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for Jack Vanden Berg on his retirement

Randall VanderMey
Dordt College

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(The following two poems were written to honor Professor Jack Vanden Berg who retired in May 1987 after teaching English at Dordt for twenty years.)

Sonnet to Jack

You did what few dare do: start overnew.
You left behind contented cows, bovines
Placid as a June breeze, who wouldn't construe
A scooping style or quiet moods as signs
Of character amiss. As sure as feed
Was offered, it was taken in delight.
No cows of corn had ever said, "We need
Our feed more tasty; prepare our silage right."
Instead they chewed on what you gave, not once
But twice. Who'd leave a class with such desire
For what his hand could give? You did. Each wants
To think he'd do the same—it took a fire
Beyond the spark that smolders in most breasts
To leave success to face much sterner tests.

Mike Vanden Bosch

for Jack VandenBerg on his retirement

Somehow, Jack,
what sticks with me
about you
is the way you say
"been"

like "bean."

The word has an
elegance
upon your lips.

I hear in it respect
for the Chaucerian
grace
of literature
some literature
and the grace
of learning
and of teaching it.

And in your "bean"—
"I have bean..."
"This has bean..."—I hear
a field of legumes,
plain things ruffled at sunset.

I feel the dirt
under my nails
and yours
and under
the joke

whose randier implications
you savor
and yet sidestep

with

such grace.

Randall VanderMey