

Comparing Strategies: *Henry V* versus *Coriolanus*

Compare and contrast these two speeches: one is from *Henry V* in which King Henry speaks to his soldiers as they advance on Harfleur, the other is Martius (later named Coriolanus) who is fighting against the Volsces and is trying to rally his retreating soldiers into fighting the enemy.

Henry V, Act 3, scene 1

KING HENRY V

Once more unto the breach¹, dear friends, once more;
Or close the wall up with our English dead.
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
As modest stillness and humility:
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of the tiger;
Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood²,
Disguise fair nature with hard-favoured³ rage;
Then lend⁴ the eye a terrible⁵ aspect⁶;
Let pry through the portage⁷ of the head
Like the brass cannon; let the brow o'erwhelm⁸ it
As fearfully⁹ as doth a gallèd¹⁰ rock
O'erhang and jutting¹¹ his confounded¹² base,
Swilled¹³ with the wild and wasteful¹⁴ ocean.
Now set the teeth¹⁵ and stretch the nostril wide,
Hold hard the breath and bend up¹⁶ every spirit
To his full height. On, on, you noblest English.
Whose blood is fet¹⁷ from fathers of war-proof¹⁸!
Fathers that, like so many Alexanders¹⁹,
Have in these parts from morn till even fought
And sheathed their swords for lack of argument²⁰:
Dishonour not your mothers²¹; now attest
That those whom you called fathers did beget²² you.
Be copy²³ now to men of grosser²⁴ blood,
And teach them how to war. And you, good yeoman²⁵,
Whose limbs were made in England, show us here
The mettle²⁶ of your pasture²⁷; let us swear
That you are worth your breeding; which I doubt not;
For there is none of you so mean and base²⁸,
That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.
I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips²⁹,
Straining upon the start³⁰. The game's afoot:

Follow your spirit, and upon this charge³¹

Cry 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George³²!'

Glossary:

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|------------------------------------|--|--|
| 1. Gap in defensive fortifications | 14. Destructive | 22. Conceive |
| 2. Heat, courage, ferocity | 15. Bare/grit your teeth | 23. An example |
| 3. Ugly | 16. Strain | 24. Lesser |
| 4. Give | 17. Derived | 25. Man of property who is not a gentleman |
| 5. Terrifying | 18. Tested and proved in war | 26. Quality |
| 6. Appearance | 19. Alexander the Great lamented that he had no more worlds to conquer | 27. Your breeding |
| 7. Porthole | 20. Stopped fighting from lack of opposition | 28. Of such low status |
| 8. Overhang, project over | 21. By suggesting that they were unfaithful to your fathers | 29. Leashes designed for quick release |
| 9. Frighteningly | | 30. In anticipation of release |
| 10. Battered | | 31. Order/charge of the cannon |
| 11. Jut out over | | 32. Patron saint of England |
| 12. Ruined | | |
| 13. Washed | | |

Coriolanus – Act 1, scene 4

MARTIUS (later Coriolanus)

All the contagion of the south¹ light on you,
You shames of Rome! You herd of--boils and plagues
Plaster you o'er, that you may be abhorred
Further than seen² and one infect another
Against the wind a mile³: you souls of geese⁴
That bear the shapes of men, how have you run
From slaves that apes would beat! Pluto⁵ and hell!
All hurt behind⁶, backs red, and faces pale
With flight and agued⁷ fear! Mend⁸ and charge home⁹,
Or, by the fires of heaven, I'll leave the foe
And make my wars on you! Look to't. Come on!
If you'll stand fast, we'll beat¹⁰ them to their wives,
As they us to our trenches followed.

Another alarm. The Volscles fly, and MARTIUS follows them to the gates

So, now the gates are ope¹¹: now prove good seconds¹²:

'Tis for the followers¹³ fortune widens them¹⁴,

Not for the fliers¹⁵: mark me, and do the like.

Glossary:

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|---|---------------------------|
| 1. South wind though to carry disease | 8. Improve |
| 2. Even before you are seen | 9. Toward the enemy |
| 3. So contagiously that the infection is carried a whole mile | 10. Drive them with blows |
| 4. Cowards, fools | 11. Open |
| 5. Roman god of the underworld | 12. Supporters, followers |
| 6. In the back as they fled as cowards | 13. Pursuers |
| 7. Trembling | 14. The gates |
| | 15. Retreating soldiers |