

Walt Whitman, Complete Poetry  
and Collected Prose, ed. Justin  
Kaplan (New York: Library of  
America, 1982)

*Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night* (1865)

VIGIL strange I kept on the field one night;  
When you my son and my comrade dropt at my side that day,  
One look I but gave which your dear eyes return'd with a  
look I shall never forget,  
One touch of your hand to mine O boy, reach'd up as you  
lay on the ground,  
Then onward I sped in the battle, the even-contested battle,  
Till late in the night reliev'd to the place at last again I made  
my way,  
Found you in death so cold dear comrade, found your body  
son of responding kisses, (never again on earth  
responding,)  
Bared your face in the starlight, curious the scene, cool blew  
the moderate night-wind,  
Long there and then in vigil I stood, dimly around me the  
battle-field spreading,  
Vigil wondrous and vigil sweet there in the fragrant silent  
night,  
But not a tear fell, not even a long-drawn sigh, long, long I  
gazed,  
Then on the earth partially reclining sat by your side leaning  
my chin in my hands,

Passing sweet hours, immortal and mystic hours with you  
dearest comrade—not a tear, not a word,  
Vigil of silence, love and death, vigil for you my son and my  
soldier,  
As onward silently stars aloft, eastward new ones upward  
stole,  
Vigil final for you brave boy, (I could not save you, swift  
was your death,  
I faithfully loved you and cared for you living, I think we  
shall surely meet again,)  
Till at latest lingering of the night, indeed just as the dawn  
appear'd,  
My comrade I wrapt in his blanket, envelop'd well his form,  
Folded the blanket well, tucking it carefully over head and  
carefully under feet,  
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.