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FOLLOWING THE RED STRING: THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE GRAPHIC NARRATIVE IN LEMIRE'S *MAZEBOOK*

Abstract: The paper analyzes the graphic novel *Mazebook* (2021) created by Canadian comic book author Jeff Lemire. Lemire's story of a father who struggles to overcome the trauma of losing the daughter relates to a number of literary works, from classical mythology to contemporary literature. The present focus is on the maze motif, taken from the Greek myth of King Minos, the Minotaur, and Theseus, and the manner in which it is present not only on the level of themes, but also as an underlying principle of graphic organization of the work, or what we will here refer to as the "infrastructure" of the graphic novel. The analysis relies on the recent studies examining infrastructure as a cultural phenomenon and the ways it appears in literature, which seems to be particularly pertinent to the readings of graphic narratives. In Lemire's *Mazebook*, the maze and the accompanying red string are omnipresent throughout the narrative as elements connecting the protagonist to his deceased daughter as well as metaphors indicating the protagonist's emotional state, while on the graphic level, they function as infrastructural devices drawing attention to Lemire's innovations in the page layout.
Keywords: comic book, graphic narrative, infrastructure, culture studies, Greek mythology, Jeff Lemire

Jeff Lemire, critically acclaimed Canadian comic book author and triple recipient of the Eisner Award, earned his recognition with the titles such as *The Nobody* (2009), *Sweet Tooth* (2009–2013), and the *Essex County Trilogy* (2008–2009, integral edition published in 2011). In his comic book series and graphic novels, Lemire developed a recognizable style of storytelling focusing on the characters' psychology, family relations, personal traumas, sense of estrangement and loneliness. Born and raised in Southwestern Ontario, in the Essex County, he depicted the challenges of country life in the eponymous graphic narrative, which along with his previous work confirmed his profound understanding of the rural environment and skill in presenting it in a compelling and emotionally charged manner.

As a sort of counterbalance to his rural stories, Lemire's graphic novel *Mazebook* (Dark Horse Books, 2021, 2022) is distinctly urban, situated in the city of Toronto. The protagonist and the narrator is Will Warren, a father whose daughter Wendy passed away eleven years ago after a difficult illness. The tragic event had a crucial impact on Will's life – Wendy's mother divorced him and started a new family, whereas Will himself seems to be trapped in the past and unable to overcome the trauma. Ever since, Will has been living alone and unconnected to other people. His sense of desolation is conveyed from the very first panels, which show Will commuting to his work on a train, preoccu-

pied with his memories of Wendy and thoughts about his own disconnectedness from his surroundings: "Don't recognize anyone's face anymore" (Lemire 2022: n.p.). Thoughts of his daughter are fraught with fear that he is starting to forget her face features and that eventually all memory of her will fade.

Will's life filled with routinely and listlessly performed activities – taking the train to work, walking, "one foot in front of the other" (Lemire 2022: n.p.), carrying out his duties of a city building inspector – is suddenly disturbed by a mysterious night call. A female voice addressing him as her father tells Will that she is in the center and that he has to come and find her. Will is convinced that the voice belongs to his daughter and concludes that the mentioned center refers to the center of maze-puzzles Wendy loved to solve. On discovering one unsolved maze in her maze book, he decides that this is what he needs to solve to find Wendy. Spurred by the possibility of seeing his daughter again, Will sets off on a quest along the streets and alleys of Toronto, which now becomes an imaginary, almost mythological place.

What distresses Will from the beginning of the book is the realization that his memory of Wendy is fading, which is why he clings to the things he still remembers clearly. One of them is an old red sweater which once belonged to him, but which Wendy used to wear all the time. The red sweater appears on the very first panel and throughout the graphic novel remains one of the most conspicuous motifs owing to its color, even more striking amid the mostly monochromatic surroundings, and also owing to its distinctly delineated pattern, sharply contrasting the blurred image of Wendy's face. Lemire depicts the state of Will's memory by the various degrees of sharpness of images – up until the last chapter, Wendy is drawn either from the back or without any features on her face, whereas the drawing of the sweater is executed in some detail. Symbolically denoting the father's fading memory, a string in the sweater goes loose indicating a possibility that the sweater itself will disintegrate and everything connected to Wendy will thus disappear. Lemire employs the loose red string as a symbol, but also as a graphic prop, a line which guides the hero and the readers through the narrative.

Wendy's fascination with mazes is another thing Will distinctly remembers about his daughter. She delighted in solving maze-puzzles to her last day and Will was truly astonished by the speed with which she did this. Along with the red string, the maze in Lemire's work quite overtly references to the classical Greek myth of king Minos and his Cretan labyrinth with the Minotaur confined in it. This is revealed at the end of the first chapter, when Will, lying in his bed and trying to remember more about Wendy, gets transferred, by means of the red string, from his gray reality to the bluish domain of dream-memory. The string leads him to a construction made up of large blocks and passages between them, in front of which is Wendy, the way he remembers her – with no distinct face features and wearing the red sweater. The last panel in this dream sequence shows a close-up of a not-quite-human face that will turn out to be the Minotaur guarding the maze in which Wendy is imprisoned. The maze as a key motif in the narrative is loaded with symbolism signifying the

protagonist's emotional states, but will also become a graphic component embedded in the page layout. The value attached to the maze on the thematic and symbolic levels foregrounds its versatility, enhanced by its function in the graphic design of the work.

An idiosyncrasy of graphic narratives,[1] as compared to works of literature, is that the storyline is developed through a simultaneous use of textual and visual devices, which gives this mode of art a transmedial quality and calls for the consideration of multiple levels through which a story is presented. As pointed by Will Eisner, in a definition further developed by Scott McCloud, comics are essentially "a sequential art" (McCloud 1993: 5), which implies movement and development realized through sequences of panels arranged in a specific way. This arrangement or the page layout is another graphic component (besides the drawings within individual panels) which should be considered as a significant contributor to the overall creation of a story. The synergy of text, images, and page layout in a graphic narrative affects the way we read. To comprehend the narrative, we have to follow the text and drawings in a particular order, which is for the most part (at least in works by Western authors) the order of the common reading direction, left to right and top to bottom. The order of the panels, however, frequently becomes quite unconventional, which causes a disruption in reading, makes the readers pause to figure out the correct path and draws their attention to usually less noticed graphic elements such as panel frames, gutters and the overall layout of the page, which we will here refer to as the infrastructure of the graphic narrative. The unconventional layout patterns are often in line with the developments in the narration and sometimes even graphically incorporate the elements that are prominently featured as themes or motifs. This is the case in Lemire's *Mazebook*.

Infrastructure as a poetic device

Before I continue analyzing Lemire's work, I will briefly point to some recent approaches which can serve as a useful framework in studying graphic narratives and which foreground infrastructure as a material object and also as a concept. Infrastructural studies are a relatively new field relying on the perspectives of several humanistic disciplines, primarily anthropology, ethnography, and history, to record and analyze complex relations between humans (human societies) and the environment, more precisely the urban physical surroundings and the part of it we call infrastructure.

Infrastructure is commonly understood as denoting the objects, systems and networks such as roads, bridges, electrical grids, waterworks, or the internet, which support the daily life and functioning of people. Over the years, the scholars have offered different definitions of the term, but they mostly agree

1 Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven pointed to the preferability of the term "graphic narrative" (instead of "graphic novel," which "can be a misnomer"), since it is mostly employed "to encompass a range of types of narrative work in comics" (Chute, DeKoven 2006: 767). Supporting this view, Stein and Thon add that the term "comic" is "culturally specific as its discursive origins are Anglo-American," while "graphic narrative" is "much more inclusive" (2013: 5).

in placing emphasis on the network construction and the movement within it. For Brian Larkin, infrastructures are "built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space" (Larkin 2013: 328). Rather than being passive objects which only serve a particular purpose, they are "physical forms [that] shape the nature of a network, the speed and direction of its movement, its temporalities, and its vulnerability to breakdown" and thus "generate the ambient environment of everyday life" (Larkin 2013: 328). By emphasizing the active role of infrastructures, whose physical properties influence their users' activities and behavior, Larkin suggests the importance of considering them as environmental agents and not just as the static background.

One of the main functions of infrastructures is to "enable the movement of other matter […] they are things and also the relation between things" (Larkin 2013: 329). According to Lauren Berlant, this is precisely what distinguishes infrastructure from a *system* or *structure* – "infrastructure is defined by the movement or patterning of social form" (Berlant 2016: 393). The fact that it *enables* the movement rather than *moves* itself also accounts for its invisibility. The unobtrusive nature of functioning infrastructure is the reason why we usually say that the term denotes a system that, although used on a daily basis, usually goes unnoticed, until it breaks down.[2]

Within different humanistic disciplines, infrastructural elements have been viewed as objects surpassing their technical and socio-political function, which indicates their potential for carrying symbolic meanings. Pointing to the necessity of analyzing infrastructures "as concrete semiotic and aesthetic vehicles oriented to addressees", Larkin observes that they "emerge out of and store within them forms of desire and fantasy and can take on fetish-like aspects that sometimes can be wholly autonomous from their technical function." (Larkin 2013: 329). The idea of infrastructure as a device or a "vehicle" conveying semiotic and aesthetic values to its user raises a question regarding the literary representations of infrastructure – whether we should discuss it only as a topic on the level of subject matter or whether it is also possible to identify some formal features of the given literary work. To illustrate the potential of infrastructure as a concept, Berlant talks about poetry as "a technology in which all objects are granular and moving toward each other to make new forms of approach from difference and distance", which she considers a form of infrastructure (Berlant 2016: 407). Thinking of infrastructure in these terms seems to be particularly pertinent in the case of art forms featuring a prominent graphic component. Such as graphic narratives.

A recent work by Dominic Davies, *Urban Comics: Infrastructure and the Global City in Contemporary Graphic Narratives*, combines the analysis of the comic-books poetics with urban cultural studies, i.e. studies on urban infrastructure. In Davies's words, the book explores "both the form and content of graphic narratives, through the vocabulary of critical urban studies, as a kind of *infrastructure*" (2018: 3). Identifying infrastructural elements at both

2 Larkin, however, disputes this claim, pointing out that "infrastructures are metapragmatic objects, signs of themselves deployed in particular circulatory regimes to establish sets of effects" (Larkin 2013: 336).

thematic and formal levels is justified by what seems to be an inherent correlation between the basic elements of comics narration (panels, frames, gutters) and the objects, systems and networks that constitute urban infrastructure. In Davies's words, urban comics realize "the malleability and contingency of the physical infrastructures that shape urban life" (2018: 6).

Observing that infrastructures "are not static, banal, depoliticised objects, but rather highly charged material actors that allow some forms of social life to exist while also prohibiting others" (2018: 6), Davies also points to their agency in *creating* the environment and not only supporting it. Although Davies adopts the term "infrastructure" (instead of "architecture") as appropriate for his postcolonial/decolonizing reading of graphic narratives from the global South, it is quite fitting for our present discussion as well. Expanding this author's observations on the active role of infrastructure in shaping an (urban) environment, we could argue that the same could be observed within a graphic novel, when the elements that constitute its infrastructure (panels, frames, gutters, and the whole layout) participate in the storytelling process. In Lemire's *Mazebook*, this happens when the maze and the red string become part of the infrastructural level turning the work itself into something of a maze book.

A Labyrinth of Mazes in Lemire's graphic narrative

Labyrinths and mazes[3] have been a much explored topic since the beginnings of story-telling and the list of literary works featuring the maze as a central theme is incredibly long. As a construction consisting of an intricate system of passageways in which movement is constricted by obstacles that one has to overcome, the maze has become a convenient device for conveying a range of symbolic and metaphorical meanings, as well as for representing the psychological state of protagonists. Equally important, especially for graphic narratives, is that mazes are also visually compelling. In his notes on the origins of *Mazebook* Lemire explained that what originally attracted him to the idea of mazes was "just how cool they were to look at and how graphically interesting they were" (Lemire 2022: n.p.).

The maze in Lemire's graphic narrative appears as one of the major themes already on the cover page, where it assumes a central place as both verbal and graphic component of the narrative. The book title itself has a double meaning suggesting that Lemire's work is simultaneously a book about mazes and a maze book (a book with maze-puzzles) in its own right, which is something the readers will discover towards the end. Featured on the title page, as well as the pages introducing the individual chapters, the drawings of the characters display a pattern of a maze incorporated in their bodies, which suggests that we will be reading about both internal and external mazes, i.e.

3 There is a subtle difference between the labyrinth and the maze, the first denoting a construction with a single route leading towards the center, twisting and turning, but without any side branches, while the second implies a complicated pathway with multiple branches, many of which are dead-ends. Serbian language doesn't recognize this distinction, which is why the title is translated as *Knjiga o lavirintu*.

that a person can be a maze, too. The centrality of the maze theme is confirmed at the end of the first and the beginning of the second chapter, when we learn that solving maze-puzzles was Wendy's passion since she was four or five years old.

As literary influences on his *Mazebook*, Lemire singled out Haruki Murakami's novels, in particular *The Wind-up Bird Chronicles*, *Kafka On The Shore*, and *1Q84* (Lemire 2022: n.p.). However, the most obvious reference, explicitly mentioned at one point in the book, too, is a Greek myth of the Cretan labyrinth and the monstrous Minotaur confined in its center. This well-known and much explored narrative tells the story of King Minos, who commissioned the ingenious Athenian craftsman Daedalus to construct an inextricable maze (the Labyrinth) to capture the Minotaur (an unwanted offspring of Minos' wife and Poseidon's white bull). Although entrapped within the maze, the Minotaur, half-man half-bull, becomes the plague of Athenians, who are required to send him seven youths and seven maidens every nine years as sacrifice. To stop this, the Athenian hero Theseus undertakes to conquer and slay the monster and succeeds in doing this with the help of Minos' daughter Ariadne, who gives him a magic ball of thread. This should help the hero to reach the Minotaur and retrace his path at the end of his endeavor.

Reminiscent of the classical myth, the plot in Lemire's work is based on the death of a child, who in her father's mind also becomes the victim of the Minotaur. In order to save her, Will needs a magic thread and finds it in the loose string from Wendy's sweater. The red string is another element of mythological provenance playing an important part at the thematic and infrastructural level. As Lemire pointed out in his afterword, his original idea for the book title was "String Theory" (Lemire 2022: n.p.), which, had it been retained, would bring to the forefront those layers of the narrative concerning the intertwining of reality, memory, and dreams. However, even without this kind of referencing, the string appears prominently throughout the novel as both the hero's and the readers' guide through the narrative. For Will, the red string is first of all the thing that still connects him to his daughter – it comes off the sweater that she liked to wear and that once belonged to him. In his imagination, the string becomes Ariadne's thread that will lead him to the monster who captured his daughter, but also out of the maze he himself is trapped in.

The myth of the Cretan Labyrinth comes across as an appropriate basis for the graphic narrative whose story is set in an urban environment. The perception of the city as a maze has been long established and also considerably explored in literary works.[4] Furthermore, the maze-like features of the cities, recognizable in their systems of streets and passageways winding around tall buildings, are additionally emphasized when presented in the comic-book

4 This literary tradition seems to have started with the aforementioned Greek myth. Arthur Evans's discovery at Knossos in Crete – a complex structure with a labyrinthine system of rooms and corridors, now assumed to be King Minos' court – is now believed to be the construction the ancient authors referred to when talking about the Minotaur's Labyrinth. We could thus say that the mythical Labyrinth was actually an ancient city.

layout. André Suhr has pointed to a strong similarity between not only the visual representation, but also the "subsequent modes of perception" at work in the city and in comics, stating that when "one walks through a city, frames feature prominently in many views of it. Windows, openings, doorways, street entrances—they all frame our view, putting things into the picture and others out of it, just as comics' frames do" (Suhr 2010: 241–2). This argument is the foundation of Davies' examination of infrastructural elements of graphic narratives and is also brought into play in Lemire's work, in panels in which vertical and horizontal lines of door frames, fence rails or bus poles parallel the frames of panels and gutters between them. Moreover, the representation of Will's office, with cubicles' walls dividing the workspace (Chapter 1) also evokes the structure of a maze as well as the troubled state of the protagonist's mind.

On the thematic level, the city is incorporated in a narrative both as the protagonist's place of residence and his working environment. Since he has lost connection with people, Will's only relation to the reality is his job of a city building inspector, which he still strives to perform conscientiously. The fact that he participates in the construction works makes him not only the "user" of the city, but also a person who shapes it.[5] Unlike the "ordinary practitioners of the city," who live "'down below,' below the thresholds at which visibility begins," as De Certeau defined the walkers (1988: 93), Will has the opportunity to observe the city from above, assuming the position of "a solar Eye, looking down like a god" (Certeau 1988: 92). Observing the cityscape from the rooftop of a building he is inspecting, Will becomes aware of the similitude between the mass of buildings and streets between them and a maze he reached in his dream following the red string in search of Wendy. The resemblance is quite strikingly presented in double-spread panels showing Will from the back looking at the maze / the city in front of him (Lemire 2022: Ch. 2).

The perspective Will adopts looking at the city map and turning it, by stretch of his imagination, into a sort of maze, is the one of the panoptic eye. From this superior position, solving the maze-problem seems easier. The difficulties start once Will moves down to the street-level of the city when the external as well as inner obstacles start to appear. The real danger, however, lies even deeper, in the underground passages of the metro line, to which Will descends following the red string. Will's descending underground in the final stage of his quest is also relatable to classical mythology. As Graves pointed out, ancient cultures (Celtic as well as early Greek) used to refer to a royal tomb as a labyrinth; for them, to escape from the labyrinth meant "to be reincarnate" (Graves 1971: 318). The Toronto subway becomes another part of the maze, the final one the protagonist needs to solve to reach the object of his quest. This means not only that he will recover the memory of his daughter, but also that he will overcome his emotional and psychological blockages caused by the trauma and in a way be reborn.

Lemire's *Mazebook* is for the greater part the story about personal trauma and ways of surpassing it, which is largely conveyed through the graphic

5 The topic of urban development is another important theme in this graphic novel.

design of the work. The appropriateness of the comic-book mode for depicting heightened emotional states and traumatic memories has been already extensively discussed by scholars. Clair Gorrara points to the panels as the "'boxes' of memory that require narrative sequencing to make sense of the whole" and gutters as elements that give "the reader the opportunity to make the imaginative leap from one memory experience to another," which is why "the page layout of comics demands a cognitive act of connection akin to the psychological need to order memories. Where this is missing or disrupted, trauma can be inferred or represented" (2018: 113). The same author draws attention to the indications conveyed by the drawing styles, different shapes and sizes of panels which influence the reading and denote troubled mental states, as well as the choice of color palette – "sepia tone can stand for nostalgia and loss" unlike the stark colors which suggest vibrancy (Gorrara 2018: 113). In the *Mazebook*, the narrative constantly oscillates between the domains of Will's reality, shaped by the past trauma, Will's memory, the source of the trauma, and his dreams or dream-like visions, in which he is searching for ways of overcoming his present condition, and all three are represented graphically in a distinctive way. The colorization denotes Will's narratorial vision, i.e. the state of his consciousness at the particular moment of the narration. The panels in gray and brown tones (not quite "sepia" but similar) show events from Will's everyday life, the drabness of the color wash suggestive of his sleepwalking through the day. As a contrast to this, the panels in color, with predominant bluish tones, show Will's memories of Wendy, while those with stronger accentuated blue palette represent the realm of the dreams Will has while sleeping or the fantasies he experiences roaming the maze of city streets. Towards the end of Chapter 3, having briefly descended into the sewage passage underground, he climbs up again and finds himself in the blue-colored world of the fantasy city indicated by the speaking dog who meets him. The blue dream-memory level is the one where maze elements obtain a central role.

A graphic element connecting the parts representing Will's real life and the ones representing the maze-worlds of memory and fantasies is the red line eventually leading the protagonist to the center of the maze. On its first appearance, the red line becomes a symbol of Will's fading memory as the disintegration of his daughter's sweater presages complete oblivion. At the same time, it is a graphic element that breaks the grayness of the panels as a sign of hope and a prompt that initiates his quest. Just as the colorization and occasional blurring of the images point to the protagonists psychological state, the mazes that in the course of the narrative appear everywhere around him represent the externalization of his inner imprisonment. As the whole narrative is presented from Will's point of view, soon it becomes clear that both Wendy and her father are trapped inside a maze and the red string should lead him as well as her out of it.

Maze as an infrastructural graphic device

The maze and the red string assume prominent roles in Lemire's narrative not so much owing to the text that we read, but mainly owing to the drawings featuring these motifs in different variants almost on every page. Generally speaking, the graphic component in the *Mazebook* is far superior to the verbal one, with Lemire's expressive drawing style and nuanced representation of the protagonist's emotional states through different color palettes and the sharpness of the images. However, what makes this graphic novel truly remarkable is the way its author employs two key motifs from his storyline as structural, or rather "infrastructural" devices for the organization of the layout.

Graphic novels are not only works of art but "a mode of communication" (Duncan, Smith 2017: 8) and reading them implies grasping not only *what* is communicated but also *how*, bearing in mind that the *how*, i.e. the manner of communication, contributes to the creation of the meaning. In the case of graphic novels (or comics in general), exploring the *how* means looking closely at those components which usually go unnoticed – frames and gutters – and whose function as well as *unnoticeability* bring them close to the concept of infrastructure introduced above. As with urban infrastructure, frames and gutters in a graphic novel become noticeable when something unusual or unconventional happens to them. This is the case with Lemire's *Mazebook*, whose parts introduce novelties in the "infrastructure" of gutters which on the one hand correspond to the subject matter and the atmosphere of the chapter, while on the other aim to influence the reading process.

The graphic layout of the *Mazebook* is for the most part rather conventional, but also rather dynamic in the sense that Lemire employs both single-panel and multi-panel pages with several double spreads made out of one panel, which show some of the most dramatic moments in the book. The multi-panel pages vary from those featuring same-size panels regularly distributed in a 3x3 grids to those with L-shaped strips mimicking the look of the city blocks Will passes in his search for Wendy. The framing is mainly conventional with solid black lines delineating the panels and white gutters between them. There are, however, a few quite telling departures from this convention, the first being the blurring and virtual disappearance of the frame line in panels showing Will's memory of Wendy (in which the drawn figures are also blurred and faded). Just like the drawing and the coloring, the frame line is in the function of the story, visually reflecting the protagonist's emotional state.

The next example of an unconventional treatment of the frame line, pertinent to the main topic of this article, is the insertion of interruptions or gaps in the frames and consequently in the gutters, making the color from one panel flow directly to the next one beside or below it. The gaps thus provide a sort of passageways or bridges connecting individual panels and, what is especially important, indicating the designated reading order.

In his discussion of the "infrastructural form" of the comics, Dominic Davies has drawn attention to the ways the comics' infrastructure (the system of grids, frames and gutters) correlates with what is depicted within the panels (2015: 5), showing that analyzing this correlation is necessary for the full understanding of the presented story. Such approach emphasizes the importance of gutters, as "intericonic space between panels," whose diegetic function within a comic can vary widely, from completely unremarkable to paramount (see Baetens, Frey 2015: 121–122). In Lemire's *Mazebook* they approach the latter, owing to the "bridges" running over them and turning the panel grid on a page into a sort of a maze. A function of these bridges is to indicate the path which the reader should follow through the story (the reading order). Conventionally, the comics and graphic novels by Western authors are read as any text, following the Z-pattern (see Duncan, Smith 2017: 21), i.e. starting from the top left panel, moving to the right, then moving down to the next row of panels and following them again left to right, so that the last one to be read on a page is the bottom right panel. However, Lemire's "bridges" over the gutters indicate that we should forget about any predetermined pattern and only focus on the indicated path. Admittedly, the order suggested by the "bridges" is such as we would probably follow even without these hints, but their presence is nevertheless appropriate as it corresponds to the narrative presented in the panels. The protagonist moves along the mazes of streets to find his way to his daughter and likewise the readers move along the maze of the panel grid to reach the end of the story. Although the gaps in the frame lines start to appear even earlier in the narrative (in Chapter 3), they become conspicuous in Chapter 4, the one that is entirely set in Will's blue dream-world, which shows him plodding through a maze of city streets. Here the whole infrastructure of the work starts to resonate with the overall topic of the narrative with mazes not only drawn within the panels but also constructed from the comics' basic organizational elements.

The red string supports the idea of the maze as infrastructural element in Lemire's work, but is also a prominent graphic feature in its own right. Whereas the gaps in the frames (the "bridges") appear mostly in Chapter 4, the red string is present throughout the book. The red line Will draws on his construction plan (Chapter 1) is what brings back the memory of Wendy's sweater at the same time referencing to Ariadne's thread that guides the protagonist of the classical myth to the center and also out of the maze. As an authentic connection between Will and Wendy, the red string torn from the sweater is the dominant motif from the first pages to a large extent owing to its color, especially striking on the mostly monochromatic panels. But what makes the string an infrastructural element of this book is the fact that it also navigates the readers' journey through the narrative, especially on the pages with unconventionally arranged panels.

In the blue-colored, i.e. dream-world pages, the red string is mostly drawn within the panels and occasionally serves to indicate their order. The first conspicuous instance of the infrastructural use of the red string appears

in Chapter 3. Will falls asleep and starts dreaming, but his dream, represented by eighteen panels on a double spread, does not contain much action. All panels on the left side of the spread show blue-gray watercolor stains in various abstract shapes. The panels are, however, connected by the red string running through them and thus conveying the sense of dynamism by directing the movement of our eye. This movement, indicated by the string, does not follow the standard Z-pattern of reading as the string goes left to right, then right to left, then again left to right, reaching the next page (the right side of the spread) at the bottom left panel and then moving all the way up. It eventually leads us to the sweater, Will, and Wendy, all the time keeping our eyes fixed to the pages, which contain no text and almost no other visual elements.

As another indicator of the dream-world, the red string appears prominently in Chapter 4 (along with the bridges over the gutters) and now its appearance is even more idiosyncratic as it runs not only inside but also outside of the panels, or more accurately, in between individual panels tying them into a story. In the final chapter, the string leads Will to the memory of what was perhaps his last conversation with his daughter, when he made her a promise he wasn't able to keep. Going back to his dream-world, he resumes following the red string, now again running through the city streets. At the end of his quest, having reached and defeated the Minotaur, Will manages to recover the memory of Wendy (indicated by the clearly drawn features on her face) and only then is capable of letting go. This is symbolically indicated by the red string flowing away into the air. Towards the end of the book, after the protagonist finds his way out of his traumatized state, the layout returns to a conventional mode, the maze practically disappears, while the red string recurs only once more, on the very last panel, suggesting a string of memory that doesn't go away.

Conclusion

A conspicuous feature of Lemire's *Mazebook* is an apt connection established among the city as the physical environment, Will's troubled mind as the psychological environment, and the concept of the maze taken from classical mythology, which is embedded in the narrative as well as its graphic layout. The connection is from the start established by means of drawing, making the visual component of the work far more striking than the verbal.

The maze along with the red string stands out as an infrastructural-poetic element, being not only part of the narrative on the level of themes and symbols, but also a device for presenting that narrative, as a graphic component of the book. It is here that the infrastructural potential of this concept (or construction) with regard to comics becomes the most obvious. The gaps in the frames bridging the gutters and the string running from panel to panel guide the readers' eyes and turn their attention to the visual layout of the book, at the same time transposing the main theme of finding one's way

to the center of the maze to the level of the graphic narrative's infrastructure. This affects the reading process making the readers more alert to the graphic elements that usually go unnoticed and making this graphic novel a complex multi-layered work.

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Бојана Аћамовић

Пратећи црвену нит: инфраструктура графичког наратива у Лемировој књизи о лавиринту

Резиме

У раду се анализира графички роман *Књига о лавиринту* (2021) канадског стрип-аутора Цефа Лемира. Лемирова прича о оцу који се бори да превазиђе трауму узроковану кћеркином смрћу тематски се може повезати с већим бројем књижевних дела, од грчке митологије до савремене књижевности. За ову анализу издвојен је мотив лавиринта, који Лемир преузима из грчког мита о краљу Минојu, чудовишту Минотауру и херојu Тезеју и обрађује га тако да постаје доминантан не само на тематском плану већ и као принцип у основи графичке организације табли, односно онога што ћемо назвати „инфраструктуром" графичког романа. Као теоријски оквир су, поред студија о стрипу, послужиле скорије објављене студије које се баве инфраструктуром као културолошким појмом и начинима на који је она представљена у уметничким делима, пре свега у књижевности и стрипу. Повезивање концепта градске инфраструктуре и графичких наратива показало се као инспиративан приступ, будући да скреће пажњу на оне графичке компоненте на које се често при читању не обраћа пажња. У Лемировој *Књизи о лавиринту* лавиринт и пратећа црвена нит су свеприсутни и функционишу као мотиви који повезују јунака приче с његовом преминулом кћерком и посредно су одраз јунаковог психолошког стања. Истовремено, они постају и инфраструктурно-поетска средства којима се скреће пажња на иновативна визуелна решења у организацији графичког наратива.

Кључне речи: стрип, графички наратив, инфраструктура, студије културе, грчка митологија, Цеф Лемир