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## **Burnside Bridge, Sept. 17, 1862**

The scattered bastards of cornfields and wheatfields  
and lathes,  
all grouped together in a foaming mass,  
the strange sharp fury of a tired lover  
within their breasts, stood under the cockeyed look  
of oak-larks (who refused to soar away  
and turn them into flecks against the dust,  
for fear of pushing the sweet-breath moment too soon  
over the cliffs and onto the rocks below).

And after the larks had drunk themselves  
full with waiting,  
then the blue coats spilled purple and they, seeing,  
laughed in rows; for then the great snake-column  
was shaped, was molded by the perverse muskets  
(a portrait-painter whose model stokes his fires,  
who poses her as perfectly as possible,  
then knows he cannot have her, loses his temper,  
and spoils the scene with a backhand across her face).

—Thomas Keith,  
Tenth grade, L.C. Anderson High School,  
Austin, Texas

*This is a snapshot of the Battle of Antietam, as Union General Burnside failed bloodily in several attempts to take an Antietam Creek bridge by head-on assault. The bridge was at last taken after three hours and fourteen separate assaults.—The Author*

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When you read and understand a poem, comprehending its rich and formal meanings, then you master chaos a little.



-Steven Spender