Jeffrey Glassberg (2)

Butterflies have a regal bearing. In North America alone, we have a Monarch, a Queen, five Emperors and one Empress. (When I was a child, a butterfly I burned to see was known as the “Goatweed Emperor” but by the time I saw one in a Mississippi forest it had been dethroned and was known as Goatweed Leafwing). Recently, I was re-reading a favorite book, The Twelve Caesars, written by the Roman historian Suetonius (ca. 69/75 – after 130 A.D.). The book, also known as “Lives of the Caesars” begins with Julius Caesar (100 – 44 B.C.) and ends with the Emperor Domitian (51-95 A.D.), taking in a span of almost 200 years. The period covered included the dictatorship of Julius Caesar (49-44 B.C.) and the reigns of the eleven Roman Emperors or Caesars that followed him — Julius Caesar was never “Caesar”, that is to say, he was never Emperor of Rome.

While reading the book, I could not help noticing all of the butterfly names flying off the pages. A typical sentence: “He had a comedian named Hylas [Polygonia faunus hylas = “Hylas” Green Comma] scourgéd in the hall of his own residence.

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