

Giovede 18 Maggio, 1967

Dear Marge:

Thank you, thank you for your wonderful letters and please don't judge me by the occasional or perhaps characteristically infrequent ones from me. There is a demon who barricades me from the typewriter and I have all kinds of sessions with him; it's gets to be a bargaining business. "You shall not write," he says; to which I whinningly reply; but it's not writing, it's just letter writing." "Oh, in that case all right." And so a letter gets written. But the next time, after letter writing has become the goal, the bargaining changes and letter writing is out too. A very funny business. It has been strangely difficult to follow skeds here in Rome, to do anything more than react to the city. the only really useful thing I have done is study Italian and that not too sucessfully. I have improved considerably in my reading and now I can read the Italian journali without first reading the Rome Daily American, and I am having a grand time reading QUO Vadis in the boy's edition (ages 11 to 14). In this I am being very tricky. I am practicing Italian, reading a book or at least an abridgement of a book I had never read and reading about Rome and its history. It is really marvelous. A lot of the action takes place in the Trastevere section in which we live and there are scenes referring to the Maritimo prison which Ruth and I saw the other day while we were looking at the Roman Fora. But what gory fare for boys. It seems to me the scholars who adapted this book could have cut down on just a little bit of the cruelty but I guess what I am really saying is that cruelty seems to be as much a part of the Italian character as it is of the Spaniard. I particularly deplore the way they shoot every bird in sight. A hunter will appear at a landowner's house dangling three warbler-like birds proudly from his fingers to prove what a great man he is. They can hunt on your land over here, it seems. Luckily we are near a park; otherwise, I am told, the country is pretty thinly populated with song birds. One of their favorite sports is to blast a flock of sparrows with a cannon of bird shot. Great sport, what? But I am being unfair, I suppose. You can't have the good part without the other, I'm afraid, which lets you know I am an Emersonian compensationist to the nth degree, which is a philosophy that does much, I think, to explain your own splendid self. In re your last letter about Hem's famous pivotal letter to you, all I can say is that if it takes a feeling of rejection to produce what was produced, which you must admit is something bordering on the idllie and includes a mother-daughter relationship of the most delightful and exemplary kind, then I am going to plop here and now for bigger and better rejections. Maybe that is what Hem meant after all, although I am inclined to doubt it at his age. I have often thought there should be a happiness measure, a kind of ounce or pound by which we measure the worth of a life, thereby dispensing with the false values of reputation, etc. If life could be measured this way on a foot-lb or happiness per minute basis, I am sure there would turn out to be happier men in the graveyard than the one who wrote the Elegy and happier men than Shakespeare and happier than Hem or any of his wives, and in this I am truly not being moralistic, merely realistic. I shall pop you off another missile instanter.

Love, Don ...