“Vigil strange I kept on the field one night; / [...] And there and then and bathed by the rising sun, my son in his grave, in his rude-dug grave I deposited”. or, in a more prosaic term, this is a poem of a funeral. Is, however, the son of the narrator in “Vigil Strange...” a new existent? Perhaps, for the narrator the events that took before the poem (the battle mentioned in it) have certainly changed his existence into something new, as the poem’s own lines explain: And there and then and bathed by the rising sun, my son in his grave, in his rude-dug grave I deposited, Ending my vigil strange with that, vigil of night and battle-field dim, Vigil for boy of responding kisses, (never again on earth responding,) Vigil for comrade swiftly slain, vigil I never forget, how as day brighten’d, I rose from the chill ground and folded my soldier well in his blanket, And buried him where he fell.

Responding Kisses: New Evidence about the Origins of “Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night”

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Abstract
Uses the recently discovered “military service records” of Bill and Arthur Giggie, including Arthur’s letter to Bill’s mother, Elizabeth Giggie, describing Bill’s death, to “shed some additional light” on the Civil War episode that stands behind Whitman’s poem “Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night”; suggests that the evidence indicates that Bill and Arthur Giggie may have been a homosexual couple serving together in the Union army, and that Whitman’s poem may in fact record the end of this “love story.”

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