

33 Arthur Ave., S.E.  
Minneapolis, Minnesota  
23 April 1971

My dear Mrs Hart:

You are kind enough to ask me to say something to the children of Troy about their new Library. If I were there to talk with them, I might say something like this:

"Young friends,-- You are lucky to have now a free library. Until comparatively recent times there were no books for children at all; their mothers told them stories; instead of that, unfortunately, you have probably been watching television, and that is mostly a waste of time. In a book called The Tempest, by William Shakespeare, you will find a descriptive line, "Turfy mountains where live nibbling sheep", and it will be years before you will understand just howpowerful this line is, but even now you may see that it enriches your mind more than half an hour of TV.

Some books you will want to own. My daughter (who is named Martha, aged eight) has read The Wizard of Oz nine times. She has several hundred books and uses some of my thousands. But she also uses every week both her school library and our city library. She is wrapped up at the moment in a 'life' of the wonderful woman Helen Keller who was born blind and deaf but was taught, by another wonderful woman, ~~how~~ to read and write and speak. Good biographies will tell you much about human life, and how to live it, that you cannot learn from your parents and teachers and friends. You might begin now with one of the Gospel narratives of the life of Christ, say Matthew's; and when you are older, one of Professor Erikson's great biographies, Young Man Luther or Gandhi's Truth, may explode into your own life, altering its purpose. The chief thing is to read as hard as you play, with the same seriousness and a mind wide open--for any book you pick up may make you slowly or suddenly as happy as if you had a new little sister.

You have a pretty building for your books. Go in, and change your life."

Yours faithfully,

John Berryman

