

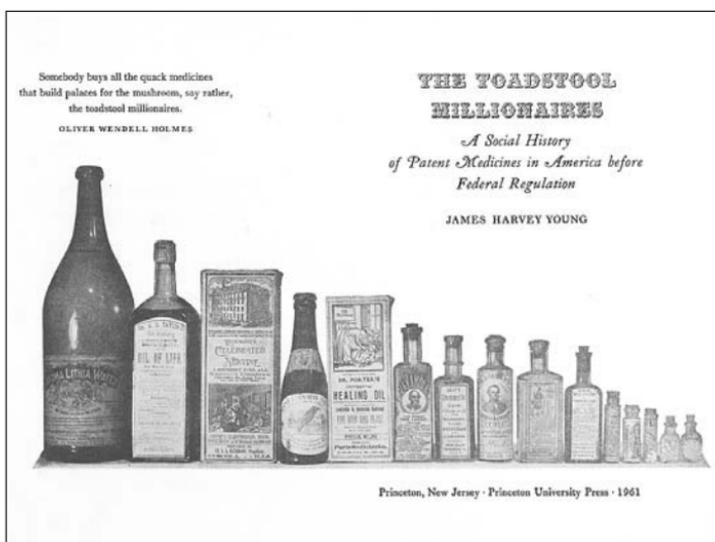
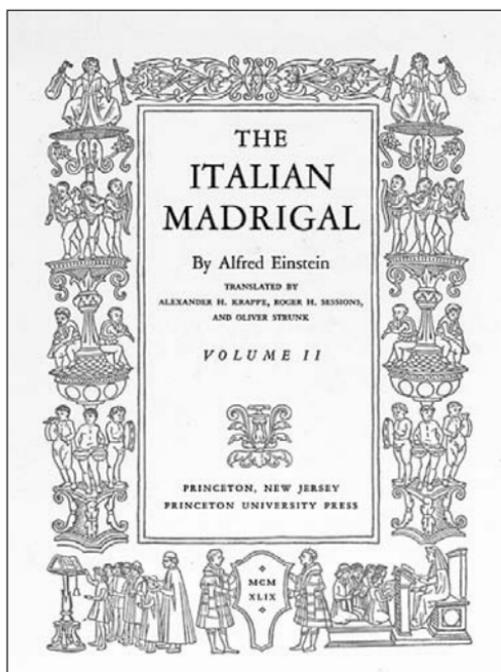
## *P. J. Conkwright and Book Design*

Throughout its history, Princeton University Press has produced consistently elegant books. Beginning with the hiring of respected book designer Frederic Warde in the 1920s, the Press has shown a strong commitment to the craft of book design. By the middle of the twentieth century, P. J. Conkwright, the legendary designer and typographer at Princeton, had sealed Princeton's reputation as a press with the highest design standards. Even as technology has evolved and working procedures have changed, the Press has maintained its ability to produce well-crafted books.

In his 1951 history of the Press, Whitney Darrow, the Press's founding director, describes the appreciation for the craft of book design that Charles Scribner had instilled in him. It was in 1921 that designer and typographer Frederic Warde was hired as the Press's first printing director. Before his arrival at Princeton, Warde had spent three years working with acclaimed designer Bruce Rogers at William E. Rudge's successful printing plant in Mount Vernon, New York.

Warde, a self-described perfectionist, created works that were classic in design and feel. As a result of underinking and a light impression, his pages were intentionally gray, light, and even. During his brief tenure, Warde jump-started Princeton University Press's program of quality design and printing.

Pleasant Jefferson ("P. J.") Conkwright joined the Press in 1939, coming from the University of Oklahoma. As the Press's chief designer and typographer from 1939 until 1970, Conkwright earned widespread recognition among both design and scholarly communities, transforming Princeton into a center of tasteful and innovative design. Working closely with the Press director and the production/plant manager, he promoted design principles that ensured a basic level of quality for all of Princeton's books. Believing that a book's design should contribute to the communication of the author's idea, Conkwright felt that any book should meet basic requirements for the reader: it should lie flat when opened, have margins wide enough to allow for a firm grip when held in the hands, possess a stamped spine that would be legible for many years, and display clear and readable type. He insisted that paper and binding materials be carefully selected, and he consistently argued for the best materials available within the project's budget. These principles continue to govern Princeton's book design and manufacturing.



Two title pages by P. J. Conkwright: *The Italian Madrigal*, vol. 2, by Alfred Einstein (1949); *The Toadstool Millionaires*, by James Harvey Young (1961).

One of Conkwright's greatest skills was his ability to organize complicated scholarly material in a way that made it easier to use. The best-known example of his work is the collected writings of Thomas Jefferson (see illustration, p. 32). This colossal project involved the commissioning of a new Linotype typeface, Monticello, based on a historic typeface originally produced by the Philadelphia foundry Binny & Ronaldson. Conkwright paid special attention to materials as well, selecting a warm-toned laid sheet (textured paper) that he developed with the Curtis Paper Company. The sense of elegance and decorum in Conkwright's series design was widely recognized, and *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* quickly became a model for historical papers published by other university presses. Conkwright's other major works for the Press include *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau*, and Charles De Tolnay's five-volume *Michelangelo*.

In addition to his focus on craft, Conkwright had a strong sense of community. He had an ongoing relationship with the Princeton University library, designing the *Library Chronicle*, its special collection bookplates, and its exhibition catalogs. Conkwright also designed for professors, alumni, and administrators through the printing division that was then a part of Princeton University Press.

Many designers who worked with Conkwright have received significant recognition within the American university press community, most notably Helen van Zandt, Jan Lilly, and Frank Mahood. Van Zandt, Conkwright's assistant beginning in 1945, was listed as designer along with Conkwright on many of his design awards.

Trained under Conkwright and van Zandt, Jan Lilly joined the Press full-time in 1966 as an apprentice book designer, eventually rising to design department manager. She is a widely respected designer, whose work is characterized by a subtle elegance and typographic sophistication. She has won multiple awards from the American Association of University Presses (AAUP), the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), and the New York book shows. Most recently, she has been praised for her handling of the *Barington Atlas* (see p. 154), described by the judges at the 2001 Book, Jacket, and Journal Show, organized by the AAUP, as "the atlas to die for. The eleven-year effort was worth it. Masterful."

Conkwright also hired Frank Mahood in 1968. While Mahood works in a broad range of styles, he is best known for his extraordinary use of ornament and decorative elements. His attention to detail and his ability to use multiple elements in harmonious

ways have earned him many design awards from the AAUP and the AIGA. In 2002 a small book of poetry, *Music of a Distant Drum*, designed by Mahood was described in the 2002 AAUP Book, Jacket, and Journal Show as “a lovely little book” and “utterly suitable and engaging.” His work as a book designer and illustrator was featured in an exhibition at Princeton University’s Firestone Library.

The Press produces more than two hundred new hardcovers and ninety new paperbacks each year; almost all are designed in-house. Although the Princeton list is larger and more complex than ever before—ranging from econometrics textbooks to volumes of poetry, from field guides to scholarly monographs—the Press has continually been recognized not only for text design but also for high-quality cover and jacket design, winning fifteen awards in the past two years alone. The current designers exhibit an impressive range of styles, using traditional typographic approaches while embracing more experimental methods.