The connection between Gothic architecture and the topics of transgression and decay is a very interesting analytical angle to consider. This article aims at examining the Gothic architectural locus, i.e. the Gothic villain’s abode – typically an isolated, decrepit structure, standing out from the rest of the buildings and embodying the features of its inhabitant(s). By looking at a variety of texts, ranging from novels and short stories to excerpts from a comic book and a television show, it intends to illustrate the different forms that the imagery of Gothic houses assumes in modern popular culture and entertainment. Gothic fiction characteristically stages a paradoxical and ambiguous place – either a castle, a convent, a mansion or the old house next door – which not only plays the role of an asylum or a refuge for its elusive tenant, but also provides a base for all kinds of far-fetched situations and a site for vice and excess: it is there that the most terrible secrets are revealed and it is also there that the truth about the landlord’s identity is uncovered.

The clearly established identity of the Gothic novel – which has made it so suitable for parody – revolves around a number of elements, or a set of ingredients, which are so constantly present that they resemble clichés. The anonymous reviewer in the essay “Terrorist Novel Writing” in 1797 parodied the highly conventional nature of the Gothic through the formula of a recipe:

Take an old castle, half of it ruinous.
A long gallery, with a great many doors, some secret ones.
Three murdered bodies, quite fresh.
As many skeletons, in chests and presses.
An old woman hanging by the neck, with her throat cut.
Assassins and desperadoes, quant. suff.
Noises, whispers, and groans, threescore at least.
Mix them together, in the form of three volumes, to be
Taken at any of the watering-places before going to bed.1

The commonplaces of the Gothic novel indeed pervade the numerous specimens of the genre, and one of the elements that have ensured its durability over the centuries has been the evolution of these topics, their adaptation to their time of usage and to the readership’s expectations. The topics can be regarded as indicators of vital areas of the Gothic genre, and their resurgence in contemporary art and literature illustrate the fact that the Gothic is somewhat “timeless”.

In this article I propose to study the interaction and evolution of two main Gothic motifs, often intimately connected in contemporary literature and visual arts, namely the buildings, that is, the architectural structures where the plot takes place, and the villain as the owner of the properties. To be more precise, I intend to focus on the Gothic house as a place of authority, as the realm where the master lives. The link between architecture and the Gothic novel is, as Montague Summers puts it in *The Gothic Quest*, “congenital and indigenous, it goes deep down to and is virtually of the very heart of the matter”. Whether it is a castle, a convent, a manor house or a mansion, Gothic fiction typically stages a paradoxical and ambiguous place, which plays the role both of an asylum and of a refuge but which also provides a base for all kinds of far-fetched situations and excess: the most terrible secrets are revealed there. More often than not, when the story is not that of a house in particular, the house still remains closely linked to the history of the main character.

My comparative study is based on extracts taken from both classic and contemporary novels. The former cover Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents* (1797), John Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1819), Matthew Gregory Lewis’ *The Monk* (1796), William Beckford’s *Vathek* (1786) and Jane Austen’s Gothic parody *Northanger Abbey*

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4 Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents* (1797), Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2011.