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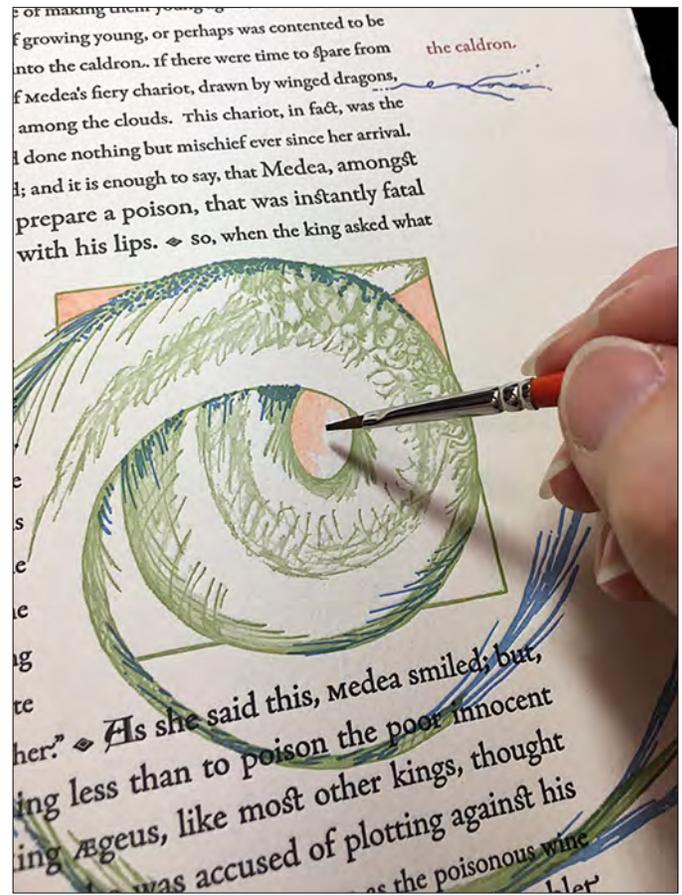
A GOLDEN THREAD

Reviewed by Michael Ryan

A Golden Thread: The Minotaur - A Contemporary Illumination by Mindy Belloff (New York: Intima Press, 2018). Text from Nathaniel Hawthorne's story "The Minotaur" (1853). 92-pages, 14.75 x 11 inches. 100 original drawings reproduced in 200 press runs. Endsheets letterpress printed. Cotton rag papers in ivory, tan, and white with deckled fore edge. Two gilt edges on head and tail in 23-karat gold, with cover design and label in gold foil on leather, gilded by Peter Geraty, Praxis Bindery, MA. Hand sewn on linen tapes with cover in quarter leather, housed inside a gold cloth clamshell box, bound by Celine Lombardi, NY. Edition of 32, plus 8 deluxe design bindings. Standard edition US\$6500.

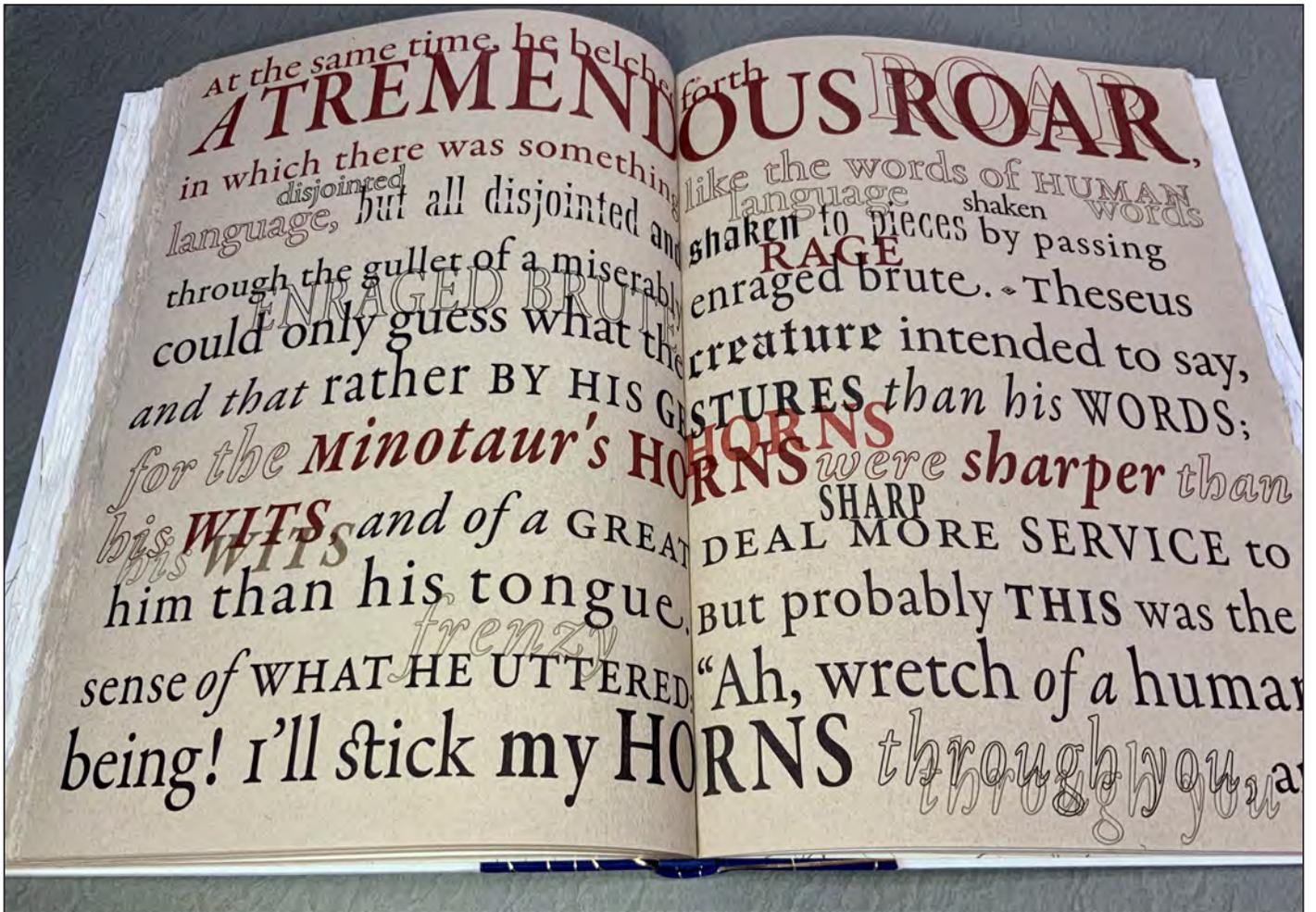
¶ Mindy Belloff's latest contribution, *A Golden Thread*, is a genuine masterpiece of art and design, an exuberant mix of color, texture, style, and format. The title alludes to the thread which Ariadne, daughter of wicked King Minos of Crete, gives Theseus to retrace his steps through the labyrinth after slaying the horrid Minotaur. Like Prince Theseus, we are invited to grasp the thread as we follow his adventures from Athens to Crete and back again. Our journey, though, is through an evolution in colors and fonts and papers that closely track the fortunes of Theseus. As an artist's rendition of the stark and often cruel world of classical mythology, it is a real tour de force.

But Belloff chooses for her text Nathaniel Hawthorne's reworking of the myth in his *Tanglewood Tales* (1853), one of two books of classical mythology that Hawthorne wrote for children. Hawthorne, our surest fictional guide to the tormented psyches of Puritan New England, thought that the Greek myths in the form they have come down to us were too dark and violent for the sensibilities of children. So he turned them into gentler stories with happier endings. But Belloff, to her credit, is not fooled by Hawthorne's sandpapered version, and her book vivid-



ly captures the raw essence of the Greek original.

A Golden Thread is an artist's book in a very direct way; it is literally, *her* book, in which she does anything she wants, giving full expression to her imagination and superb sense of design. It is as if she were saying: this is all mine, I am pulling out all the stops. I have always admired the subtlety and classical restraint of Belloff's work, and those qualities are certainly on full display here. She has a particularly rich color palette, with extraordinary blues, reds, and golds. But as she hues to the text and the menace it forebodes, the stately pages of the opening sections become more agitated, with type and color taking on more ominous appearances until we enter the labyrinth and the culminating contest between Theseus and the ghastly Minotaur, the devourer of the children of Athens. All restraint is gone as big bold block-like words leap off the page, echoing the cacophony of the struggle between good and evil. It is an extraordinary presentation of the turbulent combat, all the more jarring given the more balanced world that bookends it.



Belloff is deeply learned in the history of the book and of art. She acknowledges the traditions that have influenced her in creating this remarkable book: Medieval/Renaissance traditions of design and illumination; the designs on Japanese inro, the nested boxes that hung from obis and served as, in effect, purses; and images taken from ancient Cretan and Mycenaean art. Alongside these traditions, Belloff intersperses moments of whimsy and abandon as she places figures of her own invention in the margins of the page, much like a medieval illuminator having some fun in the midst of serious business. And not to abandon the theme of the labyrinth altogether, the book contains Carl Jung's Anima Animus in labyrinthian format.

A Golden Thread comes bound in blue and white quarter leather, with gold filaments cross-hatching the spine that suggest Portolan maps and hence Theseus' journey itself. The book is a stunning achievement by one of our most gifted artists, mature and at the peak of her powers. intimapress.com

