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## THIS WEEK

It is an occasional dream of writers, occasionally communicated to the editor of the *TLS*, that they should be allowed to review their own books. Who, after all, can understand their work better than they? It used to be considered in poor taste for writers to respond to book reviews. Now there is a strong trend, still mildly resisted here, for writers to offer in letter form the review that they wish we had published in the first place. The names of Anthony Burgess, James Joyce, Evelyn Waugh and Walt Whitman appear in the history of those who have managed to cheat the literary editor's right to choose. But few, it seems, have been more substantial self-reviewers than the Triestine poet Umberto Saba, who in the early 1940s argued in a pseudonymous commentary that his great literary strengths should be saved from neglect – while criticizing, in the best independent tradition, his points of weakness. Peter Hainsworth reviews the selected poems of a modern Italian master whose most famous work is an affectionate comparison of his wife to a wide range of animals.



Ever since the publication of Mary Beard's *The Parthenon*, there has been a handy guide for tourists to Greece, showing how ruthless archaeologists and politicians have defined what we see of the Acropolis and its surroundings. David Watkin has now written a similarly useful book on the Roman Forum, denouncing vigorously the policies that have removed so many Renaissance churches and left behind so many ancient ditches. The Arch of Titus is mostly a distinguished work of the nineteenth century and the Temple of Vesta a tribute to 1930s style, though most guide-books fail to draw attention to those truths.

The ideology of the regime in Iran has its own policy towards the Italian Renaissance (the starting point of "human decline into barbarity", according to the former President and reputedly moderate cleric Mohammad Khatami). Rosemary Righter, a veteran prickler of foreign policy illusions, examines Western responses to recent events through three books on the Khomeinist legacy, thirty years on.

PS

POLITICS	3	Rosemary Righter	Amir Taheri <i>The Persian Night – Iran under the Khomeinist Revolution</i> Con Coughlin <i>Khomeini's Ghost</i> . Emanuele Ottolenghi <i>Under a Mushroom Cloud – Europe, Iran and the bomb</i>
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ARCHITECTURE	8	Masolino D'Amico	David Watkin <i>The Roman Forum</i>
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POETRY	11	Peter Hainsworth	George Hochfield and Leonard Nathan, translators <i>Songbook – The selected poems of Umberto Saba</i>
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