbols. It is a revolt in itself, it is being unapologetic for being whoever one is, like the graffiti. Gothic is a deconstruction element in itself which not only breaks the stereotypical perspective that only women should wear corsets, but it also sets the fashion and living in a free play where no matter male or female, they can be whatever they want and wear whatever they want. It is not only the appraisal of satanic beauty or evil symbols but a support for the idea of the free will of a person. This is why Gothic is an important part of popular culture and becoming more popular among the youth.

Later, when the movie proceeds towards its ending following the dark makeup, dark setting, synthpop background music and neon lighting, there comes a frame at 01:53:36 hours, where Batman can be seen holding a fire torch which is throwing that dawn-like-orange light representing a kind of win against the darkness as just a few scenes back there was that moon-like smoky blue light setting. But, this is the beauty of the

Gothic atmosphere as it neutralises the binary or the hierarchy of good and bad and dark and light. Even the dawn light emerges from the dark. Then, after the climax, the post-credit scene comes up with the same theme playing in the background with the bat-noise-like synthpop which also sounds like a train's breaks and the movie ends continuously following the dark light theme.

### Psychoanalysis

Gothic aesthetics is related to darkness and plays with the human psyche to create a fascinating affection towards its atmosphere, whether, in literature or movies, it attracts the audience's desires to make them question the reality or binaries of the world. It develops fear through its mysterious and dark settings which people will eventually like because everyone likes to be afraid. Biologically, it is because of the adrenaline rush, but it is also because it creates the feeling of uncanny and according to Sigmund Freud's uncanny theory, the fear happens because of the familiar thing becoming unfamiliar. For instance, one is familiar with the kid in our home, but at times, if it tries to haunt us by hiding behind the door, one gets afraid because at that moment one fails to recognise the kid. At that very moment, it shakes an individual's identity, it tries to disrupt one's value of existence and in the end, it all becomes the game of existence. This is why, audiences love to watch Gothic shows or read novels because it questions one's identity and people get a chance to prove it again and again and again. In addition, it is a continuous combination of beauty and misproportioned or distorted images and people love that because it makes them question reality since what happens in the world of Gothic fiction is unique and feels unreal according to the real world. It also invokes the feeling of being in danger but a man feels free to do anything while being in danger so it also provides a sense of freedom in the minds of the audience.

Batman is a vigilante, a person who fights crime without being bound by the law or the rules. His character and his actions represent his trauma, the trauma which he faced in his mirror stage. According to Lacan's Mirror stage theory, which can also be called the stage of identity formation, it can be said that, when he was in his identity formation stage, he used to look up to his father and his father was doing good deeds for the people of the Gotham city. But, when both his parents get killed by a thief in front of his eyes, it shakes him to his core and makes him a vigilante and now whatever he is doing feels like a compensation which he is trying to give to his parents that he could not save them at that time and what he feared most was a Gothic element but it offered him freedom, freedom from the laws which set his parent's killer free and freedom from his fear, his reality of the character of Bruce Wayne. The Gothic settings, makeup, and atmosphere provided him a freedom and an escape from this world which is nothing but a simulation of the real world. Meanwhile, in *The Batman* (2022), Catwoman presents her actions as mischief. She knows she is not as strong as either the Batman or the villains. But, she is like a black cat, which again is a gothic element providing fear and freedom. She does her mischief, being in disguise, breaking trusts of the people, doing what she wants and getting what she needs, while the Batman's character is bold, powerful, and brave and does what he wants in front of the people, yet in a clever manner. Visible from a quotation from the movie the understanding of his idea of self-understanding to learn his thoughts about himself from which one can relate to his psyche more, "they think I'm hiding in the shadows, but I am the shadows," here one can know that he stays in the dark to distinguish himself from the world not that he fears the world, where one can say Catwoman hides in the shadows because she knows what she has to do if she wants to accomplish the tasks.

## Conclusion

This paper has explored many types of Goth fashion in the goth subculture and its music while also discussing how knowing about them can help in detailing when you are making a movie or song about Goths, and how they can create an impact on the scene and the audience's minds while conveying a lot of social messages. People used to think and still think that darkness, evil symbols, black fashion, etc., are a way to approach satan or evil practices. But, these movies with detailing in the understanding of Gothic settings try to break that thought and allure the audience towards dark music, setting, and fashion and also break gender norms by offering a genderless fashion sense. After Gothic architecture became the churches themselves, Goth fashion and literature developed more because they became part of the holy church. But the bands saw it as a way to express their truth and desires with unapologetic behaviour. And so, detailing while making something on it holds important because one is not dealing only with a fashion sense but hundreds of years of history and a lot of symbols which represent various things, so one must have great knowledge about what they are presenting like Bat is a Gothic element but represents fear and its acceptance. The lighting, music, makeup, architecture, and dark atmosphere were all on point to enhance the aesthetic of this gothic representation of the movie *The Batman* (2022).

Hence, while looking at the scenes from *Stranger Things*, *Batman*, *Dracula Untold* or whether it be a Bauhaus song, it is found that the importance of detailing, like the other artworks, is equally important to enhance the Gothic aesthetics, as well.

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