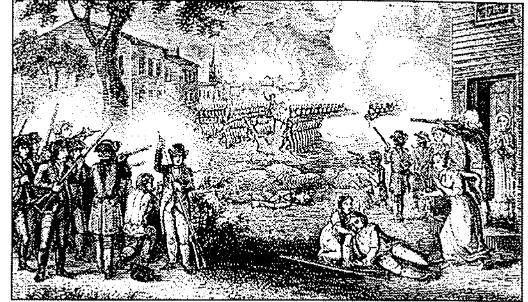
cult." Throughout Clausewitz's writing runs the tension between war's inherent tendency to "absolute" violence and its social function as an instrument of politics. His celebrated statement that war is a continuation of politics by "other means" entailed the view—uncongenial to his fellow soldiers—that a purely military plan is an absurdity. Unlike his predecessors with their mechanistic prescriptions and rigid strategies, Clausewitz wanted to develop the capacity for flexible military judgment that would reckon not only with the enemy's forces but also with its resources and will to fight.

Paret, an historian at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, argues that Clausewitz's method was essentially humane, which is not to say humanitarian. Clausewitz was a Prussian officer who took pride in the profession of arms, and he saw war as more than just a regrettable necessity. Clausewitz's exact attitude toward war is indeed complex, at once realistic and romantic. He could assert the primacy of the psychological over the physical struggle but then, contradicting himself, insist on the centrality of battle to all military operations. Unfortunately, most of Clausewitz's successors have been anything but complex, concentrating almost exclusively on his *leitmotif* of battle and destruction. (In the once-standard German edition of *On War*, the passage advising ministerial control of military strategy was altered to prescribe exactly the reverse.) By demonstrating that Clausewitz's "respect for action" was balanced by skepticism and his deep awareness of the past, Paret presents a truer picture of the early 19th-century author who has become the most respected military theorist in the late 20th century.

THE RADICALISM OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: How a Revolution Transformed a Monarchical Society into a Democratic One Unlike Any That Had Ever Existed. *By Gordon S. Wood. Knopf. 447 pp. $27.50*

Who were the true revolutionaries of the modern world? "We think of Robespierre, Lenin, and Mao Zedong," writes Brown historian Wood, "but not George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams." One of history's



larger ironies is that the revolutions that failed, the ones that ended in bloodbaths and reigns of terrors, with dictators and purges, are today considered the real revolutions, while the American revolution, which established a stable new form of government and society, is dismissed as hardly revolutionary at all.

Historians usually argue that America's was, at most, a conservative revolution—in reality, a constitutional defense of rights ("no taxation without representation")—fought not to change the existing society but to preserve it. Wood announces his counter-thesis in his subtitle: The American Revolution created a society for which there was no historical precedent.

The radicalism Wood describes is, however, quite different from that which Charles Beard and J. Franklin Jameson once argued for. Those Progressive historians, viewing the American conflict through the lens of the French Revolution, claimed that our Revolution was not only about "home rule" but also about "who was to rule at home" (in Carl Becker's famous phrase). Yet economic malaise or class unrest could hardly have incited the Revolution because, as Wood points out, 18th-century America lacked the poverty or economic deprivation that supposedly lie behind all social revolutions.

Unlike Beard and Jameson, who dealt with intentions, Wood locates the radicalism of the Revolution in its consequences, most of them unintentional and unanticipated. He presents a before-and-after picture. In 1760, less than two million Americans lived along the Atlantic seaboard, in a society governed by monarchical assumptions, patronage, and hierarchical dependencies. By 1810, nearly eight million Americans spanned an almost continent-wide nation, democracy had replaced aristocracy, and bustling, enterprising individuals had bro-

ken free of feudal arrangements. Wood minces no words: "Americans had become almost overnight the most liberal, the most democratic, the most commercially minded, and the most modern people in the world."

How was such a transformation possible without industrialization, urbanization, or even railroads? The engine of change, Wood says, was the republican ideology itself, the founding fathers' vision of a society free from corrupt patronage and servile dependencies. Yet Adams, Madison, and other leaders had expected the new republic to be governed, as ancient Rome's had been, by "notable geniuses and great-souled men"—that is, by themselves. They were both surprised and disheartened as they witnessed the egalitarian forces they had unleashed create not a classical republic but a messy Jacksonian democracy. That democracy would eventually free the slaves, emancipate women, and forge a commercial society of entrepreneurs, all pursuing their own definitions of happiness. Thus, Wood concludes, the Revolution was "the most radical and far-reaching event in American history."

Arts & Letters

HEAVEN AND EARTH: A Cosmology. *By Albert Goldbarth. Univ. of Ga. 118 pp. $20*
WHAT WORK IS. *By Philip Levine. Knopf. 77 pp. $19*

With newspapers, TV, and nonfiction claiming a monopoly on important public events, today's poets—among them Linda Pastan, Stephen Dunn, and Phyllis Levin—are turning to subjects private and elusive. If there is a "typical" American poem now, it involves a meditation about a seemingly inconsequential corner of one's personal life.

This year's winners of the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award, Philip Levine and Albert Goldbarth, respectively, provide exceptions to this poetry of domestic meditation. Levine is identified with a particular subject: work—unglamorous, blue-collar, industrial, assembly-line work. During the late 1940s and early '50s, when in his teens and twenties, Levine worked in the factories and warehouses of Detroit. Later he determined "to find a voice for the voiceless." In the title-poem of this collection, Levine addresses the reader: "You know what work is—if you're old enough to read this you know what work is. . . ." The poet is outside the Ford Highland Park plant, waiting for work, vainly hoping to be hired for the day. Someone in the same line reminds him physically of his brother, who at that moment is at home sleeping off a miserable night shift at Cadillac. Levine realizes he has never told his brother how much he loves him and probably never will. Why not? "You have never done something so simple, so obvious," Levine merely comments, but the *you* is no longer the reader but himself—and everyone who has been too numbed by the toll of hard, repetitive labor to undertake life's other important tasks. No, Levine realizes, "you don't know what [real] work is."

Goldbarth rummages among the "big events" for his subject matter. In "Sentimental," for example, he describes a wedding "in the sap and flyswirl of July in upper Wisconsin." As it turns out, though, the wedding is not a real event but only a kitsch image his class is using to debate the nature of sentimentality. Goldbarth could be called a comic Hegelian (in the same way that Groucho could be called a Marxist). The movement of his poems is from thesis to antithesis to synthesis: He begins with a physical event like a wedding ("Earth"), then he negates its actuality by considering it as a concept ("Heaven"), but finally unites both event and concept in a synthesis or "Cosmology," one meaning of which is structure or organization. Goldbarth structures his poems by tracing his concept through the most dissimilar embodiments of it, in a wild roller-coaster ride through everything from intimate details of his sex life to quantum physics. After discussing the wedding, he then asks, "If a balled-up fidget of snakes/in the underbrush dies in a freeze is it sentimental? No,/yes, maybe. What/if [it is] a litter of cocker spaniels? if we called them 'puppydogs' . . . ?" The freeze reminds Goldbarth of his father's funeral in coldest winter, but by this point, having catalogued all the connotations of sentimentality, he dares—as no other sane poet would—to liken his grief at the funeral to those puppydogs finding their natural voice.

No poet now writing has more fun with lan-