



## The Metaphorical Logic of Deviant Creation in Thomas Ligotti's *The Red Tower*

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### Abstract

### Original Research Article

This article reads Thomas Ligotti's *The Red Tower* through Conceptual Metaphor Theory and argues that the story is best understood as a structured metaphorical system rather than as a loose cluster of grotesque symbols. The Red Tower and its subterranean extensions function as a source domain through which a broader process of deviant creation becomes intelligible. The analysis shows that creation is first figured through industrial production, then progressively rendered in bodily terms, turned towards generation, and finally expressed through forms of life whose vitality is inseparable from degeneration. Particular attention is given to the story's spatial logic, especially the downward migration of productive activity from the visible factory to hidden underground levels, where grave-space is converted into generative space. The article also considers secondary metaphorical lines, including the Tower's reddening as visible deviation, the grey landscape as an erasing counter-force, the dissemination of inner process into outward form, and the limited value of a pathological-proliferation reading when treated as a controlled analogy rather than as a master-key. Methodologically, the study adopts a restrained use of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and focuses on recurrent, structurally central patterns instead of isolated grotesque details. It concludes that the horror of *The Red Tower* lies not only in disturbing imagery, but in the formal coherence with which Ligotti renders creation as hidden, embodied, generative, and self-corrupting.

**Keywords:** Conceptual Metaphor Theory, cosmic horror, embodiment, generation-degeneration, Thomas Ligotti, weird fiction.

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### 1. Introduction

Thomas Ligotti is widely regarded as a major writer of contemporary weird and philosophical horror, yet criticism has often approached his fiction primarily through worldview. Recent studies have connected his work with pessimism, anti-humanism, macabre unrealism, deceptive reality, antinatalism, and the collapse of human autonomy. Marino-Cicinelli (2020, 2024),

Wróbel (2021, 2022), Villalobos Manjarrez (2023, 2026), and Lopes (2019) differ in emphasis, but they converge on one important point: Ligotti's horror does not depend on conventional monsters or sudden shocks. Rather, it arises from the suggestion that consciousness, embodiment, and reality itself are unstable, deceptive, or fundamentally wrong. This critical consensus is valuable, but it also leaves one



question insufficiently developed. If Ligotti's fiction is so persistently concerned with deformation, breakdown, and unreality, by what formal means do individual stories make those abstractions intelligible?

*The Red Tower* is especially well suited to that question. The story offers neither a conventional plot nor sustained character development, yet it constructs a dense fictional environment. A ruined factory stands in a featureless grey landscape, sealed above ground, connected to subterranean chambers, and associated with operations that continue beneath its apparent abandonment. Its products develop from absurd novelty goods into diseased anatomical forms, then towards graveyard-like generation and hyper-organic life. The text repeatedly stresses mutation, hidden process, deviation, and increasingly "viciously intent creation", while its later stages culminate in beings whose vitality is inseparable from decay. Such a narrative invites less an image-by-image reading than an account of a whole world organised around a developing logic of deviant creation.

This article approaches *The Red Tower* through Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). In its modern form, metaphor theory no longer treats metaphor as merely ornamental language. As Huszka and Aini (2026) show in their historical overview, the field has moved from a predominantly rhetorical understanding of metaphor towards a cognitive one, in which metaphor is treated as a structure of thought rather than a decorative element of language. Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980/2003) established the central CMT claim that abstract concepts are commonly understood through systematic mappings from more concrete source domains to more abstract target domains. Building on this framework, Huszka et al. (2025, 2026) emphasise that such mappings are often grounded in embodied and spatial experience. CMT is particularly useful for literary analysis when a text does not merely contain metaphorical phrases, but organises a whole narrative environment so that one domain becomes thinkable through another.

A methodological precedent for such a reading already exists in recent Ligotti

scholarship. In their article, *Civilization in Nihilistic Miniature*, Huszka, Aini, and Stark (2026) argue that Ligotti's *The Town Manager* should not be treated as a loose symbolic backdrop, but as a bounded story-world functioning as a source domain through which a wider abstraction becomes narratively legible. Their central point is not only that metaphor can exceed local phrasing, but also that a literary world may itself be metaphorically structured, with meaning emerging through setting, sequence, repetition, and mutation. This insight is crucial for the present study. *The Red Tower* likewise resists reduction to a single emblem. It is not best understood simply as a factory, a body, a symbol of death, or a pathological growth. It is a bounded and evolving world in which industrial production, bodily matter, subterranean space, and degenerate vitality are drawn into a coherent conceptual pattern.

This perspective also helps position the present article within earlier Ligotti criticism. Marino-Cicinelli (2020, 2024) helps explain why Ligotti places reality under ontological suspicion rather than treating horror as external intrusion. Wróbel (2021, 2022) highlights the importance of bodily reduction, darkness, and anti-autonomous embodiment in Ligotti's work. Villalobos Manjarrez (2023, 2026) clarifies why development in Ligotti's work does not lead towards flourishing, but towards further corruption, dissolution, or anti-life revelation. Lopes (2019) is equally relevant because *The Red Tower* repeatedly destabilises the distinction between ruin and activity, object and organism, manufacture and generation. Even so, these approaches are stronger on philosophical orientation than on formal mechanism. The present study therefore asks not only what Ligotti's story suggests, but how its world is organised so that these suggestions acquire conceptual force.

The argument advanced here is that *The Red Tower* constructs a structured metaphorical system whose primary target domain is creation, though creation in an aberrant and self-corrupting form. The story first figures creation through industrial production, then progressively renders that production bodily, hidden, and

generative, until it culminates in forms of life whose vitality is inseparable from degeneration. This does not require the claim that every grotesque detail encodes a separate metaphor, nor does it justify rigid allegorical equations such as “the tower is the body” or “the tower is disease”. A more defensible claim is that the Red Tower functions as a source domain through which the story models deviant creation: a process that breaks away from grey sameness, turns increasingly inward, and produces beings marked from the outset by decay. In that sense, the horror of *The Red Tower* lies not only in grotesque imagery or philosophical suggestion, but in the formal coherence of the world it builds. The Tower is not simply a strange place within the narrative; it is the concrete model through which the story thinks.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 From rhetorical ornament to conceptual structure

A reading of *The Red Tower* through Conceptual Metaphor Theory must begin with the explanation of an important shift in the history of metaphor studies. In older rhetorical traditions, metaphor was often treated chiefly as a figure of speech, valued for vividness, compression, or stylistic effect. As Huszka and Aini (2026) show in their historical overview, this understanding remained influential for a long time, even though the tradition also contains repeated challenges to a purely ornamental view. The decisive modern change came with Lakoff and Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By* (1980/2003), which argues that metaphor is not merely a decorative feature of language, but a basic mechanism of thought. In this account, metaphor does not simply embellish expression; it structures how abstract concepts are understood through more concrete forms of experience.

This shift matters for the present study. If metaphor is treated only as local figurative phrasing, *The Red Tower* can be read at most as a story containing suggestive symbolic details. That approach would not explain why the factory, the underground levels, the graveyard,

the diseased products, and the hyper-organisms form such a coherent pattern. A cognitive-conceptual account is more useful because it allows metaphor to be understood as an organising principle. The relevant question is therefore not simply whether Ligotti uses metaphorical expressions, but whether the story constructs a world in which one domain of experience becomes thinkable through another.

### 2.2 Source domains, target domains, and embodiment

Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003) argue that metaphor operates through systematic mappings between source domains and target domains. The source domain is usually more concrete and experientially accessible; the target domain is more abstract and less directly graspable. In later work, Huszka et al. (2025) and Huszka et al. (2026) develop this point by stressing that such mappings are often grounded in embodied and spatial experience. People understand abstract matters through recurring bodily patterns such as weight, movement, balance, pressure, containment, and direction.

This embodied dimension is especially important for the present article. *The Red Tower* does not discuss corruption, hiddenness, or deviant creation in purely philosophical terms. Instead, it renders them through a factory, subterranean levels, diseased organs, grave-like enclosures, fleshy productive processes, and beings in whom vitality and decay coexist. The story’s abstractions are therefore inseparable from bodily and spatial forms. Conceptual Metaphor Theory is well suited to such a text because it allows those forms to be treated not as decorative embellishments, but as structures of thought.

A related concept is that of image schemas (Huszka et al., 2026). These are recurring bodily patterns such as CONTAINER, PATH, FORCE, BALANCE, and UP-DOWN. They are relevant here because Ligotti’s story repeatedly organises meaning through enclosure, descent, hidden interiority, and distributed movement. The Tower’s metaphorical force depends not only on

what it contains, but also on how its world is spatially arranged.

### 2.3 Conceptual metaphor and world-modelling in literature

Although CMT originated in cognitive linguistics, later work has shown that it can be highly productive for literary analysis. Huszka et al. (2026), in their study of Stephen King's *Elevation*, emphasise that literature can foreground or literalise metaphors that remain partly implicit in everyday thinking. In such cases, metaphor does not function only at the level of isolated phrases. It can shape plot, spatial design, ethical movement, and character transformation. This is important for *The Red Tower*, whose force lies less in individual images than in the cumulative organisation of its spaces, materials, and processes.

The most useful refinement for the present study comes from Huszka, Aini, and Stark's (2026) account of a structured source domain in their reading of Ligotti's *The Town Manager*. Their argument is particularly valuable because it distinguishes a metaphorical model from a looser symbolic reading. A static symbol may suggest meaning without explaining development, while a metaphorical model allows one to analyse process, mutation, sequence, and recurrence without reducing the text to rigid one-to-one equivalences. The distinction is especially useful for Ligotti. His stories often generate horror not through stable emblems, but through worlds that evolve according to their own internal logic.

That insight is directly applicable to *The Red Tower*. The story is not best approached as a collection of separate symbols – factory, graveyard, body, disease, red colour, underground spaces – each carrying an independent meaning. It is more productive to treat the tower-factory complex as a bounded world through which a broader process becomes intelligible. The task of the analysis is therefore to identify how the story organises that world, what target domain it renders thinkable, and how

its different features belong to one metaphorical system rather than several unrelated ones.

### 2.4 The present use of CMT

The present article adopts CMT in a deliberately restricted and text-based manner. It does not claim that every grotesque detail in *The Red Tower* corresponds to a separate conceptual metaphor, nor does it attempt to reduce the story to a fixed allegorical code. Instead, it proceeds from four working assumptions. First, metaphor is treated as a conceptual and narrative mechanism rather than as ornament. Second, the tower-factory complex is approached as a bounded source domain. Third, the analysis focuses on recurrent and structurally central patterns rather than isolated images. Fourth, the value of the framework is judged by explanatory power: the key question is whether CMT clarifies how the story's world thinks.

This approach is especially appropriate for *The Red Tower* because the story already invites a developmental reading. The factory does not remain a factory in any ordinary sense. Its products move from novelty objects to bodily distortions, then to graveyard-borne hyper-organisms. Its operations retreat below ground. Its relation to the surrounding grey landscape is repeatedly figured as betrayal and deviation. Its later stages are associated with "putrid creations" and a "perfection of defect and disorder". These are not scattered horrors, they belong to a process. Conceptual Metaphor Theory is useful here because it makes that process legible as a structured movement from industrial production to bodily generation and finally to degenerate vitality.

For that reason, the following analysis treats the Red Tower not as a single static symbol, but as a metaphorical world-model. Its architecture, materials, underground extensions, products, and later life-forms together constitute a concrete domain through which the story renders deviant creation intelligible. The article's central theoretical claim is that Ligotti's horror in *The Red Tower* is generated not only by grotesque

content, but by the conceptual coherence with which the story organises its own strange world.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Analytical orientation

This article adopts a qualitative close-reading method grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Its purpose is not to catalogue every image in *The Red Tower*, nor to produce an open-ended symbolic reading of its grotesque details. Instead, it seeks to identify the recurrent structures through which the story organises abstract meaning by means of concrete, bodily, and spatial forms. In this respect, the method combines literary close reading with a cognitively oriented account of metaphor. It proceeds from the CMT premise that metaphor is not merely ornamental language, but a way of structuring thought through mappings between source and target domains. At the same time, it treats Ligotti's story as a literary construction whose meanings emerge not only from phrasing, but also from recurrent sequences and spatial arrangement.

This orientation is especially appropriate for *The Red Tower* because the story is driven less by conventional plot than by the patterned development of a world. The factory, the underground levels, the distribution system, the graveyard chamber, and the hyper-organisms do not function as isolated motifs. They belong to one evolving structure. The method adopted here therefore assumes that interpretation must proceed from patterns rather than from individual curiosities. The central task is to determine how those patterns work together and what broader process they render intelligible.

#### 3.2 Corpus and unit of analysis

The primary corpus of the study is Thomas Ligotti's *The Red Tower*. The analysis concentrates on the passages most important to the story's metaphorical organisation: the opening description of the Tower and its landscape, the first subterranean level and its

distribution system, the novelty phase of production, the graveyard-like second underground level, the emergence of the hyper-organisms, and the narrator's later account of the Tower's reddening, deviation, and conflict with the surrounding world. These moments are treated not as separate scenes, but as linked stages in one developing system.

The relevant unit of analysis is therefore not the isolated metaphorical phrase alone. In some cases, local wording is decisive, as when the story refers to "viciously intent creation", "betrayal", "breaking-off", or vitality joined to decay. More often, however, the decisive evidence lies in larger textual clusters. What matters is the recurrence of relations among industrial production, bodily matter, descent, grave-space, mutation, and degenerate vitality. The method therefore works at two connected levels: lexical signals and wider narrative configurations. The first helps identify metaphorical pressure points; the second shows how those points form a coherent structure.

#### 3.3 Criteria for identifying conceptual metaphors

To keep the reading disciplined, a metaphorical claim is accepted only when it meets four conditions.

First, it must be recurrent. A single suggestive phrase or one grotesque object is not, by itself, enough. Second, it must be structurally central. The pattern must shape the story's organisation rather than appear only at its margins. Third, it must be conceptually coherent. The proposed mapping must explain how several textual features belong together instead of merely linking two loosely associated ideas. Fourth, it must be interpretively economical. When a simpler and more textually grounded formulation explains the evidence, that formulation should be preferred to a more elaborate or speculative symbolic claim.

These criteria are especially important in a story such as *The Red Tower*, which strongly invites speculative interpretation. It is possible,

for instance, to read the Tower as a figure of the mind, the body, disease, or pathological proliferation. Some of these directions are genuinely suggestive and may explain parts of the text. Even so, the present article does not grant them primary status unless they are supported by repeated, structurally central, and conceptually coherent evidence. This is why the analysis gives priority to the sequence from industrial production to bodily process, then to generation, grave-space, hidden descent, and degenerate vitality. Those patterns are not only present; they organise the story's development.

### 3.4 Analytical procedure

The analysis proceeds in four stages. The first stage is textual clustering. Recurrent lexical and descriptive patterns are grouped according to their dominant domains, including industrial production, bodily matter, subterranean depth, grave-space, mutation, and vitality marked by decay. The second stage is mapping. These clusters are tested for possible source-target relations in order to determine which abstract process the story most consistently renders thinkable. The third stage is sequencing. Since *The Red Tower* is not a static tableau, the analysis traces how its metaphorical logic develops from manufacture to bodily inflection, then to generation, hidden process, and finally hyper-organic degeneration. The fourth stage is control through comparison. Candidate interpretations are checked against alternatives and retained only if they account for more of the text with fewer speculative assumptions.

This procedure is designed to avoid two common problems in literary metaphor analysis. The first is fragmentation, where critics identify many local metaphors without showing how they belong to a unified system. The second is over-totalisation, where a complex text is flattened into one fixed allegorical equation. The method used here aims to avoid both. It asks which patterns recur most forcefully, how they are related, and what larger process they jointly render intelligible. In the present case, that

process is taken to be creation in an aberrant, bodily, hidden, and self-corrupting form.

### 3.5 Scope, limits, and interpretive restraint

This article does not claim to recover a final or exclusive meaning of *The Red Tower*. Its aim is narrower and explicitly methodological. It seeks to show that some metaphorical claims are more textually warranted than others, and that the story becomes more critically legible when read as a structured source domain. For that reason, the analysis privileges patterns that are both explicit and recurrent: the movement from manufacture to creation, the bodily inflection of industrial space, the conversion of grave-space into generative space, the retreat of operations underground, and the culmination of the process in vitality joined to degeneration.

Conversely, more speculative formulations are treated with caution. The article does not rely on a psychoanalytic master-key, does not claim that the Tower straightforwardly equals the mind or the body, and does not stabilise the text as a medical allegory. Such readings may remain useful as secondary observations, especially when discussing bodily process or pathological proliferation, but they are not given primary explanatory status unless the story itself supports them through repeated and central cues. In a text as suggestive as *The Red Tower*, this kind of restraint is not a limitation, it is rather a condition of persuasive analysis.

In sum, the method adopted here combines close reading, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, and a deliberately cautious interpretive procedure. It assumes that Ligotti's story organises meaning through a bounded and evolving world, that this world can be read as a source domain, and that the strongest metaphorical claims will be those that account for the story's recurrent structures without reducing its complexity to a single static symbol. On that basis, the following analysis turns to the Red Tower itself as a metaphorical system whose central logic is the transformation of creation into bodily, hidden, and degenerate processes.

#### 4. The Red Tower as Structured Source Domain

The analysis begins from a simple premise: the Red Tower is not best read as a single symbol or as a merely grotesque setting. It is more precise to treat it as a bounded narrative world whose architecture, materials, and internal development render a broader process conceptually legible. In this respect, the present reading follows the methodological insight developed by Huszka, Aini, and Stark (2026), who argue in their study of *The Town Manager* that a Ligotti story may function as a reduced but coherent world through which a wider abstraction becomes visible. The same principle applies here. *The Red Tower* does not simply assemble disturbing images; it constructs a concentrated environment in which creation, mutation, concealment, and corruption can be traced as parts of one evolving system.

This becomes clear in the story's opening description. The Tower first appears as a "ruined factory" in a "gray emptiness", with no road leading to it, no door opening into it, and no ordinary means of access below the second floor. Even before the narrative turns underground, the structure is marked by closure and disengagement. It stands within the world, yet resists normal relations to it. That resistance matters. The Tower is not introduced as an open industrial site connected to surrounding space by exchange and circulation. It is introduced as a sealed structure whose contact with the outside world has already been radically limited. The result is a form of visible neutrality that conceals inner resistance and latent process. What initially appears inert is, from the beginning, organised against ordinary accessibility.

The upper structure reinforces this point. The factory is not simply abandoned; it is described as a place from which visible organisation has been withdrawn. The machinery that once occupied the upper levels has "evaporated", leaving behind only spectral outlines of tanks, funnels, belts, and wheels. Above ground, there are dust, silence, and traces. What remains is a structure whose operative coherence is no longer directly available. Yet the story does not frame this as simple cessation. The disappearance of

visible machinery suggests that process has not ended but shifted. In other words, surface ruin does not mark the death of the system. It marks the withdrawal of its most obvious form. The Tower's upper levels still indicate organised activity, but only as residue. The real work has moved elsewhere.

The landscape around the Tower sharpens this logic. It is "gray", "desolate", and "featureless", and the Tower initially occupies only the most unobtrusive place within it. At first glance, this setting gives the structure an air of near-neutrality, as if it had not yet broken decisively from the surrounding order. The story then revises that impression. The Tower's "encrimsoning" is described as "a betrayal, a breaking-off", and the hostility between the factory's operations and the "desolate purity" of the landscape becomes one of the story's governing tensions. The redness of the Tower therefore marks more than visual distinction. It registers a movement from obscurity to manifest deviation. What had once seemed almost absorbed into the grey world comes to display its separation from it. This shift from pale indistinction to visible rupture is one of the clearest signs that the Tower's inner process has begun to declare itself outwardly.

At this point, the Tower's status as a structured source domain becomes clearer. If the factory were approached as a static emblem, one might ask whether it "means" the body, the mind, disease, or industrial modernity. Such questions are understandable, but they tend to flatten the story. The text offers something more dynamic. The visible ruin above ground, the evaporated machinery, the subterranean chambers, the distribution tunnels, the graveyard-like second level, and the later hyper-organic productions all belong to one system in development. The emphasis falls not on one fixed equivalence but on an organised process of intensification. In that sense, the Tower is conceptually prior to any secondary symbolic gloss: it is the concrete environment through which the story renders deviant creation thinkable.

The internal organisation of that environment confirms the point. The first subterranean level is the "nexus of a unique distribution system", with

tunnels that “honeycombed” the land and reached “the most obscure and unlikely delivery points”. The Tower’s process is therefore not confined to the visible building. It extends through hidden channels into spaces beyond the factory itself. This makes the source domain larger than the standing structure. It includes the underground supports, the tunnels, the delivery points, and the later generative chambers. The factory is not merely a site of production. It is a distributed system whose hidden operations continue even when surface organisation appears to have collapsed. This also helps explain why the novelty goods matter. They are not isolated curiosities. They are outputs of a secretive world that is already organised around dissemination and deepening internal disturbance.

That disturbance becomes clearer as the story moves downward. The first underground level still belongs to a recognisably industrial grammar of chamber, support, tunnel, and delivery. The second underground level does not. It is “far more intimate”, enclosed like a graveyard, crowded with nameless headstones, and later identified as the place where the factory’s operations have migrated as the machinery above becomes obsolete. This movement matters because it shows that the Tower’s development is not random. What begins as manufacture becomes less visible, more inward, and more extreme. The deeper the system goes, the less it resembles ordinary industry and the more it appears as a hidden mechanism of bodily and generative corruption. The story’s spatial descent therefore corresponds to a change in the quality of process itself. What is withdrawn from view is not lost, it is intensified.

The same developmental logic governs the Tower as a whole. The factory begins with novelty manufacture, then moves towards bodily distortions, deeper distribution, graveyard-generation, and finally the production of hyper-organisms. That sequence shows that the Tower is not a static horror-object but a system that mutates. Its processes become less mechanical, less visible, and more radically productive over time. The story’s final movement makes the same logic outwardly visible. What begins as an

almost unobtrusive structure in a grey landscape becomes a tower whose inner logic is increasingly legible in outward form: in its redness, in the withdrawal of visible machinery, in the migration of function below ground, and in the emergence of beings whose vitality is already marked by degeneration. The Tower does not merely contain corruption. It gradually externalises it.

The Red Tower is not merely the place in which the story happens. It is a bounded, evolving, and conceptually organised world through which a broader process becomes intelligible. Its closure from ordinary access, its withdrawal of visible organisation, its conflict with the grey landscape, its subterranean extensions, and its shift from machinery to generative corruption all show that it functions as a source domain rather than a static symbol. The target domain clarified by this world is not simply death, bodily horror, or madness on their own, but deviant creation: a process that begins in manufacture, turns increasingly inward, and culminates in forms of life already marked by decay. The next subsection turns to the first major development within that process, namely the way in which creation is initially figured through industrial production.

## 5. Major Metaphorical Developments in *The Red Tower*

### 5.1 Creation figured through industrial production

The first major metaphorical development in *The Red Tower* is also the most explicit. Before the story turns towards graveyard-generation and hyper-organic life, it frames creation through the logic of industrial production. This is not a secondary feature of the narrative world but its initial organising principle. The Tower is introduced as a factory, its activity is described in terms of manufacture, and its hidden lower levels sustain production and distribution. If the story’s broader target domain is creation, the first source domain through which that process becomes intelligible is industrial production.

The text itself supports this reading. The narrator states that the Red Tower was “never

solely devoted to the lowly functions of an ordinary factory”. The sentence both confirms and exceeds the industrial frame. The Tower does perform the work of a factory, but ordinary manufacture does not fully account for its purpose. The same doubleness appears when the early products are described as “novelty items”, only for the narrative to add that their initial randomness gradually gives way to “the more usual plans and purposes of a viciously intent creation”. Here the vocabulary shifts from manufacture to creation without abandoning the factory-world. Creation is not opposed to production; it becomes legible through it.

This shift matters because it clarifies how the story organises abstraction. At first, the Red Tower produces goods. Those goods remain commodity-like in form, even when grotesque in content, and they belong to a recognisable industrial logic of output and distribution. At the same time, the text unsettles what such a setting would ordinarily imply. The early phase of production is irregular and only partly coherent. Forms emerge without stable design, sometimes resembling faces, clawing fingers, or caskets on wheels, but not yet forming an ordered line. Then “things began to fall into place”. Increasing order, however, does not bring reassurance. Production becomes more coherent at the same moment that it becomes more disturbing.

For that reason, the factory in *The Red Tower* should not be treated as mere setting. It provides the story with a model of coming-into-being. A factory implies planned output, repetition, transformation of matter, and an organised relation between process and product, and all of these implications are active here. The Tower does not create through spontaneous growth or divine fiat. It produces, develops lines of output, and distributes its goods through hidden channels. What emerges from it is conceived from the outset as something made, not simply born. The story’s horror begins here: creation is figured not as flourishing or gift, but as manufacture within a closed and increasingly deviant system.

The novelty phase of production makes this especially clear. The phrase “novelty items” might initially suggest triviality or eccentric

amusement, but the products quickly undo that expectation. Cameos are unnaturally heavy. Locketts open onto a black reverberant abyss. Organs are diseased, warm, and soft to the touch. A disembodied hand continues to grow fingernails. Gourds scream. Eyes are set into lava. Cement leaves an intractable stain. These things are still products, yet they are no longer comfortably legible as “products” in any ordinary sense. Their commodity form persists, while their content becomes bodily, uncanny, and destabilising. Industrial production begins to exceed itself from within.

The distribution system extends this logic. The first subterranean level functions as the nexus of an underground network through which the Tower’s products are carried to “the most obscure and unlikely delivery points”. Production is therefore not complete at the moment of fabrication. It includes circulation and spread as well. Goods move outward from the hidden centre into remote and intimate sites, so that creation is imagined not simply as making, but as a process whose effects radiate beyond the visible source. The industrial model provides not only a means of producing things, but also a means of extending the Tower’s deviant logic into the wider world.

The mapping may therefore be stated with some precision: creation is figured through industrial production. The source domain provides a system of manufacture, organised output, infrastructural distribution, and developmental change. The target domain is creation, though already in corrupted form. This is why the industrial frame remains indispensable even when the story later becomes more bodily and more generative. The graveyard phase and the emergence of the hyper-organisms do not abolish the factory logic; they radicalise it. Before creation becomes birth-like, necrotic, or hyper-organic, it is first made intelligible as controlled production. The Tower must be a factory before it can become something worse.

This also helps avoid an interpretive mistake. It would be possible to read the factory mainly as a symbol of modern mechanisation or industrial alienation. Such associations are not impossible, but they are broader than the text requires. What

matters here is not industry as a social theme in general, but industrial production as the story's first model of creation. *The Red Tower* does not simply criticise the factory; it uses the factory to think through a form of making that is hidden, purposive, accumulative, and increasingly diseased. The system becomes more successful according to its own logic at the same moment that it becomes more monstrous.

In the first phase of its metaphorical development, *The Red Tower* renders creation intelligible through the world of industrial production. Manufacture, output, distribution, and purposive design provide the initial grammar through which the story models coming-into-being. Yet that grammar is unstable from the beginning. The products it yields are bodily, diseased, uncanny, and progressively more complex. The factory therefore does not remain a neutral frame. It becomes the first vehicle through which the story reconceives creation as deviant process. The next subsection follows that transformation by examining how industrial production is progressively rendered in bodily terms.

## 5.2 Industrial production rendered in bodily terms

If the previous subsection showed that *The Red Tower* initially figures creation through industrial production, the next development is equally important: the industrial system is progressively rendered in bodily terms. This does not mean that the Tower can simply be equated with a human body. Such a claim would be too rigid for the text. What the story supports more securely is a gradual somatic inflection of the factory-world. Bodily matter enters the architecture, bodily forms appear among the products, and manufacture increasingly approaches organic process. The factory does not cease to be a factory, but becomes steadily less separable from tissue and pathological life.

This shift begins at the level of structure. The first subterranean chamber is sustained by an improvised system of supports made not only of wood, metal, and concrete, but also of bone and “a fine sinewy webbing”. That detail alters the

status of the space. A mine or storage chamber would ordinarily be supported by inert materials. Here, however, the understructure already includes elements that belong to an anatomical register. Bone and sinew do not merely decorate the underground level; they help constitute it. The industrial system is therefore bodily from within, not only through what it produces, but through the very materials that hold it together.

The same movement becomes clearer in the novelty phase of production. Among the Tower's manufactured goods are “lifelike replicas of internal organs and physiological structures”, many of them diseased and all of them “displeasingly warm and soft to the touch”. These are not simply grotesque objects. They show that production has turned towards the body as a material model. The organs are manufactured, yet they retain the sensory qualities of living tissue: warmth, softness, and pathological vulnerability. The result is a collapse of distance between product and body. What is made in the factory already feels less like a commodity than like an excerpt from diseased organic life.

Other products intensify this movement by fragmenting bodily form and redistributing bodily functions. A disembodied hand continues to grow fingernails even after they are clipped. A death-rattle is miniaturised into an ornate music box. A pocket watch opens to reveal insects as numerals and reptilian tongues as hands. In each case, bodily process appears outside the organism to which it would normally belong. Growth, sensation, and mortality are detached from a stable body and reorganised as manufacturable features. The result is not simple mimesis, but a productive logic that treats the body as divisible material, capable of being rearranged, miniaturised, or inserted into new mechanisms.

This point becomes sharper when placed alongside broader Ligotti criticism. Wróbel (2021, 2022) argues that Ligotti repeatedly strips the human subject of autonomy and reduces it to flesh, tissue, organs, and pain. That insight is useful here, but *The Red Tower* does something more specific. It does not merely expose the body beneath illusion. It renders industrial

production itself increasingly bodily. The story does not leave the factory behind in order to reveal organic truth, it makes the factory absorb the body's textures and pathologies. This keeps the argument from collapsing into a simpler body-symbol reading.

The disturbing force of the novelty goods lies in this instability of categories. Internal organs become external commodities. Growth continues outside organismic unity. Sensory experience is displaced into objects that should not feel, scream, stain, or simulate dying. The body is no longer the stable container of organic life, but something manufacturable, distributable, and experimentally reorganised. In CMT terms, the source domain of industrial production is being overlaid by a bodily domain whose features increasingly govern how the factory is understood. Production remains the dominant frame, but its products render that frame somatic from within.

The distribution system extends this development further. The Tower's products do not merely leave the factory for anonymous markets. They are sent to "obscure and unlikely delivery points", and some are said to have been discovered "within the shelter of a living body, or one not long deceased". This is one of the story's most important bodily details because it pushes somaticisation beyond the products themselves. The body becomes not only the model of the factory's goods, but also a site of delivery and emplacement. Manufacture no longer stays outside the body; it enters it. The result is a further collapse of exterior and interior. Production becomes invasive, while bodily space becomes one more destination within the Tower's hidden network.

For that reason, the strongest formulation here is not THE RED TOWER IS THE BODY, but something narrower and more defensible: industrial production is progressively rendered in bodily terms. This accounts for the use of bone and sinew in the understructure, for the manufacture of diseased organs, for the fragmentation and animation of bodily functions, and for the insertion of products into bodily interiors. It also avoids flattening the story into one rigid equivalence. The Tower remains a

factory-world, but one whose materials and outputs increasingly draw their intelligibility from anatomy, tissue, growth, sensory violation, and pathological embodiment.

This bodily inflection prepares the story's later developments. Once production has become somatic at the level of structure and output, the shift from manufacture to generation no longer feels abrupt. Grave-space can function as generative machinery because the factory has already moved beyond ordinary mechanical production. The bodily turn is therefore not an isolated flourish within the story's industrial logic. It is the development through which manufacture becomes capable of turning into something closer to corrupted life. In *The Red Tower*, industrial production does not remain purely mechanical. It is gradually reconfigured through bodily matter, bodily texture, bodily fragmentation, and bodily emplacement. This reconfiguration does not abolish the factory-world; it deepens its logic and prepares the next major transformation in the story: once production has become bodily, it can begin to resemble generation.

### 5.3 Production becomes generation

A decisive turn in *The Red Tower* occurs when industrial production ceases to function as the story's final model of creation and begins to take on the logic of generation. Up to this point, the Tower has produced novelty goods, bodily distortions, and increasingly complex constructions, but these still belong, however uneasily, to a recognisably industrial order. The next phase alters that order from within. Production no longer yields only things. It begins to yield forms of life. The factory is not abandoned, but its productive logic deepens into something more intimate, fertile, and corrupt.

This transition is prepared by the earlier somaticisation of manufacture. Once the Tower has begun to produce diseased organs, disembodied hands, sensory anomalies, and more articulated bodily constructions, it has already moved beyond neutral commodity production. Bodily matter and bodily function have become part of its internal logic. The next

step is therefore not abrupt. What changes is that this bodily inflection becomes reproductive. Production no longer merely imitates or fragments life; it begins to generate it.

The shift becomes explicit when the story turns to the second subterranean level. The first underground chamber still belongs to a recognisably industrial world of supports, tunnels, carts, and delivery points. The second level is described differently: it is “far more intimate”, and the story later explains that the operations of the upper factory were gradually driven down to it as machinery became obsolete and the Tower’s “diseased mania” evolved into “more experimental, even visionary projects”. The disappearance of machinery is therefore not the end of production. It marks a change in productive mode. The system continues, but no longer in primarily mechanical form.

The crucial passage follows immediately. The graves of the second subterranean level are “not burying graves” in any ordinary sense, but “graves of a highly experimental design from which the newest productions of the Red Tower were to be born”. That phrasing matters because it does not simply add reproductive imagery to an otherwise unchanged factory-world. It redefines what production has become. Birth-language enters the system directly. The Tower still produces, but now produces through a logic of emergence rather than output alone. Generation does not replace production, it rather develops out of it.

This is why production becomes generation is a more accurate formulation than the simpler claim that the story moves from machine to organism. The latter would imply a clean substitution. The text suggests something more complex. The generative process remains nested within the productive one. The new beings are still the “productions” of the Red Tower. Even when birth-language appears, industrial vocabulary is not discarded. The story does not leave one world behind and enter another; it shows that the industrial world has become capable of generation.

The emergence of the “hyper-organisms” confirms this development. Their name alone

registers the transition. They are no longer novelty objects and no longer merely bodily constructions. They are organisms, yet organisms intensified beyond ordinary natural categories. The text stresses that these beings were born from the “ingenious and fertile graves”, and later refers to the products of this lower level as “cleverly blasphemous works”. Generation here is neither spontaneous nor natural in any uncomplicated sense. It is aberrantly engineered and inseparable from the productive order that made it possible.

This point becomes sharper when set beside broader Ligotti criticism. Wróbel (2021) argues that Ligotti repeatedly degrades the idea of life by presenting it as disease, infection, fungus, or blind biological multiplication. That observation is useful here because the hyper-organic phase of *The Red Tower* does not represent life as fulfilment or renewal. It presents generation as a continuation of pathological productivity. Life emerges under the sign of deformity and corruption. The story does not oppose manufactured horror to biological life; it presents biological life as the next stage of a deviant productive system.

Villalobos Manjarrez’s (2026) account of Ligotti’s anti-life and antinatalist tendencies also helps clarify the force of this turn. In that broader context, horror is pushed inward towards existence, reproduction, and the possibility that life itself may be a mistake. This helps explain why generation in *The Red Tower* is so disturbing. The story does not present birth as a counterweight to decay, but as the means by which corruption acquires a more complex and vital form. Generation extends the Tower’s logic; it does not redeem it.

In *The Red Tower*, manufacture does not remain the final model of creation. It develops into generation. The most important sign of that shift is the moment when the Tower’s “newest productions” are said to be “born”. This does not dissolve the industrial frame; it transforms it from within. The factory becomes capable of reproduction, and creation becomes more intimate, more fertile, and more corrupt at once. The next subsection turns to the spatial consequence of this change by examining how

grave-space is refunctionalised within the Tower's generative system.

#### 5.4 Grave-space converted into generative space

If the previous subsection established that the Tower's productive logic becomes generative, the present subsection asks a narrower question: what happens to grave-space once generation enters the system? The second subterranean level no longer functions as a cemetery in any ordinary sense. It becomes a productive space. The grave is not abolished, but refunctionalised. Burial remains as atmosphere and form, while its usual meaning is redirected towards emergence.

The text makes this explicit. The graves are "not burying graves", but "graves of a highly experimental design". That formula does more than add reproductive imagery to a funerary setting. It suspends the normal function of the grave and replaces it with another. The grave no longer receives the dead as an endpoint, but serves as a designed mechanism within the Tower's larger process. The story preserves enough of the graveyard's recognisable features to keep the space legible as burial-space, while stripping it of ordinary finality. What remains is a chamber in which death-space has been turned into a medium of production.

The physical arrangement of the level reinforces this altered function. The chamber is enclosed by a crooked fence, crowded with headstones, and marked by a strange phosphorescent illumination. Above all, it is described as "far more intimate" than the level above it. That intimacy matters because it distinguishes this space from the recognisably industrial grammar of the first underground chamber. The earlier level belongs to tunnels, supports, carts, and distribution. The graveyard level withdraws from that logic into enclosure, concentration, and anti-memorial stillness. It is less openly mechanical, but not less organised. The reduction of visible machinery does not weaken productivity; it changes the spatial form that productivity takes.

The nameless and dateless headstones are central to that transformation. In an ordinary

cemetery, names and dates preserve individuality and memory. Here, they are missing. The graves do not commemorate singular lives; they function as anonymous units within a larger system. This loss of inscription changes the space from memorial ground into operational ground. The chamber does not organise remembrance. It organises process. The graveyard level thus supports one of the story's broader tendencies: individuality is subordinated to production, and production is increasingly hidden within structures that deny ordinary human meaning.

This is also why the graveyard should not be reduced to a simple womb-symbol. Such a reading is possible at the level of loose association, since the story clearly links graves with birth. Yet the space is not figured in maternal or natural terms. Its defining qualities are experimental design, enclosure, secrecy, and post-funerary distortion. The graves are "ingenious and fertile", but also "highly experimental". What matters most is not maternal nurture, but systematic refunctioning. The more accurate formulation is therefore not **THE GRAVE IS THE WOMB**, but grave-space is converted into generative machinery. That phrasing preserves the story's emphasis on altered function and productive continuation.

The phrase "cleverly blasphemous works" sharpens the point further. The graveyard is disturbing not simply because life appears where death should be, but because that reversal appears organised and deliberate. Something has taken a space associated with burial, closure, and memorial order and repurposed it for continued output. The blasphemy lies in that calculated reversal. The familiar has not disappeared; it has been redirected.

This spatial transformation is central to the story's larger structure. The graveyard level is not an ornamental horror-setting placed beside the factory. It is the place where the Tower's productive logic acquires a new spatial medium. Earlier, the system manufactured novelty goods and bodily distortions. Later, it yields hyper-organisms. The graveyard level stands between those phases as the place in which death-space becomes productive. Without this

transformation, the movement from manufacture to generated life would remain conceptually thinner. The graveyard gives that movement a concrete site and a recognisable, though radically altered, form.

In *The Red Tower*, the graveyard level does not simply add death imagery to the story's productive sequence. It changes the spatial meaning of production itself. The graves are no longer containers of the dead, but functional units within a hidden generative system. Their enclosure, namelessness, experimental design, and anti-memorial quality show that grave-space has been converted into productive space. The next subsection turns from this altered chamber to the broader vertical logic of the story by examining how descent spatialises hidden generative process.

### 5.5 Descent as access to hidden generative process

One of the most persistent structuring principles in *The Red Tower* is descent. The story does not distribute its processes evenly across space, but repeatedly relocates what is most active, most secret, and most generative below the visible surface. The Tower's productivity is therefore not merely hidden in a practical sense; it is conceptually organised through depth. The deeper the narrative descends, the more inward, more fertile, and more extreme the mode of creation becomes. Vertical space is thus not a neutral setting, but a way of rendering concealed process intelligible.

This vertical logic begins with the contrast between the visible structure and the system beneath it. Above ground, the Tower appears ruined, silent, and partly emptied of machinery. The upper floors preserve only traces of production. Below ground, by contrast, access becomes possible and function reappears. The first subterranean level contains the nexus of the distribution system, while the second becomes the site of graveyard-generation. Visible ruin and hidden activity therefore have to be read together. What seems exhausted at the surface persists in altered form below, and descent is the

movement by which that persistence becomes legible.

The distinction between the underground levels sharpens this pattern. The first chamber resembles a mine and sustains a network of tunnels that carry the Tower's products outward. It introduces hidden process, but still belongs to a recognisably industrial order of circulation and infrastructure. The second level is different. It is "far more intimate", enclosed, graveyard-like, and oriented towards generation rather than distribution. That phrase gives a conceptual quality to depth. Lower space is not merely deeper space, but more inward, more secretive, and more closely tied to the productive core of the system.

At this point, the story's verticality becomes more than a descriptive device. In CMT terms, spatial orientation often structures abstract reasoning through recurring bodily schemas such as UP-DOWN, CONTAINER, and PATH. As Huszka et al. (2026) note, verticality is rarely neutral in literary representation because bodily experience gives upward and downward movement conceptual force. *The Red Tower* draws on that principle in an especially dark form. Descent does not lead to clarification or redemption, nor does it simply signify death. Instead, downward movement gives access to a process that is more hidden, more fertile, and more corrupt than anything visible above ground. The lower levels are therefore not only spatially deeper, but conceptually denser.

The story's developmental sequence confirms this. The machinery of the upper factory becomes obsolete as the Tower's "diseased mania" evolves into "more experimental, even visionary projects". Those projects do not remain in visible industrial space; they migrate downward. Descent therefore coincides with intensification. It marks the movement away from ordinary manufacture towards a more radical mode of creation. The narrative does not place strange things underground simply because underground settings are conventionally uncanny. It makes depth itself the spatial form of escalating deviance.

This also explains why the rumoured third underground level is so significant, even though it remains largely inaccessible. The narrator associates the final, most ruinous phase of the Tower's existence with reports of a third level below the graveyard chamber, a site devoted to "putrid creations" and a "perfection of defect and disorder". The story's logic of descent therefore does not stop at the graveyard, but continues beyond what can be directly known. The lowest level is also the most obscure and the most extreme. The Tower's productive process does not merely move downward; it deepens beyond the limits of full representation. Hidden generativity tends towards a point where visibility, order, and even intelligibility begin to fail.

The vertical organisation of the story also changes how concealment should be understood. Hiddenness here is not accidental secrecy, but part of the productive logic. The more deviant the process becomes, the less visible it is from the surface and the more deeply it is embedded in enclosed space. The Tower's development from upper-level machinery to underground distribution, from graveyard-generation to rumours of a still lower chamber, suggests that creation becomes more powerful as it withdraws from ordinary visibility. What matters most in the Tower is not what stands above ground, but what continues below it.

This downward movement can also be linked to a broader Ligottian tendency identified by Lopes (2019), Marino-Cicinelli (2024), and Villalobos Manjarrez (2023), all of whom stress that Ligotti's horror often shifts attention from visible external order to a darker and more destabilising inner truth. In *The Red Tower*, that shift is given unusually concrete spatial form. Surface ruin conceals active process. Apparent abandonment conceals generative continuation. What appears secondary above ground proves subordinate to what persists below. Descent becomes the narrative operation by which the story moves from appearance to deeper process, even though that process is never fully graspable and never redemptive.

For that reason, the strongest formulation is not simply DOWN IS BAD or

UNDERGROUND IS DEATH. Those would be too crude for the text. A more exact formulation is that descent gives access to hidden generative process. This captures the story's main spatial logic without flattening it into a moral opposition. The lower levels are indeed more corrupt, but also more productive, more intimate, and more central to the Tower's evolving system. Downward movement therefore combines concealment, fertility, and extremity within a single spatial pattern.

In *The Red Tower*, descent is the principal means by which the story spatialises deviant creation. The visible factory above ground is increasingly emptied of direct function, while the deeper levels become sites of distribution, generation, and still more radical defect. What lies below is not merely hidden residue, but the operative core of the system. Through this vertical structure, Ligotti renders concealed generativity as a process of increasing depth, intimacy, and corruption. The next subsection turns to the culmination of that process in the hyper-organisms, where vitality and degeneration become inseparable.

### 5.6 Vitality inseparable from degeneration

The sequence traced so far reaches its clearest culmination in the "hyper-organisms". At this point, the Tower's logic of production, bodily inflection, hidden development, and graveyard-generation converges in a single form. The hyper-organisms are not merely one further grotesque product among others. They are the point at which the story states most explicitly what kind of creation the Red Tower has been moving towards. Their defining feature is not simply life, and not simply monstrosity, but the co-presence of vitality and corruption.

The text formulates this with unusual precision. The hyper-organisms "manifested an intense vitality in all aspects of their form and functions", while at the same time possessing "an ineluctable element of decay". The force of this description lies in its simultaneity. The story does not present a sequence in which a healthy organism later declines into corruption, nor does it present decay as an accident affecting

otherwise complete vitality. Instead, vitality and decay appear together from the outset. The organism is generated under the sign of both. That is why the phrase degenerate vitality is particularly useful here. It captures the paradox without weakening it. The life produced by the Tower is not opposed to degeneration; it is constituted together with it.

The narrator intensifies this point when he describes the hyper-organisms as scintillating with “obscene vital impulses”, while “degeneracy and death” are “written deeply upon” them. This is not an image of life later overtaken by ruin, but of life already inscribed by its own undoing. The obscenity of these beings lies not only in their form, but in the condition they embody. They make visible a mode of existence in which animation itself has become inseparable from corruption. They do not fail to live; they live in a way that already includes their own degeneracy.

At this point, the larger movement of the story comes into focus. Industrial production has already ceased to be neutral manufacture. The system has turned towards bodily matter, then towards generation, and then towards the conversion of grave-space into productive space. The hyper-organisms gather these developments into one final form. They are products, yet also beings; bodily, yet engineered; generated in a graveyard-like chamber, yet marked by a surplus of life inseparable from decay. In them, the Tower’s entire logic becomes visible at once.

This is why the hyper-organisms should not be treated as a late decorative excess. They are the conceptual climax of the story. Everything in the Red Tower has been tending towards them. Even the phrase “minute factories of flesh” points in this direction, since it fuses production and organic generation in one compressed formulation. Flesh is no longer the opposite of machinery, but one of the media of production. By the time the hyper-organisms appear, the distinctions between factory and organism, product and life, and manufacture and generation have already collapsed.

This culmination also clarifies the philosophical force of the story. Wróbel (2021)

argues that Ligotti repeatedly degrades the idea of life by presenting it as disease or blind biological continuation. That observation is directly relevant here, because the hyper-organisms do not represent an escape from the Tower’s diseased productivity into a fuller or more natural mode of being. They intensify the same logic. Life is not redeemed by becoming more vital; it becomes more terrible precisely because vitality and corruption are no longer separable. In a related way, Villalobos Manjarrez (2023) emphasises that Ligotti’s fiction is structured by fatalism, by forms in which the end is already built into the beginning. The hyper-organisms fit that pattern closely. Degeneration is not an after-effect, but present from the first moment of emergence.

The references to an even lower level devoted to “putrid creations” and to a “perfection of defect and disorder” sharpen this point further. The hyper-organisms already make visible the fusion of life and decay, but the rumoured third subterranean level suggests that even this fusion may not be the end of the Tower’s experiments. The story therefore does not close with stable culmination. It closes with the sense that productive corruption can still deepen beyond what is directly known. The hyper-organisms are both climax and threshold: they reveal the logic of degenerate vitality, while also implying that the Tower’s hidden process could deepen it further.

From a CMT perspective, the strongest formulation here is not simply LIFE IS DECAY, since that would flatten the tension the story preserves. A more exact formulation is that vitality is inseparable from degeneration. This captures the simultaneous structure insisted upon by the text and preserves the difference between ordinary mortality and the specific condition of the Tower’s creations. The hyper-organisms do not merely exemplify the general truth that all living things eventually decay. They embody a darker principle: life can be generated in such a way that decay is intrinsic to its first appearance. That is the most disturbing form of creation imagined by the story.

This subsection brings the main analytical sequence to its most concentrated point. What

began as industrial production ends not in flourishing, but in a mode of life that carries corruption within its very structure. The Red Tower does not create beings that later fall into disorder. It creates beings in whom disorder has already been perfected as vitality. With that, the story's model of deviant creation stands fully revealed.

## 6. Secondary Metaphorical Lines and Their Limits

The preceding sections traced the article's main argument from industrial production to bodily process, then to generation, hidden descent, and degenerate vitality. That sequence remains central. Even so, several further metaphorical lines deserve attention because they sharpen the main pattern and clarify its limits. These lines concern the Tower's reddening, the role of the surrounding grey landscape, the outward spread of its productive logic, and the temptation to read the entire system as a figure of pathological proliferation. None of them displaces the primary claim that the story models deviant creation.

### 6.1 Reddening as visible deviation

The Tower's redness is one of the story's most striking features, yet also one of the easiest to overinterpret. The safest starting point is the narrator's explicit claim that the Tower was not always red, but was once "the same pale hue as the world which encompassed it". He then describes the later "encrimsoning" as "a betrayal, a breaking-off", and elsewhere speaks of the Tower as having "reddened with an enigmatic passion for betrayal and perversity". These formulations establish one point with particular clarity: redness marks a departure from prior continuity. It is the visible sign of a structure that has separated itself from the grey order surrounding it.

This makes it possible to keep the symbolism of redness under control. The colour may invite associations with blood, violence, inflammation, or pathological heat, but the text does not require any one of those in a decisive way. What it does

require is the idea of rupture made visible. The Tower no longer merely differs from its surroundings in function; it bears that difference outwardly. In that sense, reddening belongs to the same logic as the later hyper-organisms: what had remained hidden in process begins to declare itself on the surface. The strongest formulation is therefore not RED IS BLOOD or RED IS LIFE, but reddening figures deviation.

### 6.2 The grey landscape as erasing counter-force

If the Tower's redness marks visible deviation, the surrounding landscape marks the pressure against which that deviation takes shape. The landscape is not a neutral background. It is repeatedly described as "gray", "desolate", and "featureless", and the text attributes to it a "desolate purity" that stands in "profound hostility" to the Tower's operations. This hostility is said to produce "temporary erasures, or fadings" of the Tower by the surrounding world. Later, the narrator imagines an "attempt" to reclaim the Red Tower or draw it back "toward the formless origins of its being". The landscape therefore acts less like scenery than like a resisting force.

This force should not be reduced to "nature" in any comforting or restorative sense. The landscape is not fertile or nurturing. Its dominant qualities are blankness, stillness, featurelessness, and hostile purity. It is therefore better understood as an erasing counter-force than as a positive alternative to the Tower. The story does not stage a conflict between corrupt industry and benign nature, but between differentiated deviant creation and an order of grey desolation that appears to resist differentiation altogether. The Tower creates against a world that exerts pressure towards sameness and reabsorption.

### 6.3 Dissemination and outward manifestation

A further line concerns the way the Tower's inner logic spreads beyond its visible centre. From the beginning, the first subterranean level functions as the "nexus of a unique distribution system" whose tunnels "honeycombed" the land

and reached “the most obscure and unlikely delivery points”. The products do not remain within the factory. They circulate outward into remote and intimate spaces, and some are reported to have been found even “within the shelter of a living body, or one not long deceased”. The Tower’s deviance is therefore not confined to a single enclosed site. Its productive logic is disseminative as well as hidden.

This outward movement also helps explain the story’s pattern of progressive visibility. What begins as a relatively inconspicuous ruined factory in a grey landscape gradually becomes a structure whose inner disorder is increasingly legible in outward form: in its redness, in the obsolescence of its upper machinery, in the shift of its operative centre below ground, and in the spread of its products beyond the visible building. In that respect, the Tower does not merely contain corruption; it externalises it. Hidden process becomes distributed effect, and distributed effect becomes visible deviation. This line sharpens the main argument by showing that deviant creation in the story is not only inward and subterranean, but also expansive.

#### 6.4 Pathological proliferation as a controlled analogy

A final line concerns the temptation to read the Tower as a figure of pathological growth. The analogy is understandable. The Tower deviates from prior grey sameness, spreads through hidden networks, produces diseased anatomical forms, installs its products in intimate spaces and even in bodies, and culminates in beings whose vitality is inseparable from decay. Wróbel (2021) is especially relevant here, since he argues that Ligotti repeatedly degrades the idea of life by presenting it as disease, infection, fungus, bacterial culture, or blind biological multiplication. That broader Ligottian context makes a pathological reading of the Tower plausible.

Even so, the analogy must remain controlled. The story never fully stabilises a medical model. It does not speak in terms of tumours, cells, metastasis, or diagnosis, and it never securely establishes the Tower as the lesion of a larger

host-body. For that reason, it would be too strong to state that the Red Tower simply “is” cancer. Such a claim would narrow the text too sharply and replace its broader metaphorical system with a single modern medical allegory. The safer conclusion is that the Tower behaves in a cancer-like or pathologically proliferative manner: it mutates, spreads, intensifies, and generates life-forms already marked by corruption. The analogy is useful as a comparative note, but not as the paper’s primary key.

Used in this restrained way, the analogy still contributes something important. It helps name the conjunction of growth and corruption that culminates in the hyper-organisms, and it clarifies why the Tower’s productivity is so disturbing: it is expansive and diseased at once. Yet the stronger claim remains the one developed throughout the main analysis: the Red Tower models deviant creation, not a single medical condition. Pathological proliferation may illuminate one aspect of that deviance, but it cannot replace the broader sequence of manufacture, bodily process, generation, hidden depth, and degenerate vitality.

The Tower’s reddening, the pressure of the grey landscape, the dissemination of its inner logic, and the possibility of a pathological-growth analogy all deepen the reading, but only when they remain subordinate to the central pattern already established. None of them displaces the main claim that *The Red Tower* constructs a metaphorical world in which creation becomes embodied, hidden, generative, and self-corrupting. The final section now gathers that argument into its broader implications.

#### 7. Conclusion

This article has argued that *The Red Tower* is best read not as a loose cluster of grotesque symbols, but as a structured metaphorical system. Through the lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the story emerges as a bounded world in which a broader process becomes legible. That process is creation, though creation in an aberrant form. The Tower first renders creation through industrial production,

then progressively inflects that production with bodily matter and bodily process, relocates its operative centre below ground, and culminates in forms of life whose vitality cannot be separated from degeneration. The story's horror therefore lies not only in its imagery, but in the coherence with which it organises that imagery into a developing logic.

The Red Tower should not be reduced to a single static meaning. It is tempting to treat it as a symbol of the body, the mind, disease, or industrial modernity, and some of those analogies remain suggestive. Yet the analysis has shown that the story works more powerfully when the Tower is understood as a world-model rather than an emblem. Its visible ruin, subterranean extensions, bodily products, graveyard level, distribution system, and hyper-organisms do not point in unrelated directions, but belong to one evolving structure. In that sense, the article confirms the methodological value of approaching Ligotti's story-world as a source domain, an insight already made productive by Huszka, Aini, and Stark (2026) in their reading of Ligotti's *The Town Manager*. The Red Tower is not only the place in which the story unfolds; it is the concrete medium through which the story thinks.

The argument has not claimed that the Tower simply "is" the human body. A stronger conclusion is that the story progressively renders industrial production in bodily terms. Bone and sinew enter the understructure, diseased organs appear among the manufactured goods, bodily interiors become sites of emplacement, and the later stages of production move towards generation and hyper-organic life. This sequence shows that the story does not abandon the factory in favour of the body. Rather, it makes the factory absorb bodily matter, bodily process, and bodily vulnerability until manufacture and organism can no longer be clearly separated.

The same is true of the story's spatial logic. *The Red Tower* is organised not only through production and embodiment, but through depth. Visible machinery becomes obsolete while the system's more intimate and more radical functions migrate below ground. The first subterranean level distributes products, the

second converts grave-space into generative space, and the rumoured third level points towards still more extreme forms of defect and disorder. Hiddenness and intensification therefore advance together. Descent is not an incidental gothic feature, but the story's main way of spatialising concealed generative process. What lies below is not merely residue, but the operative core of the Tower's system.

Within this sequence, the hyper-organisms provide the story's sharpest conceptual concentration. They gather the earlier developments into one final form: production, bodily process, hidden generation, and corruption become inseparable. Most importantly, they embody what the article has called degenerate vitality. Their life is not later overtaken by decay; vitality and corruption are present together from the start. This is where the story's deepest horror lies: *The Red Tower* does not merely imagine monstrous products, but creation itself as a process in which life emerges already marked by disorder and decline.

The secondary lines examined near the end of the article reinforce this conclusion without displacing it. The Tower's reddening marks deviation as visible rupture. The grey landscape acts as an erasing counter-force that resists differentiated existence. The analogy of pathological proliferation remains useful only when it is kept subordinate to the broader model of deviant creation. These lines deepen the reading, but do not alter its centre. The most secure claim remains that *The Red Tower* constructs a world in which creation is rendered as embodied, hidden, generative, and self-corrupting.

At a broader level, the article contributes to Ligotti scholarship by complementing existing work on pessimism, anti-humanism, deceptive reality, macabre unrealism, and the degradation of life in his fiction. In *The Red Tower*, philosophical horror is not only asserted as atmosphere or worldview, but built into the architecture of the story-world itself. Conceptual Metaphor Theory is especially useful here because it explains how that architecture works: how industrial production becomes a way of thinking creation, how bodily process

reconfigures manufacture, and how depth turns hiddenness into generative corruption.

The final claim may therefore be stated plainly. *The Red Tower* does not merely represent horror; it constructs a metaphorical model in which creation itself becomes horrific. What begins as manufacture becomes bodily process, then hidden generation, and finally vitality inseparable from decay. By giving this process a bounded and coherent world, Ligotti turns deviant creation into something concrete, spatial, and narratively legible. The Red Tower is thus not only the setting of the story, but its most powerful act of thought.

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