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Tributes to Robert F. Roeming

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Tributes to Robert F. Roeming

IN THIS ISSUE of *The Modern Language Journal* the National Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations is commending a staunch leader, Robert F. Roeming, who for the past eight years has rendered signal service as Managing Editor of the Journal, and has left us with vivid memories of his personality, his capability, and his contribution to the FL profession.

The *MLJ* has benefited greatly from his intelligence, his journalistic abilities, and his good sense of organization. Bob Roeming's high standards have resulted in constant up-grading of the quality of the *MLJ* during his two terms as Managing Editor. The thematic grouping of excellent articles which are of significant current interest has made the Journal increasingly valuable as a source of reference material for the FL teaching profession and especially useful in FL teacher training programs. As an able author also, Roeming has made a substantial contribution to FL pedagogical literature.

Throughout his service as Managing Editor, Robert Roeming demonstrated that he is a man of action and a man of conviction. In his approach to his responsibilities he has always been decisive, forthright, and outspoken to an extent which at times provoked controversy. He has never been willing to compromise his principles. Thus, he has quickly made firm friendships with many, while at times this same candor inevitably lost him the support of some with whom he differed. He clearly and unhesitatingly expresses himself without compromising the position to which he is committed. These are some of the varied facets of the personality of this stimulating, brilliant, articulate, and basically charming gentleman.

These have been strenuous and difficult years in a puzzling epoch for the NFMLTA. In this extremely demanding situation, Robert Roeming undoubtedly grew with his experience as he worked with might and main. Now he can relinquish his post with the satisfying knowledge that he has made a notable and worthy contribution

to the FL teaching profession. Our sincere thanks are due Bob for a difficult job very well done.

VIOLET BERGQUIST,
President, NFMLTA,
1971

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Robert F. Roeming is the twelfth Managing Editor *The Modern Language Journal* has had since its establishment in 1916, and his eight years in office have set a record for length of service in the Managing Editorship. Previously two Managing Editors served for six years each, but the normal term has been four years and because of the National Federation's principle that this and other offices should rotate among the various modern foreign languages his reappointment for a second term was in itself testimony to his great ability and unusually successful performance.

On the shelves of individual subscribers and libraries Volumes XLVII-LIV of *The Modern Language Journal* speak with a loud voice of the high standards, editorial imaginativeness, and promotional energy of Bob Roeming. His friends and associates value, along with these qualities, many others, such as his administrative ability, his flair for academic and scholarly experiment—and his fiery independence.

GORDON R. SILBER,
Secretary-Treasurer, NFMLTA

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I am happy to have this opportunity to add my word of congratulation and gratitude to Bob Roeming on the occasion of his retirement as Editor of *The Modern Language Journal*. Our profession owes very much, and in many different ways, to his leadership through the past years. He has shown great initiative and imagination in constructing an editorial policy which has made the *MLJ* responsive to the needs of teachers. He has shown discernment and real critical judgment in maintaining quality. He has called upon resources of patience and dispassion when criticized on many sides. Above all, he has been wise,

with the vision of a true leader, in resisting the impulsive tempers of the moment, and in following the constructive policies of long-view betterment of our whole profession. We are grateful to Bob Roeming and we want him to know that we admire and respect the work he has done.

STEPHEN A. FREEMAN,
*Director Emeritus of the
Language Schools,
Middlebury College*

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Robert F. Roeming is a man of immense energy and a broad range of talents. As teacher, scholar, critic, administrator, and editor, he helped make the nineteen-sixties come alive for foreign language teachers.

It was fortunate for the profession that he accepted the challenge of the Managing Editorship of *The Modern Language Journal* from 1963 to 1970, a period of intense experiment and development in the foreign language field. Much of this activity grew out of Federal support under the National Defense Act of 1958, rising to a climax during his tenure as Managing Editor.

Thanks to his experience, insight, and untiring effort, he succeeded in mirroring the tremendous events and accomplishments of those times in the pages of *MLJ*. When it seemed advisable, he went on the road to get the articles and news. I have encountered him in many places seeking out the authors—at foreign language meetings in New York, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, even West Berlin. And invariably he got results for *MLJ*.

When the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) was launched, he saw the point and became a member of the Organizing Committee. The successful start of ACTFL owes no small measure to his understanding and support.

Bob Roeming has moved into still another of his many careers, now as Director of the Center for Twentieth Century Studies at his university. He is truly the Renaissance Man from Milwaukee. We shall hear more from him. Many thanks, Bob, and good luck.

KENNETH MILDENBERGER,
*Deputy Executive Secretary,
Modern Language Association of
America*

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As a person outside the domain of modern languages, I got to know Robert Roeming first through correspondence in which he began to see implications on our discussions and research on the psychology of language learning and teaching that we ourselves had not fully appreciated. By asking for fuller explanations from us, he not only got to know what we were up to but also forced us to speak non-technically and think more clearly about our own ideas. Correspondence as searching as that led to many pleasurable personal contacts with Bob and these have also been characterized by his asking troublesome questions and patiently waiting for the fumbling to stop and some sense to emerge. Thus, my first impression was one of a very skilled prober who is patient with human nonsense if there is hope that sense will follow. What great characteristics these are for the teacher or the pace-setter in a field of inquiry, and in his role as editor of *The Modern Language Journal*, Roeming has been an exemplary teacher and leader. The fact that on the social level he has been for me a personal teacher and stimulator indicates the richness of his qualities as an individual that makes him a special type friend. My hope is that he will continue to use his skills and friendship to further the development of the field.

WALLACE E. LAMBERT,
*Professor of Psychology,
McGill University*

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My numerous contacts with Professor Roeming since the early 1960's have made me keenly aware of his many positive attributes as a scholar, educator, and administrator whose activities have made an impact in such varied fields as literature, linguistics, educational technology, and pedagogy. These are only a few of the attributes which helped to make him a first-rate editor of *The Modern Language Journal*. Such characteristics of scholarship and administrative competence can almost be taken for granted in one who has served successfully as editor of so outstanding a journal. Therefore, I would like to direct my remarks toward several other aspects of Professor Roeming's character because they represent traits which, in my opinion, will be badly needed by persons in leadership positions in the

foreign language profession over the next decade.

First of all, Robert Roeming is a man who holds strong convictions about many things. It is perhaps a gross understatement to say that he is not easily swayed from those convictions. In an age in which mechanized industrial society has produced the conforming personality which David Riesman refers to in *The Lonely Crowd* as the "other directed man," strongly held inner views are not always looked upon with favor. Yet it is precisely his firm inner-directed personality which prevented Robert Roeming from jumping on one or the other of the many bandwagons which passed by during his term of office. Thus, it was perfectly in character, for him to write an article entitled "Traditional!," in which he reaffirmed the intrinsic humanistic value of foreign language study, at a time when even a Milton scholar was proclaiming foreign language study as instrumental to "the national interest." At that time, when millions of federal dollars were available for those who acted upon the belief that language study should be tied to international understanding and other utilitarian applications, it was easy to overlook the obvious fact that some of the bloodiest wars in history were fought between people who spoke the same language and that few people other than language teachers are ever employed *primarily* because they have acquired a second language. In fact, it was considered rather gauche to point such things out, merely because they were true. This did not prevent Professor Roeming from doing so.

It might be interesting to speculate about what might have happened if the profession had held more firmly to this concept of foreign language study as an end in itself, as a field of study to be pursued rigorously for its inherent intellectual and esthetic content. A few possible outcomes of scrupulously following this principle to its logical conclusion might have been: (1) We would probably not have got into the trap of implying that high school foreign language is principally a ticket for admission to some college or university; hence we would not now feel threatened by the lifting of such requirements in higher education; (2) By not treating foreign language as a "tool" subject needed for entrance into certain occupations (where language skill was clearly irrelevant as a tool) we might not have created the present army of antagonists in other academic disciplines whose progress toward the doctorate

had been retarded merely because they were not particularly adept at passing Ph.D. language exams and who, as a result, nourish an abiding hatred for foreign languages in general; (3) Also, if we had not over promoted the study of foreign languages as a utilitarian skill subject (when, in reality, it is impossible to demonstrate such utility to a given student) we might not now be so severely threatened by the present "cost accountability" push at the high school level.

In the mid-1960's we needed more people like Robert Roeming, who looked to the heart of things and who perceived the potential consequences of bandwagon jumping. In the 1970's, the need for such leaders is going to be even greater. For a new wave of "innovations" is upon us again. We hear talk of a curricular "systems approach," of behavioral objectives, of team teaching, of "relevant" curricula, etc. Federal funds are again tied to people who say the right things in the prescribed way to the various grant-bearing institutions. We need to look at each of these new developments with the same deep skepticism and inner conviction that Robert Roeming exhibited during his editorship.

The second trait which Robert Roeming has that could benefit other leaders in the field of foreign language pedagogy is that of being receptive to bona fide innovation. At first glance this might seem to be in conflict with everything that I said above. But Robert Roeming, as editor, was receptive to articles which dealt with genuine innovations. Also, in his work at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee he was receptive to the use of technological innovations ranging from computers to radio broadcasts. But his basic orientation remained firm. Innovation had to be consistent with the goals of humanistic education.

In closing, I would like to mention the final aspect of Robert Roeming's character which made him a successful editor; it could be summarized with the word "stamina." The mere physical and mental survival of a long-term editorship in these chaotic times is worthy of note. Sifting through manuscripts of wide-ranging quality can be a mind-boggling experience. That he retained his clarity of mind through it all is attested to by an article which he wrote with the improbable title, "Preparation of a Manuscript." The article is a sort of inverted tongue-in-cheek Socratic dialog based upon his correspondence with prospective authors. At times, a mood of caustic humor and

ironic incredulity breaks through as illustrated by the following:

Question: When should I send my manuscript to the Business Manager?

Answer: When the day arrives that a journal can be published without an editor.

And then there is the laconic response technique where one word says more than a thousand pictures.

Question: Will it help me if I tell the editor that my next promotion depends on getting my manuscript in print?

Answer: No.

Question: Will I gain an advantage if my English structure and spelling are correct?

Answer: Yes.

In my opinion, it is characteristics such as those which I have outlined above that made Robert Roeming an outstanding editor, namely a scholarly background, clear-headed skepticism, tempered innovativeness and the mental and physical stamina to stand up under the professional buffetings which are the inevitable lot of a Managing Editor. He has stood up well, and has left a legacy of high-quality journal volumes which present a challenge for emulation to his successors.

Those of us who have worked with him in the past can congratulate him now on a job well done while at the same time, hoping that he will in some way, continue in a leadership role in the field of foreign language education.

FRANK M. GRITTNER,
*Foreign Language Supervisor,
State of Wisconsin*

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Robert F. Roeming has a name and reputation which has for many years been in the forefront of foreign language activities throughout the nation. Many of us have turned to him early in our professional careers for help, and his assistance and counsel were given freely and with the assurance of many years of experience. Bob Roeming was active in foreign language education long be-

fore the advent of federal funds and at a time when the foreign language roles were much smaller than today.

Bob Roeming was extremely active in the Central States Modern Language Association. He held office, supported it and edited its journal with little recognition other than the gratitude of the few who knew how hard he was working. Even though Dr. Roeming had an emotional stake in the Central States Modern Language Association, he recognized that change was needed and became quite active in the reorganization of the Central States Modern Language Association into the Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

At the time of the development of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Bob Roeming was there and was willing to support this new fledgling organization. In fact, he was so active in professional organizations that one wondered how he could be in so many different places working so tirelessly in such a short period of time.

Dr. Roeming's name has almost become inseparable from *The Modern Language Journal*. His discriminating evaluation of articles and exacting demands for perfection have resulted in a journal which is considered a professional necessity by most practicing teachers. Certainly Dr. Roeming needs a rest from this demanding task. He will be missed, but it is hoped that he will get some relief from the great demands upon his time. Even saying this, it is realized that anyone so energetic and so interested in his profession will still be around with his wise counsel and advice.

BARBARA ORT,
*Foreign Language Consultant,
State of Michigan*

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While editing 64 issues of *The Modern Language Journal*, Robert F. Roeming spent his "spare time" addressing regional, national, and international language conferences; serving on executive committees and advisory councils of this, that, and the other FL organization; writing articles and comments for the *MLJ* itself while at the same time publishing an impressive list of articles and reviews in *other* journals; conducting summer seminars; organizing and directing since

July 1969 the Center for Twentieth Century Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; etc. An authority on French literature of the twentieth century he published in 1968 *Camus: A Bibliography*, a 298-page computerized work described by Germaine Brée as "extremely impressive" and "doubly valuable: as an example of new techniques, and in itself as a research tool" (*Books Abroad*, Summer 1969, p. 380).

I am most appreciative to Bob Roeming for his splendid counsel and cooperation during the transition of the editorship of the Journal. On more than one occasion his tolerance and "gig-

gling good humor" saved the day. (Eight years as editor and he has preserved his keen sense of humor! This must be some kind of record!)

I think of Roeming as a rock in the foreign language profession. Just turned fifty-nine he has enough plans and projects in his fertile brain to keep him busy for another half century. We shall hear a lot more from him in the future.

Roeming is a hard act to follow; patience, gentle reader, I need your support.

CHARLES L. KING,
Editor,
The Modern Language Journal

*Modern Language Teaching: Problems and Opportunities for the Seventies**

STEPHEN A. FREEMAN, *Middlebury College*

WE ARE LIVING in an age of crisis. This is a pure platitude, because men have always lived in an age of crisis. Since before the Sphinx began posing its riddles, men have faced the future with foreboding and anxiety. This is a time of change, but change *is* the definition of time. So I like to remember that the Chinese character for crisis is a double symbol: danger and opportunity. I have chosen for my theme "Problems and Opportunities" because I want to be very realistic in discussing with you the problems and dangers I see ahead for foreign language teaching; at the same time I believe there are solutions to the problems, and opportunities contained in them for greater success and service.

The *first problem* I see is that of decreasing enrollments in our language classes. There are several reasons for this. School populations will not increase as rapidly as in the past decade. The "baby boom" of the forties and fifties has now passed. The census and demographic studies seem to show that our school population will grow, but much more slowly (perhaps 2 percent yearly). More important for us specifically is that language requirements are being dropped, quite generally. Colleges and universities dropped them in the thirties, reinstated them in the fifties and early sixties, largely due to the campaign of the MLA Foreign Language Program

and to the Sputnik furor; and now are again dropping the requirements both for the degree and for admission to college. The natural result is that High Schools and Prep Schools are making foreign languages only recommended for the college bound, and optional or even "counter-indicated" for the terminal student. One thing is certain: we are no longer a "protected" profession with a captive clientele guaranteed to us by college requirements and other bases of an academic "status quo."

Underlying this significant change is the permissiveness evident in our entire life and society today. Everthing is becoming optional—morals, drugs, social ethics, financial responsibility, family obligations. Small wonder that permissiveness in our academic curriculum is the vogue of the moment. Students are told that they know best what subjects they should study in order to become well educated, and that their choice may

*Address delivered at the New Jersey Foreign Language Teachers Association Convention in Atlantic City on November 6, 1970. On this occasion Dr. Freeman, who retired last Sept. 1 from Middlebury College after many years as Vice-President and Director of the Summer Schools, was honored by the NJFLTA with a bronze plaque inscribed "Presented to Stephen A. Freeman for his incalculable contributions to the improvement of Foreign Language Teaching; in grateful appreciation. NJFLTA, 1970."