POET Robinson Jeffers is inseparably associated with the Pacific coast and the California mountain landscapes where he lived in ardently preserved isolation for nearly a half century. Scholars and biographers acknowledge Jeffers’s Pennsylvania birth and family ties but usually give them scant attention. His relationship to Western Pennsylvania is typically dismissed as an accident of birth. Among the most important American poets of the twentieth century, Jeffers wrote mainly about the scenes and people around him in the Carmel-Big Sur region of California. As Carl Sandburg is linked with Chicago and Robert Frost with New England, Robinson Jeffers is linked with his adopted home in the western United States rather than with Western Pennsylvania.

Identifying Jeffers with the California coast is accurate, but it is also excessively narrow. A poet does not find his special voice overnight, and Jeffers did not become a major poet simply from seeing Carmel with his wife Una for the first time. A poet’s mind begins to seek its own unique shape with his first steps and words, with what he sees, hears, reads, and learns as a child. For Jeffers these critical experiences occurred in Pennsylvania as his parents from the start raised their son in ways that set him distinctly off from others.

Robinson Jeffers was born on Ridge Avenue in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, on January 10, 1887, the first son of Annie Jeffers and Dr. William Hamilton Jeffers, then a professor of Old Testament literature at nearby Western Theological Seminary.1 The Allegheny River separating Allegheny from Pittsburgh was a few blocks away. The Jefferses’ home was a three-story double-dwelling serving as a residence for seminary faculty members.

In his poetry, Jeffers seldom alluded to his beginnings. A careful reader would never guess he lived in Western Pennsylvania until he

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was sixteen, or that the Pittsburgh area was a key part of his background. The cleverest of literary detectives could study Jeffers's poems without finding a clue to the place where he mastered his letters, discovered other people, and opened his eyes on the world. Nevertheless, those formative years influenced every line he wrote. The insights that give human and philosophical depth to Roan Stallion, The Women at Point Sur, Such Counsels You Gave to Me, and other books by Jeffers, began their development among the hills of Allegheny. Pennsylvania was home to Jeffers about one-fifth of his seventy-five years. It was the most susceptible period of his life, making the Pittsburgh years a crucible of early observations and impressions which became the foundation on which he built his later work.

When Jeffers was born, his father at forty-eight was twenty-two years older than Jeffers's mother, twenty-six. This age difference had a profound influence on the child and the adult poet. In his narratives, Jeffers often wrote of marriages between the young and old, "the useless beauty of young brides" with elderly husbands. In Cawdor, he laments, "It's pitiful to see youth chained to helpless old age." From this chaining comes tragedy.\(^2\)

Whatever the age difference represented to the poet looking back at his childhood, the marriage of William and Annie Jeffers outwardly at least was a happy one with no sign of tragedy or even of incompatibility. Jeffers's parents met when she was an organist and he a visiting preacher at the Presbyterian Congregational Church in Sewickley, Pennsylvania. Dr. Jeffers at that time was in his forties and on the faculty at Western Theological Seminary. Previously he had been pastor of the Euclid Avenue Church in Cleveland. Jeffers's friend and fellow poet George Sterling, in the earliest study made of Jeffers's work, wrote, "Tracing his poetic blood, one looks, as usual for the Celtic strain."\(^1\) Sterling made an accurate surmise. Dr. Jeffers was born on May 1, 1838. His Irish father was from County Monaghan, while his mother was the daughter of a Bavarian immigrant.

By the 1880s, Dr. Jeffers was a well-established theologian proud of his Calvinist ancestry. When Dr. Jeffers left Ohio to join the faculty of Western Theological Seminary, he was a widower and had lost two sons by his first marriage. He had no family connections when he met Annie Tuttle at the Sewickley church and in the home of her guardian-

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cousin, John Robinson, a wealthy member of the Robinson Brothers banking house.

Annie Tuttle was the second of three daughters born to Edwin and Mary Tuttle of North East, Pennsylvania. She was born on September 5, 1860, and her father died a little over three years later. When her mother died in 1874, Annie Tuttle and her sister Minnie moved in with John and Philena Robinson in their Sewickley home not far from the Ohio River.¹

The Robinsons objected to Dr. Jeffers’s courtship of Annie, because he was many years her senior. Annie Tuttle was less concerned. On February 10, 1885, she wrote an aunt, “A gentleman called here one evening, requesting a confidential talk with me, and when he went, I found myself engaged to be married! Just think of it! It happened a week ago, and I have hardly been able to take it in yet. . . . His name is Rev. Dr. W. H. Jeffers, and he is a deal older than I am, and not a bit handsome; very tall and, in fact, quite homely, but so good! And so good and kind and thoughtful for me. I am happy, and will be happy. . . . We expect to be married in May. . . .”³

Annie Tuttle clearly showed her maturity and resolution in this note, as well as strength of character. She had made up her mind to be happy, and in later years seemed to manage the feat virtually as an act of will. They were married April 30, 1885, in the parlor of the Robinson home. The seminary session was then in progress. So without a wedding trip, they moved into their faculty residence on Ridge Avenue.

At that time Western Theological Seminary was a long-established institution dating back to 1825. In 1788, when David Redick of Washington, Pennsylvania, officially surveyed the Allegheny townsite, a tract that came to be known as the Commons was reserved for public use. The uneven terrain convinced Redick the land could serve no purpose except “to afford a variety of beautiful lunar spots not unworthy the eye of a Philosopher. I cannot think that ten-acre lots on such pits and hills will possibly meet with purchasers, unless like a pig in a poke it be kept out of view.”

From the eighteenth century on, the growth of Allegheny paralleled that of Pittsburgh, and when the two cities joined in 1907 to create modern Pittsburgh, Allegheny was the third largest city in the state. The original Commons was used for community purposes, including a popular park, land granted for a penitentiary in 1818, for

¹ Bennett, Stone Mason of Tor House, 9-11.
³ Quoted in ibid., 13.
Western University of Pennsylvania in 1819, and to the Presbyterian church in 1825 as a seminary. The original seminary building was constructed on Hogback Hill (later called Monument Hill). When the initial structure burned in 1854, the seminary constructed a new seminary building on Ridge Avenue. This was where Dr. Jeffers served until his poor health forced the family's move to California in 1903. Near the seminary was the residence where the Jefferses lived following their marriage and where their first son was born.

Weeks after her son's arrival, Annie Jeffers wrote of the event in a chronicle she kept of family matters:

At ten o'clock, Monday morning, January 10, 1887, my baby, a strong healthy boy, was born. Having been long expected and eagerly wished for, he received a very warm welcome, and both his parents were very thankful and grateful for such a blessing. At first, as all babies do, he slept a good deal; always being very good at night. His nurse stayed with us for six weeks; before that time, he began to laugh a little. He had presents in those early days, and many people were anxious to see this wonderful baby, with big blue eyes that weighed eleven pounds.

Dr. Jeffers, noted for precise language, would have avoided mentioning such questionably weighty eyes, but Annie Jeffers can be forgiven carelessness with syntax. She had a difficult time delivering the large child. The baby's right eye was injured by the doctor's forceps during the delivery, and Jeffers later found the eye "invalid" and prone to cataracts.

At Western Theological Seminary, Dr. Jeffers was respected for scholarly attainments, including expertise in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. He was a chronic traveler, a trait imposed in due course on his wife and son. His journeys to the Middle East and expert knowledge of Biblical lands were additional reasons for the esteem in which he was held at the seminary. Dr. James A. Kelso, president of the seminary, wrote about his associate to Lawrence Clark Powell, friend and biographer of Robinson Jeffers: "I knew Dr. Jeffers quite intimately during the last five or six years of his connection with this institution. He was a scholar of the old school, thoroughly versed in classical literature and had a wonderful command, in public speech, of English pure and undefiled; in fact, he was able to use the choicest English with perfect ease and could drop the right adjective in its place."
Powell, working on a study of Robinson Jeffers in the 1930s, also corresponded with A. C. Robinson of Pittsburgh. Robinson knew the Jefferses well when he lived next door to them after they moved to Sewickley and was impressed by their interest in education. “For instance one winter her husband, Dr. Jeffers, she and I revived our French together.” Robinson described Annie Jeffers as “a woman of unusual beauty of form and character, great charm, well educated, with finely matured mind, and a good musician. To his heritage from her and her influence and training, Robinson Jeffers owes much, as well as to his able father.”

Jeffers did owe much to both parents for the unique, some might say almost oppressive, care they took with his early education. With his mother he toured Europe, and, prodded by his father, he leaped headlong into scholarship while his contemporaries were wading through their ABCs. At three and a half the boy knew his letters, the days of the week, and could read several pages in The Reformed Primer. Dr. Jeffers, Biblical scholar and classicist, began teaching these specialties to his son at the same time the Pennsylvania countryside was giving Robinson primordial lessons in the wonder and wildness of nature. Thanks to his father, Robinson Jeffers was reading Greek by the age of five. He mastered other languages during European trips and periods of schooling on the continent. Thanks to his own Pennsylvania backyard Robinson began acquiring a deep and permanent awareness of nature’s combined beauty and threat, themes that would haunt his poetry. The habits of scholarship and a strong sense of the earth, his chief dividends from childhood, would be valuable tools in the work ahead.

The son of a theologian, Jeffers naturally suffered from no neglect of religious and moral instruction. As a result, in much of his poetry there is a Biblical cadence and a solemn resonance that seem to echo the Old Testament. He was skilled throughout his life in locating Scriptural passages, this despite a philosophical break as a young man with the Calvinistic doctrine of his father.

The religious content of Jeffers's work was extensive though divorced from conventional creeds. The religious dimension was another effect from the training imposed, indeed virtually inflicted, on the boy by his father. In addition to Jeffers's stern grounding in languages, literature, and philosophy — making him perhaps the best educated of American poets in this century — he also absorbed into his blood, brain, and conscience the Calvinistic virtues of self-discipline and hard...

10 Ibid.
work. Near the Pacific, he spent years carrying stones from the beach to build a stone tower. That incredible persistence was a carry-over from the studious time with his father in the hills around Pittsburgh.

Assessing Jeffers's work, Gilbert Highet concluded, "his poetry is not meant to be liked. It is meant, I think, to do people good." 11 Jeffers rejected the religion of his father but not the morality. In his commitment to labor, discipline, responsibility, and integrity, he was his father's son. At the start of his career, reacting to Nietzsche's claim that "poets lie too much," Jeffers vowed not to lie in verse. He would say only what he believed and he did not believe easily. 12 As a result, many of his poems are not pleasant to read. Ironically, in part they are twentieth-century artistic elaborations of his father's uncompromising nineteenth-century sermons in Ohio and Pennsylvania.

"To appreciate fully the patterns, symbols, and allusions of Jeffers' art, one must keep in mind his amazing background," wrote Robert J. Brophy, "the preparation which he brought to his poetry is one of the most varied and rich among American poets. From his father . . . he was able to imbibe a thorough knowledge of biblical themes and Eastern literatures together with a respect for scholarly accuracy." 13

Before Jeffers was two, the family moved to a house Dr. Jeffers built at 44 Thorn Avenue in Sewickley near the John Robinson home and close to the Presbyterian church where he sometimes preached. The move was made to escape student interruptions at the seminary residence. The new dwelling gave Dr. Jeffers the greater privacy which he craved and more time to concentrate on his son's education. For the first seven years of his life, Robinson Jeffers was an only child and received exclusive parental attention.

Annie Jeffers meticulously recorded events in her son's childhood, noting each new pound and word. She described his eagerness to stop anything, even crying, to look at pictures. This infant curiosity became a trait shared by the man as his poetry featured word pictures of the real world and of nature.

Dr. Jeffers was no less attentive to the boy. When the child was eight months old, Dr. Jeffers advised weighing him to "ascertain his avoir du pois as soon as convenient & enter it in your chronicle as

13 Robert J. Brophy, Robinson Jeffers, Myth, Ritual, and Symbol in His Narrative Poems (Cleveland, 1973), 5.
material for biography.” 14 Few eight-month-old babies, outside royal families, are normally considered potential subjects for biography.

Travel and school in Europe were other aspects of Jeffers's childhood and youth. He attended Swiss kindergartens at Zurich in 1891 and Lucerne in 1892. Concert and museum outings were stoically accepted by the solemn boy. His mother kept a diary of their excursions, which seemed little planned to feed an adolescent appetite. Annie Jeffers wrote that during one particularly long Handel oratorio Robin, though “restless at times,” was quiet throughout and during one chorus asked her to teach him to be a musician. A more revealing episode was poignantly described when she recorded that while strolling in the Champs Elysées, sighting a merry-go-round Robin said, “It will make me so happy if you will let me ride on that.” He had his ride.

Home in Western Pennsylvania, the main emphasis for young Jeffers was mastering subjects his father valued. The boy’s aptitude was pronounced, though his progress rarely satisfied Dr. Jeffers’s expectations. Supplementing European schools and lessons at home, Jeffers attended private schools, including Allegheny’s Park Institute and a Pittsburgh academy. His precocity and skill with languages made him conspicuously unlike the other students. He found it difficult to acquire friends. Aloofness and acceptance of being much alone took root in his character. At one European school, Jeffers was known as the “Little Spartan” because of his long, solitary journeys on foot into the surrounding mountains.

George Evans, Jeffers's cousin from Ohio, wrote concerning the Sewickley days, “His solemnity in games was something I still remember. He got his youthful solemnity from his father, by no means from his blithesome mother. Dr. Jeffers walked along always with a stoop, his hands often clasped behind him, his very light blue eyes seeming to gaze at an idea. He always seemed enormously tall. Robin got Latin and Greek from the very start. I can recall playing at tennis with Robin on the Robinsons' grass court, when he was about seven or eight years old, and having him suddenly stop the game, much to my boyish disgust, to tell me scenes from Xenophon's Anabasis that he had been reading in the original that morning with his father.” “My first pictures in memory of Robin are of a child about four,” wrote Evans, “being pushed in a child's carriage by his father, who seemed

14 Bennett, Stone Mason of Tor House, 16.
to arch forward over it almost dangerously and gaze straight ahead at nothing."  

Evans described how Jeffers imitated his father's manner of walking. This fact as well as Annie Jeffers's running account confirm that despite his father's age and sobriety, the relationship was apparently one of respect and emulation on the boy's part.

In 1894, Jeffers's only brother, Hamilton, was born. Hamilton was too far from Robinson's age to become an intimate. At seven, Jeffers's lifelong preference for solitude was fixed by the exceptional circumstances of his childhood. Hamilton Jeffers, though not drawn to poetry, also developed intellectual interests and became an astronomer associated with Lick Observatory.

One of the earliest published letters by Robinson Jeffers was written on August 23, 1897, to his father when Hamilton Jeffers was a baby and Jeffers was ten. The letter shows a scientific detail of observation and a fearlessness of nature which would characterize his poetry and become strong currents in his major work. In their Sewickley yard, the eyes that would learn to see remarkably far were already busy.

Sewickley, Pa.
August 23, 1897

Dear Papa,

The baby and I were out in the garden when I saw a snake which afterwards measured 22 inches. I called William and ran to get a club. But William called me back to help him hunt for it. I ran back and found it and he got it under his hoe and I ran away to get a stick. When I came back he was about two rods away and I thought he had killed it but when I asked him he said no it was in the row of beans just above the garden. I saw it in the beans and William poked it out with the hoe and then I killed it with my stick. I think it was a garter snake. It was white under neath, black with green speckles on top, a greenish yellow band ran along its back, and large brown stripes ran lengthwise along its sides. Mr. Shannons road is being filled up fast. We go out for a ride every morning; before Grandma went away we took her; since then we have been taking Mrs. Knox. Yesterday we went to the U.P. Church. Goodbye.

Your loving son,

John Robinson

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15 Ibid., 8, 18.
“William” referred to William Hicks, the Jefferses’ family gardener and driver. “Grandma” referred to Philena Robinson who was actually the wife of Annie Jeffers’s cousin.\textsuperscript{17}

In 1897, the Jefferses lived at “Twin Hollows,” a home deeper in the Western Pennsylvania countryside, where they had moved in 1893. The move was a continuation of Dr. Jeffers’s search for peace and quiet when distractions from children and visitors became excessive on Thorn Avenue. Life at Twin Hollows was rural and isolated. The location gave Dr. Jeffers the privacy he wanted. Separation from companions his own age turned Robinson Jeffers inward and forced greater reliance on his own resources. Books and nature became his companions. The nearby woods ignited lifetime intimacy with birds and trees. “Give your heart to the hawks,” he wrote. The personal habit of doing just that began for him in Western Pennsylvania during the last years of the nineteenth century. Twin Hollows was close to the Ohio River where Jeffers taught himself to swim, the start of another lifetime activity.

Robinson Jeffers commented on his childhood solitude in a June 28, 1940, response to a questionnaire from Grace Besthel, of Shenandoah, Pennsylvania:

I had little or no companionship with other children and spent much time in day-dreams, but I do not remember imaginary companions (meaning playmates). I was usually alone against the (imaginary) world, astonishing a curious or hostile people by my exploits — a flying man, or an animal companioned man like Kipling’s. This up to 14 years or so, then I found satisfactory companionship of my own age. Occasionally after that when circumstances isolated me again. At what age began “creative work”? Began to feel poetry strongly and write bad verse at 14.\textsuperscript{18}

In 1953, Jeffers wrote his publisher, Random House, about being “lugged” to Europe and expanded further on his Pennsylvania years. “When I was nine years old my father began to slap Latin into me, literally, with his hands; and when I was eleven he put me in a boarding-school in Switzerland — a new one every year for four years — Vevey, Lausanne, Geneva, Zurich. Then he brought me home and put me in a college as a sophomore. I graduated accordingly at eighteen, not that I was intelligent but by sporting my languages and avoiding mathematics.” The tone is one of lingering resentment against imposed studies and paternal domination more than a half century before.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} Ann N. Ridgeway, ed., \textit{The Selected Letters of Robinson Jeffers} (Baltimore, 1968), 2-3.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.}, 281.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}, 353.
Jeffers’s biographer, Melba Bennett, speculated about Dr. Jeffers's custom of switching his son from one school to another. "It is no wonder that Robin kept to himself. He probably felt that it was not worth the terrific effort it cost to make new friends, only to be snatched away from them. It possibly never occurred to the doctor that friendship might include human beings as well as books." 20

Equally plausible is the theory that Dr. Jeffers was simply driven by a single-minded concern to make certain his son received a thorough education. Jeffers’s success in college and his poetry indicate that his father’s method was effective if callous by today’s standards.

Home at fifteen, Jeffers became a sophomore at the Western University of Pennsylvania, “sporting” his languages, including ability to think in French, German, Italian, and English. 21 He attended the university from September 1902 until April 1903, when Dr. Jeffers’s worsening health compelled the family migration to California.

In California, Robinson Jeffers finished the education he had started in Western Pennsylvania. He graduated from Occidental College in 1905 and went on to graduate and medical studies at the University of Southern California, where he met Una Call Kuster, the woman who became his wife and whom Jeffers credited with making him a poet. Together Robinson and Una Jeffers in 1914 discovered Carmel, the place where they lived the rest of their lives and where Robinson wrote the books which keep his name important in American literature. There they built “Tor House” and “Hawk Tower” from granite boulders washed smooth by the tides, and there after many full and brilliantly creative years, they died, Una in 1950, the poet on January 20, 1962, at the age of seventy-five.

Once at home in his stone house, Jeffers rarely went anywhere. He was content. Perhaps the poet remembered the child who had been restlessly moved about the world by well-meaning parents. He lived more than four decades within the walls he had erected and had no desire to move on.

Jeffers made trips to Europe for Una’s sake but told his publishers after her death that “it was for her pleasure that these pilgrimages were undertaken. She was in many ways a mediator between me and the world.” 22 The need for a mediator bespoke his solitary, bookish Pittsburgh childhood. Jeffers lived to prove Wordsworth’s dictum that “the Child is father of the Man.” The poet-

20 Bennett, Stone Mason of Tor House, 27.
22 Ridgeway, Selected Letters, 353.
recluse in California was a recognizable extension of young Robin studying Greek, Latin, and nature at Twin Hollows.

His rapport and identification with nature began during childhood when it was easier to make friends with birds, trees, and landscapes than with people. The seeds are found in Western Pennsylvania for such lines as: "Turn outward, love things, not men, turn right away from humanity . . . let your eyes / Climb the great ladder out of the pit of yourself and man. / Things are so beautiful. . . ." 23 Or this line: "Wise men hope nothing, the wise are naturally lonely." 24 And this: "It is only a little planet / But how beautiful it is." 25

Jeffers searched the Western Pennsylvania woods for that special companionship nature bestows on the lonely. Yet he was never there merely to look. He was there to learn. The habit of asking questions started early and never stopped. In 1961, when Lawrence Clark Powell made the dedication address for the Hunt Library at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie-Mellon University), he mentioned a complaint he had seen in Saturday Review that modern poets "didn't know one flower from another." Powell countered this by describing the vast botanical knowledge displayed in Jeffers's poetry. 26

Technically accurate knowledge of botany, forestry, astronomy, and other branches of modern science was prominent in Jeffers's work. Initial steps taken and questions asked at Thorn Avenue and Twin Hollows led inexorably in that direction. "Pittsburgh-born Robinson Jeffers did not come to the Carmel Coast until he was grown to manhood," said Powell, "the poetry he wrote thereafter is more golden than any thus far produced by native sons and/or daughters of the Golden West." 27 It was not an accident of birth or place, but the result of what was learned near Pittsburgh and carried west for a fresh perspective of the "wild water" and the sea-worn coast.

Jeffers returned to Pittsburgh only once during the almost fifty-nine years he lived after the family's departure. That was in February 1941, when he made a brief lecture tour in conjunction with inauguration of a poet series at the Library of Congress. The opening engagement was at Stephen Collins Foster Memorial on the University of Pittsburgh campus. Jeffers and his wife visited the house he was born

23 Jeffers, Selected Poetry, 574.
24 Robinson Jeffers, Such Counsels You Gave to Me (New York, 1937), 110.
26 Lawrence Clark Powell, The Little Package (Cleveland, 1964), 57-58.
27 Ibid., 137.
in on Ridge Avenue and other remembered sites. Una wrote of the poet's return to his first home:

On the Sunday of our arrival we had lunch with cousin Alice, then we drove about Pittsburgh, Allegheny, etc.; and called on various connections and houses associated with the family. We saw the house and room Robin was born in, and the Craigs (44 Thorn St.) were most cordial at their home, then to Twin Hollows. . . . Robin talked to an intensely interested audience in a fine little auditorium. . . . After this talk I had no worry about Robin for he read easily and audibly. Our stay was very happy there and it was pleasant to know how likeable the family are. And Robin's old college was glad to claim him. 28

The old college may have found it difficult to recognize the shy, precocious teenager who left thirty-eight years earlier in the still shy but now distinguished poet who returned. The teenager and the poet were not the same, but they had shared a life, and the connections between them were impossible to sever.

Jeffers's ranking today as a major voice in American literature is reason for pride in his home region. Though his subjects were largely restricted to the place where land and ocean meet, he was an American poet, and he came from Pittsburgh. He left Pennsylvania as a youth with mind and emotions formed, each ready to serve in the pursuit of poetry. Jeffers was not a cheerful poet. Remember, he had vowed to tell no lies in verse. But he became a great poet with timeless things to say that men in every age will need to hear. Stephen Salmon wrote of Jeffers's present and future appeal: "His troubled spirit speaks with perhaps more intimacy to many citizens of today's unhappy world than do some of his more optimistic contemporaries." 29 Not long before his death, Jeffers was asked if he had anything further to write. He replied, "No, I have said it all." 30

The passing of a poet is often little noted. Only a few newspapers reported Jeffers's death. Fewer still did so prominently. The poet would not have been surprised, nor would he have complained. Critical praise or blame mattered little to him in his work, and being remembered would have no significance to the man who wrote, "So we: death comes and plucks us: We become part of the living earth / And wind and water whom we so loved. We are they." 31 He became one with the ashes of Una and their daughter Maeve whom his ashes joined near the earth's surface. One with Dr. and Annie Jeffers who

28 Bennett, Stone Mason of Tor House, 173-74.
29 Covington Rodgers and John Meador, Jr., The Robinson Jeffers Collection at the University of Houston (Houston, 1975), preface by Stephen Salmon.
30 Marlan Beilke, Shining Clarity: God and Man in the Works of Robinson Jeffers (Amador City, Calif., 1977), xxxi.
31 Jeffers, Beginning and End, 72.
started him on his strange, compelling journey. One even with the garter snake killed in the garden at Sewickley during another century.

In a poem he called “Vulture,” Jeffers wrote: “To be eaten by that beak and become part of him, to share those / wings and those eyes— / What a sublime end of one’s body, what an enskyment; / What a life after death.” 12 Beginning with the first skies above him, Jeffers glanced skyward and saw birds in flight — some rapacious, some benign. He saw lifted crowns of trees and higher up the blue mask that stops most of us. Being a poet, Jeffers saw farther, from Western Pennsylvania fields and woods to the ocean and beyond.

Reading Jeffers’s poems with knowledge of his background, we sense more than coastlands, mountains, and sea. We recognize the strength, resolution, and larger focus of his mind, and we acknowledge the essential investments made in that mind among the hills and near the time-whispering rivers of Western Pennsylvania.

32 Ibid., 62.