

TRADITIONS OF RETIREMENT IN AMERICAN LIFE AND LITERATURE

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Abstract: *The theme of traditions and transitions brings to mind the state of retirement, which occurs when individuals stop working, usually upon reaching a certain age or condition that allows them to receive a pension. This important life transition is often accompanied by traditions, which may take the form of retirement parties both celebratory and irreverent, gifts for the retiree that may have symbolic meaning, and rituals that reinforce notions of rebirth and reintegration in contrast to the retiree's receding or withdrawing. This article explores the meanings of retirement rituals with examples taken from American life and literature in the twentieth and twentieth-first centuries. One primary example comes from a firefighter's retirement dinner and "roast," in which cultural expectations are challenged and mocked in order to alleviate some of the tensions and anxieties present in the retiree's transition from work to leisure. Other examples come from novels of the late twentieth and early twentieth centuries, in which retirees are metaphorically reborn in order to maintain an active and vital life.*

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