

Forum

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Reinventing Retirement

TO THE EDITOR:

Most of the respondents to Carolyn Heilbrun's "Guest Column: From Re-reading to Reading" (119 [2004]: 211-17) seem generally to accept her rather dismal view of what is and is not possible in retirement. I disagree. Two of the fine scholars (and teachers) who were my dear friends and mentors did some of their best work in their eighties and nineties. One of these was John C. Pope, who was nearing ninety when those of us attending the Medieval Academy meeting agreed that his latest article on an Old English poem was the model of what a scholarly article ought to be; he had just mailed off another important contribution when he died, very suddenly, at ninety-three. Another was Ruth J. Dean, whose prizewinning masterwork, *Anglo-Norman Literature: A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts*, was published about three years before she died, at the age of one hundred.

I cannot compare myself with such examples, but at least I have completed (and published) four books since my retirement, and I have finished work on another, which I hope will see publication soon—when my collaborators have finished their share. I have, to be sure, somewhat shifted my area of concentration since I stopped teaching, and I have been spending my time on editing and working with medieval culinary records rather than literature in the more usual sense. Almost all my published articles in recent years have been on culinary matters, but I made a start on this twenty-five years ago, and it can't be said to be a new area for me.

At seventy-six, I am slowing down, and I spend a larger part of my time rereading novels (most recently, all of Jane Austen and Emma Lathen, one of my favorite writers of whodunits), but I am apt to feel guilty of slacking off when I do this in daylight hours.

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