

Russians. In South Vietnam, he urges firm support of the established government until such time as conditions speak for either "a successful negotiation" or "an expansion of the war." How this latter alternative would contribute to the hoped-for *détente* with Communist China is not explained.

For the Atlantic world, the Senator proposes an Atlantic Assembly which could serve as a joint parliamentary body for NATO and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. For the United States itself he recommends more discrimination in defense and space expenditure—even if the Russians are first on the moon—and a more comprehensive and compassionate approach to the problems of poverty, unemployment, educational deficiencies, and racial and social tensions. "The success of our foreign policy," he wisely observes, "depends ultimately on the strength and character of our society, which in turn depends on our success in resolving the great social and economic issues of American life."

Senator Fulbright may not be another Socrates, but he is indubitably a gentleman and a scholar. His little book contains no trace of arrogance, still less of "dogmatism and sectarianism." Precisely because it makes no claims to infallibility, *Old Myths and New Realities* can be heartily recommended as the sensible man's guide to this year's crucial foreign policy issues. One would wish it to be widely read abroad as well as at home, and in Communist as well as democratic countries. For its unique and priceless virtue lies in the underlying assumption that Americans, by and large, are still capable of brushing aside the cobwebs of mythology and looking at their problems through the eyes of responsible adults.

**FRAZER YOUNG'S
LITERARY CRYPT NO. 1097**

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1097 will be found in the next issue.

GLCA NLTBG OCG FHBB; XAG

ODDP OCG NGKHZD CMMQH-

CANBR GC FDDS TBHZD.

QBCAEL

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1096

A wise man knows everything; a shrewd one, everybody.

—ANONYMOUS.

Sicily on the Sordid Side



—Foto Servadei.

**Alberto Denti di Pirajno—
the unusual is typical.**

The Love Song of Mara Lumera, by Alberto Denti di Pirajno (Doubleday, 299 pp. \$4.95), in a series of tragic and ironic scenes, reveals the inner workings of the Sicilian Mafia. Marc Slonim edited "Modern Italian Short Stories."

By MARC SLONIM

BEFORE it is translated abroad, a work of fiction usually appears in the land of the author in his own language; *The Love Song of Mara Lumera*, however, was written in English, and its American publication precedes the author's own Italian translation, which will be released in Milan late in the fall. The unusual, though, is a salient trait of Alberto Denti di Pirajno's literary career. A titled aristocrat of Sicilian descent, a medical man by education, an official of the Italian colonial service by vocation, a former governor of Tripoli until the arrival of the British in 1943, he led a life of adventure and travel. But the occasional books that he wrote failed to stir any interest among Italian literati until 1960, when, inspired by the astounding success of Giuseppe di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, literary scouts of the peninsula began hunting

for hidden manuscripts that might eventually become best-sellers, and the Milan publisher Lerici turned up *Ippolita* by Denti di Pirajno.

This story of a woman of humble extraction who acquires wealth and status but evolves from a creature of love and beauty into an avaricious, power-hungry old tyrant was told with vigor and skill, and Lerici promoted it in the wake of *The Leopard*. Wasn't *Ippolita* also a novel about Sicily? Wasn't its author also a Sicilian nobleman and an aged man? Didn't he tell picturesque anecdotes of a not-too-distant past? The critics hailed *Ippolita* and spoke of another "literary discovery," and Italian and foreign readers liked it. At the age of seventy-five Denti di Pirajno was launched.

In *The Love Song of Mara Lumera* he displays the same qualities that made *Ippolita* so popular: he has a gift for telling an entertaining yarn and for drawing vivid portrayals; he knows how to shift from the dramatic to the comic, and when to break the suspense by introducing amusing episodes hardly connected with the main plot. But his new novel is quite different in content and structure from his previous work. Its best and most exciting part is what could be called a fictionalized report on the Mafia, that underground organization of western Sicily which until recently successfully competed with the central government of Rome and with the Church. By corrupting the lay officials and by entering into monstrous alliances with the local clergy, the Mafia maintained its grip over the island. In a series of tragic or ironic scenes Denti di Pirajno succeeds in disclosing the inner working of the Mafia and in bringing to life all its secret activities. He also paints excellent portraits of its ringleaders, who range from perverted psychopaths to cool businessmen for whom murder and robbery are only details of profitable financial transactions.

The most memorable character of the novel is certainly the king of Trapani, the "One Asleep" (*L'Addurmisciuuto*), an old, thin-faced bachelor who hates women and feels almost faint in their presence. A devout Catholic and church-goer, he condemns all the pleasures of the sinful flesh but his piety does not prevent him from being a ruthless killer, a shrewd gangster, and the head of many fishy undertakings.

(Continued on page 41)

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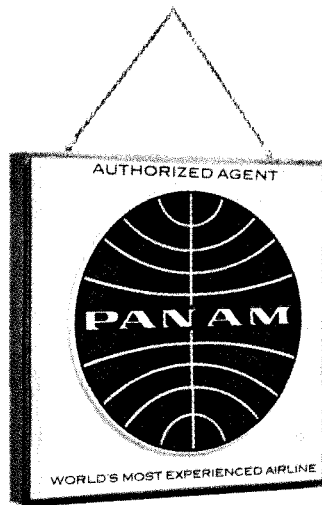
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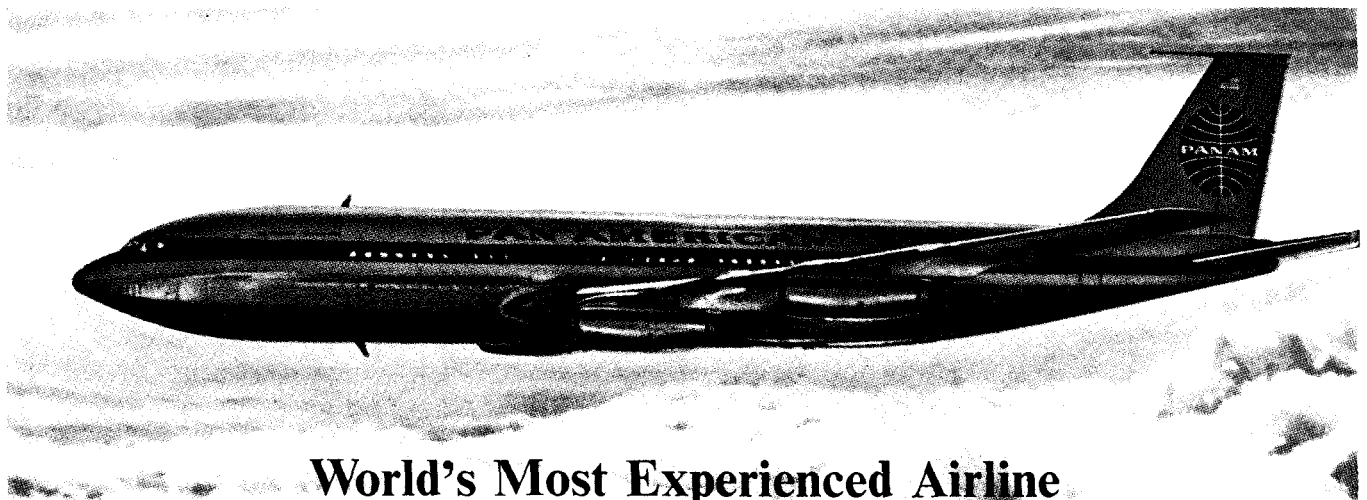
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(Continued from page 36)

Among other activities, he directs the smuggling of the "white powder" into Sicily and takes particular delight in turning children into drug addicts. His opposite number, Sasà Gucciaria, runs after every woman he meets and spends on his whims the money he earns from trading in heroin and cocaine. The uneducated members of the "honorable society" consider him a fine diplomat, a learned man, because he went to school, talks glibly, and—as they add respectfully—"has even been a salesman on the mainland." Another ruler, Don Vannozzo, an illiterate peasant, establishes among the sharecroppers a regime of fear and submission similar to the feudal bondage of the Middle Ages.

Opposing reforms and innovations, the chiefs of the Mafia thwart the efforts of the Italian government and of native liberals to combat the misery of the dispossessed. Superstitions and the traditional passivity of the poor help the Mafia in wielding its authority over the population. When a dam is planned to irrigate barren fields, the Mafia claims that the project is "against God, who created the course of rivers; if He wanted to change it, He would send an earthquake." When rains threaten to compromise the tourist season in Panagia Marea, a Mafia stronghold, the prominent members of the confraternity lead a pious procession through the streets into the cathedral, where, after prayers and invocations, the crowd begins to shout abuse against St. Thaddeus, the patron saint of the town, because he failed to intervene in High Quarters in order to stop the rain.

Unfortunately, Denti di Pirajno added to an absorbing factual narrative, studded with bright character sketches, a melodramatic plot. His stilted and unconvincing heroine, the beautiful queen of the local Mafia, never comes to life. It is a pity that such a good writer employed clichés in a book that did not need artificial, pseudo-Romantic constructions to sustain the interest of average readers.

Mamma Knows Best

A Mother's Kisses, by Bruce Jay Friedman (Simon & Schuster, 286 pp. \$4.95), presents a matriarch whose efforts to settle her son in college include attending his classes and fraternity parties. Daniel Stern, the author of "Who Shall Live, Who Shall Die," frequently comments on current fiction.

By DANIEL STERN

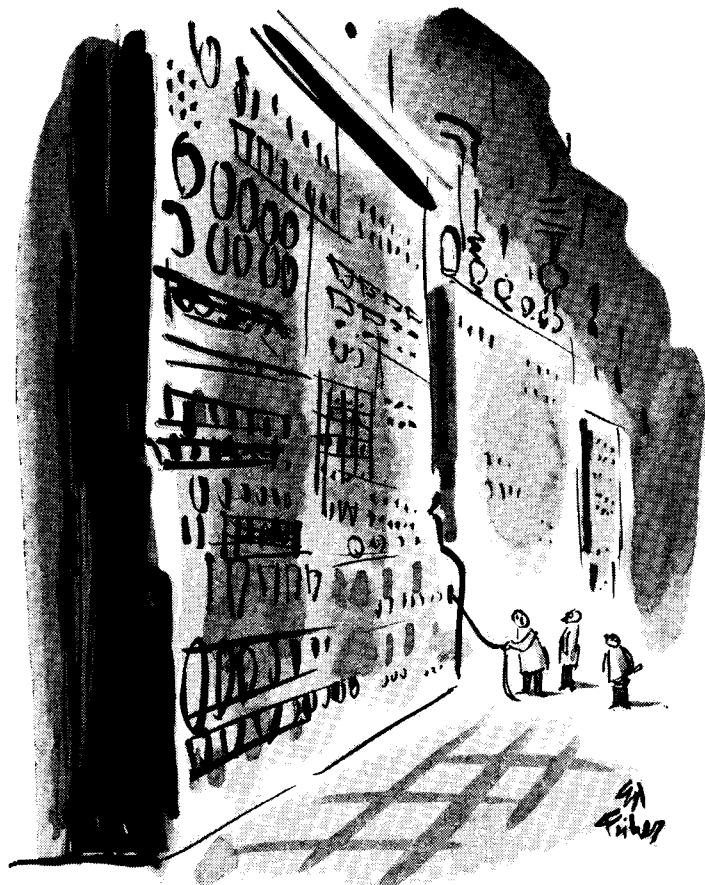
IN 1963 a book called *Stern* by a first novelist named Bruce Jay Friedman was published. It was hailed as an extraordinary achievement. Here was a satirist who made you wince as you laughed aloud, who endowed wildly improbable scenes with a sort of mad internal logic. Friedman's new novel, *A Mother's Kisses*, is now here, and it is a worthy successor to *Stern*—a hilar-

ious, mordant account of a few weeks with Joseph, a seventeen-year-old college applicant, and Meg, the most fabulous mother in modern fiction.

The plot can be easily summed up. Joseph has been turned down by one of the two colleges to which he has applied. He goes to summer camp as a waiter while awaiting final word from Columbia. He is again turned down, and in despair commits an abortive theft, is caught and expelled from the camp. His mother then pulls strings to get him into an unlikely school named Kansas Land Grant. She accompanies him to college—and will not go home.

Now you know everything. Or do you? Not until you've met Meg in person, you don't.

She is, on one level, the classic Jewish mother; but she wears her *nu* with a difference. Jewish mothers use sarcasm



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