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In Memoriam: Robert F. Roeming, 1912-2004 Editor, the Modern Language Journal, 1963-1970

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In Memoriam

Robert F. Roeming, 1912–2004

Editor, *The Modern Language Journal*, 1963–1970

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ROBERT F. ROEMING, THE 15TH EDITOR of *The Modern Language Journal* and Professor Emeritus of French and Italian at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, passed away of natural causes at his home in Chenequa, Wisconsin, on January 11, 2004. A Milwaukee native, he was 92 years old at his death. He edited this periodical with distinction from 1963 through 1970. During a lengthy academic career Roeming proved himself a professional visionary and a humanist devoted to the improvement of the profession to which he committed his efforts.

He was simultaneously a colleague, an independent professional leader, one of the earliest scholars in literature to become actively interested in the scholarly reception afforded a particular author's works, certainly one of the first literary scholars to see the potential of the computer for the most advantageous arrangements of the scholarship about and works by a particular author. The most tangible result of his devotion to the importance of bibliographic undertakings is his *Camus: A Bibliography*, published at Wisconsin Press (Madison) in 1968, a project that would continue to occupy his time for more than 20 years after the original publication.

When I became editor of *The Modern Language Journal* in 1980, Professor Roeming was among the first colleagues to be in touch and to offer his personal support and counsel. He was as gracious

in welcoming me to the responsibilities of the position as he had been warmly forthcoming in his *MLJ* welcoming remarks to Charles King 8 years earlier (Roeming, 1970, p. 561).

That type of friendly and collegial support was as much a part of Professor Roeming's professional life as was his scholarship. Following completion of his dissertation, "The Evolution of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*" at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1941, he accepted a faculty position in Milwaukee, where earlier he had taught evenings and weekends. Fifteen years later he became the first chair of the Department of French and Italian upon its establishment at UW–Milwaukee. He held that appointment for more than a decade, after which he continued his service by accepting the directorship of the Language Laboratory. The correspondence files of the UW–Milwaukee Department of Hebrew document the origin and early development of the department, and include letters and memoranda of the ad hoc Committee on Hebrew Studies, chaired by Roeming, with the Wisconsin Society for Jewish Learning and the College of Letters & Science. He was the founder (1969) of the Center for Twentieth-Century Studies at the UW–Milwaukee (Silvers, 2004).

J. Alan Pfeffer, Roeming's immediate predecessor as editor, lauded Roeming's appointment by noting especially that he had the "training and temperament," as well as the necessary "physical vigor" for the job (Pfeffer, 1962, p. 337). Former *MLJ* Business Manager Wallace Klein, who worked with Roeming for all of his 8 years as *MLJ* editor (1963–1970), notes in a personal

communication to me: "First impressions of [Roeming] probably were that he was gruff, very intelligent, scholarly, very self-confident . . . outspoken, assertive, competent." In the same letter, Klein goes on to describe the evolution of his relationship with Roeming: "Gradually my impersonal business relationship . . . developed into an admiration for his competence as an editor . . ." In a letter to Professor Roeming upon the completion of his editorship, Klein wrote that the standards Roeming had set as editor would "stand as models of excellence against which all past and future issues will be measured."

In his later years Roeming, who had worn eyeglasses since boyhood, suffered the debilitating consequences of macular degeneration. He was left with only peripheral vision and had to continue his scholarship—which he did—with the aid of a verbalized reading machine and a magnification camera (McLoone, 1994). In her lengthy essay on editorial policy, Sally Magnan refers to Roeming as an editor "who was highly vocal on both research and methods questions. He directed his pen even more often to the controversy surrounding professional issues" (Magnan, 2001, p. 109) such as the formation of ACTFL, and of the Central States Conference, and a most outspoken advocate of professional unity. Magnan goes on to note that he became so concerned over the profession's lack of common goals and causes that he feared the eventual loss of self-determination as a discipline. Roeming wrote: "We stand as a profession in jeopardy of losing the leadership in controlling the future devel-

opment of our own discipline" (*MLJ* 49, 1965, p. 307).

Roeming's career stands out because of his nearly equal dedication to literary study and to methods of foreign- and second-language teaching and learning. He saw a symbiotic relationship between all scholarly and pedagogical activities of the profession. In the final analysis, his duties as editor and as professor were but one to him: teaching in each instance—only the audiences were different. As editor he was charged with teaching and helping peers; as professor, his primary tasks were in the classroom and the library. Both the editor and the professor had an unavoidable calling to be outspoken, to advocate, to profess. His unflinching energy, his keen intellect, his total dedication to the profession he saw as a cause—all of these will be missed as will he!

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