INTRODUCTION

This book is simply a random collection of essays published in various literary and scholarly journals during the last decade and of some I have not submitted but feel do contribute in some way to a better understanding of the subject.

The title I have chosen is not especially original but Discourse seems to be a fitting title for the kind of essays included here. Although some are more scholarly written than others, all are in language common enough for the student or the teacher interested. Criticism is often treated negatively as being worthless and unnecessary, but I contend that valid, sober discourse of any subject can be worthwhile. Few subjects suitable to any discussion have been overtreated with commentary. In fact, those subjects that seem to draw much criticism may in the process suggest their inner worth.

The essays included in Discourse deal with both American and British authors and their works. Some are very specific, treating particular poems or stories in particular ways; others are more general, dealing with certain materials in a broad comparative fashion. A few deal with authors who may be questioned as appropriate for inclusion, authors like Lowry and Paton, but I have included them anyway, because the works mean something very special to me.

Although I begin with a short essay on Chaucer, the chronology of the various pieces may not match exact chronology of all the writers; nevertheless, an attempt at chronology has been made. I think it is appropriate that I begin with a writer who is still considered the first major author in literature of the English language. Chaucer comes at the earliest of the Renaissance, a true forerunner of the Golden Age of Elizabeth and the great national spirit born at this time. It is also appropriate to conclude with an essay on future writers and their
great potential for American literature. It simply proves that good writing continues.

Some may feel that too many of the critical works deal with Biblical imagery and themes, but I hasten to remind the reader that much literature, if not the majority, has relied upon and continues to rely upon Biblical motif. Without a thorough knowledge of the Old and New Testament traditions and the Judeo-Christian heritage, readers are lacking in complete understanding of literature.

Certainly many writers worthy of treatment are not included in Discourse, but time limits face all scholars and fortunately our abilities differ to a great degree. It is my hope, however, that any reader will in some way find benefit in perusing this small collection.

The Greek anthology contains among its many short, pithy poems one titled "Heraclitus" which seems an extremely appropriate comment for this collection. Its words penned by Callimachus are as follows:

They told me, Heraclitus, they told me you were dead,
They brought me bitter news to hear and bitter tears to shed.
I wept as I remembered how often you and I
Had tired the sun with talking and sent him down the sky.
And now that thou art lying, my dear old carian guest,
A handful of gray ashes, long, long ago at rest,
Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales, awake;
For Death, he taketh all away, but them he cannot take.