

Manure Pile Covered in Snow

When the horses' heads got too close to the beams above,
and they pinned back their ears each time they saw me,
I had no choice
but to lay wide barn boards
on the four feet of snow
for thirty yards or so
from the stalls to the top of the pile.
Load a wheelbarrow—I favoured a pitchfork first,
next the shovel. Then get a running start
on the downslope board
from the stable door,
rush it to the pile's top, and flip
both handles with a hard twist.
It was labour—and my father said
to do it—to be done.
Aesthetics? I had none.
So: I ruined a pristine mound
of snow. A mound so symmetrical, so round,
it seemed a Half-Sphere from the Spheres,
or perhaps a sky god's giant tear
fallen and frozen, smothered by white.
And I soiled it, tossing one barrow-load left,
the next right, over and over. After each run,
I carved on the stable door: 1,
then 1, then 1, and one more,
then crossed all four.
And started another. I worked hard
until the horses stood level again
in their stalls, and accepted extra oats.
They were shaggy in their winter coats.
It never snowed again that year,
and never once four feet since.

THOMAS LUX