

from exploring popular culture as represented on television.

Mosley implicitly rejects the standard definition of "deism" that postulates a God who does not intervene in the universe. According to a more contemporary version of deism, "'truth' and 'God' are understood as being essentially indefinable, but knowledge of these can be experienced by an individual or group embarking on a journey of observation and discovery". In Christian terms, for Mosley, this means valuing the virtues of humility and vulnerability as shown in the story and teaching of Jesus, whereas the theism of the Church is vitiated by power-seeking. And we can see the old theologues as similar to the science fiction of today.

This idiosyncratic book fluctuates between endorsement of the New Age inclusiveness of Neale Donald Walsch's *Conversations with God*, or the screwball film *Dogma* (1999), and engagement with Darwinism, Gödel's incompleteness theorems, quantum mechanics and astrophysics. Over half the text is an experimental fiction, perhaps best read as a series of dream episodes, centred on a writer who is fascinated by what Jesus could have been doing between the ages of twelve and thirty. In one striking passage, an unsupervised visitor to the picture gallery in Colmar forces open the outer wings of the great Grünewald altarpiece, which depict attendant figures around the central Crucifixion: images of a golden Atonement are exposed. Mosley's belief in the need to reconcile opposing views is given poignancy by what we know of his own life.

JONATHAN BENTHALL

Spanish Fiction

Andrés Barba

AUGUST, OCTOBER

Translated by Lisa Dillman

152pp. Hispabooks. Paperback, £9.99.

978 84 943658 1 2

One is tempted to call *August, October* – the first of Andrés Barba's novels to be translated into English – flawless. Superficially about one month in an adolescent's life when everything changes, its true subject is those unseen emotions whose only conscious emissaries are vague feelings of malaise: stomach aches, short-temperedness, uncharacteristic violence, overwhelming sadness. Barba tells this emotional complexity behind the subdued language of the everyday.

Every August, Tomás's well-to-do family visits a seaside resort. From the very first paragraph, in which Barba explains the "enthralled revision" with which Tomás masturbates to the memories of young women on the beach, we know this summer will be unique. The adolescent's body is changing: his legs and arms are becoming sinewy, his lips taut, but his chest and eyes are still that of a child. "In the same way an ugly girl looks in the mirror and thinks crossly *this is not me*", Barba writes, "he had looked in the mirror for years and felt a sort of furious discord between what he was and what he saw." This discord is profound – Tomás shocks his family by suddenly declaring his dear aunt Eli a "sick cow", and in a remarkable two pages he nearly drowns himself on a childish whim. "It occurred to him that he could die there, and the idea didn't frighten him in the slightest."

Barba gears up his plot when Tomás is

nearly beaten up by the village's street children. Impressed at how he brutalizes one of their ranks, the boys introduce him to a hitherto unknown world: theft, drugs, alcohol and dispassionate "fucking". "He started to feel like he'd been lied to all his life." Tomás's increasingly erratic doings begin to give him the insight he has wanted. It is no surprise that Tomás's summer idyll is careening towards a moment of anguish, for Barba tells us this from the start. Although this book expertly describes the experiences of adolescence, *August, October* is really a powerful novel about the unprocessed – indeed, unprocessed – emotions of transition. Barba binds these least legible feelings into a series of immaculate scenes, at once allowing us to understand what also swirls around our own insides.

SCOTT ESPOSITO

Biography

Theodore Evergates

HENRY THE LIBERAL

Count of Champagne, 1127–1181

392pp. University of Pennsylvania Press. £49

(US \$75).

978 0 8122 4790 9

Henry the Liberal, count of Champagne (1127–1181) lived at the centre of twelfth-century European society. Ruler of one of the wealthiest and most influential of the French principalities for thirty years, he was also an extremely well-connected man: his extended family included his great-grandfather William the Conqueror, his uncle King Stephen of England, and his mother-in-law Eleanor of Aquitaine, while King Louis VII of France was both his father-in-law and his brother-in-law. Yet, to date, he has attracted relatively little attention from English-speaking scholars – an omission which Theodore Evergates (the author of two previous volumes on medieval Champagne) seeks to correct in this illuminating biographical study of the Count.

On his accession in 1152, the young Count Henry immediately set about transforming his principality into a significant power on the European stage. He established a grand new comital capital at Troyes, complete with a magnificent church whose canons were the mainstay of his increasingly bureaucratic government, and developed the regional trade fairs established by his father into international events which propelled the economic development of the region. Beyond the bounds of his own county, he built good relations with the French crown, and acted as an intermediary in various diplomatic disputes, even playing a bit part in the Becket controversy. He also became a crusader twice over, although neither of his trips to the Holy Land was a particular success, and on his second visit he was briefly held ransom by the Saracens. Nor was his influence limited to the political sphere, for he was an enthusiastic literary patron and book collector, praised by contemporaries for his remarkable memory and his enthusiasm for conversation and correspondence with learned men.

Inevitably, given the nature of twelfth-century sources, this is more a history of a reign than a portrait of a man. Yet if Count Henry remains (for the most part) a shadowy figure, it is clear that he was not an insignificant one. Evergates makes a strong case for the importance of the aristocracy in medieval society and offers a salutary reminder that, in the mid-