



Act 5, Scene 1, Lines 76-95

CASSIUS Messala,

This is my birth-day; as this very day
Was Cassius born. Give me thy hand, Messala:
Be thou my witness that against my will,
As Pompey was, am I compell'd to set
Upon one battle all our liberties.
You know that I held Epicurus¹ strong
And his opinion: now I change my mind,
And partly credit things that do presage².
Coming from Sardis, on our former ensign
Two mighty eagles fell, and there they perch'd,
Gorging and feeding from our soldiers' hands;
Who³ to Philippi here consorted⁴ us:
This morning are they fled away and gone;
And in their steads do ravens, crows and kites,
Fly o'er our heads and downward look on us,
As we were sickly prey: their shadows seem
A canopy most fatal, under which
Our army lies, ready to give up the ghost.

1. Cassius relates to Messala, a soldier in Cassius' army, a negative omen that Cassius witnessed involving birds. **Please describe, in your own words, what he witnessed and explain why this omen is negative.**

2. **When your birthday rolls around every year what do you think about on that day? What types of thoughts go through your head? How do you think a woman feels on her 50th birthday?**

3. A Buddhist cleric by the name of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche once said that "On the day you were born, you begin to die..." Do you think it is possible that when Cassius proclaims that it "is [his] birth-day" he is informing Messala of another negative portent for the battle that they are about to fight? Review 5.1 76-95. **What do you think is the significance of the fact that, as Cassius proclaims, "this is my birth-day"?**

¹ **held Epicurus strong:** believed strongly in the ideas of Epicurus (who denied supernatural influence on human affairs and, therefore, did not believe in omens)

² **presage:** foretell

³ **Who:** i.e., the eagles

⁴ **consorted:** accompanied

Annotation from the Folger Shakespeare Library edition of *Julius Caesar* p.184.