A&M professor speaks of love for Middle Ages

By Ron Pippin

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bert Boenig is a Renaissance man e true spirit of the term. The 40old assistant professor of English at s A&M would feel right at home ong the poets, musicians, noblemen knights of the Middle Ages.

period, he would need to change out his purple plaid shirt, green silk tie, pants and tennis shoes into something

ut would a real Renaissance man se Arnold Schwarzenegger as his fa-

He's my hero," Boenig says. "He's tch a throwback to the Middle Ages. If ou had to make a movie of Beowulf, hwarzenegger is the only actor you ald cast in that role."

> ce 1974, concentrating primarily on iterature of the medieval and Renaisce periods. He began as a teaching asnt at Rutgers University in New Jerwhile working on his Ph.D. Boenig she has been interested in books and rature for as long as he can remem-

When I was a kid living in Hoboken, , I could see the Empire State Buildfrom my kitchen window," Boenig . "I remember that famous week in 1950's when the Million Dollar vie was showing King Kong seven hts in a row. I watched it every night, one night I rushed to the kitchen to if King Kong was really standing on Empire State Building, swatting wn airplanes. That was my first lesson literature, the difference between real

After teaching at Rutgers for seven ars, Boenig spent from 1981-1983 as assistant professor of English at Penn te University. Following a return to tgers in 1983 as the associate director he writing program, he brought his

osphere to Texas A&M in 1986.
Tressha White, a senior journalism member of Phi Beta Kappa his junior ajor from Houston, took Boenig's year and graduated summa cum laude. orld literature class in the spring of

"He didn't try to intimidate us like years and specialized in Greek. ome professors do, but he wanted us to ay what we felt if we could support it,"

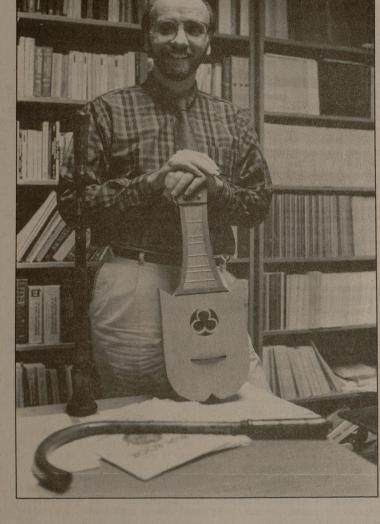
That's the way Boenig wants his f class participation. For instance, when same discipline enig took a position as visiting lecrer in English at Purdue University in 987, he taught a course on the history of

"That can be a very dull subject," oenig says. "One of the things we had discuss was how the Vikings invaded England and brought a lot of their Norse words into the English language. So I decluding "The stribed the invasions as if they were in-cursions of Viking motorcycle gangs, fost recently, driving with leather jackets and new Tempest" for Words tatooed to their arms and bellies. Nureyev took able. Learning can't happen unless irector of the you're comfortable."

has created leasic balles own versions "Washington the strengths of English is you have to the strength of English is yo arn a lot about different things, because thors of different time periods had as

their subject their own world and their wn outlooks in history, philosophy, art, usic and this and that. Perhaps it was his dedication to learng when he attended college that makes

eing so thorough in his teaching. Boenig attended Rutgers as an under-raduate from 1966-1970. He was a Chubb Foundation and Lane Cooper



Dr. Robert Boenig

After his undergraduate work, Boenig attended Princeton Seminary for three

"I learned how to teach at Princeton Seminary more than anywhere else," he White says. "I had a lot of fun in his class. He was always doing neat things says. "You had to take classes in counclass. He was always doing neat things seling, psychology, Greek and theology. get us involved."

One of the reasons I entered the SemiThat's the way Boenig wants his
nary was I didn't want to go straight
asses to be — entertaining, with a lot
from college to graduate school in the

> In 1973, he returned to Rutgers to pursue his doctorate in medieval English literature. In 1974, Boenig received the Walter Russel Graduate Scholarsip, and he graduated with his Ph.D. in 1978.

Boenig reads eight languages: Old English, Middle English, Latin, Greek, German, Hebrew, Syriac and, of course, modern English.

"They're all dead languages except German and modern English," Boenig says. I've learned Hebrew and Syriac, which very few people know and almost

"I've always been interested in things that people aren't interested in. To know something about things that are arcane

to be writers and poets who have nothing For instance, Boenig is interested in to say at all," Boenig says.

"I build and play musical instru-ments," he says. "I have a collection of about 50 or 60 instruments — about half of which I made — and most are medieval or Renaissance." Boenig says the lute, which is a medieval instrument resembling a guitar, is his favorite instrument to listen to and play

"I've also built and played crumhorns, which is a late medieval woodwind," Boenig says. "Its sound can be best de-

scribed as that of an electric kazoo.'

medieval music when he first heard it in

"I was ready to enter graduate school to study medieval or Renaissance litera-ture," he says. "But my liking for the music is independent of my liking of the literature. All classical orchestra sounds basically alike. If you listen to a consort of Renaissance musicians you hear a wider range of different sounds -comic,

serious, pretty, sad, loud and raucous." Although music plays an important role in Boenig's life, he spends the majority of his spare time writing.

"I am currently working on a mystery novel set in the Middle Ages," Boenig says. "I have about 70 pages written, and I don't have it worked out completely.

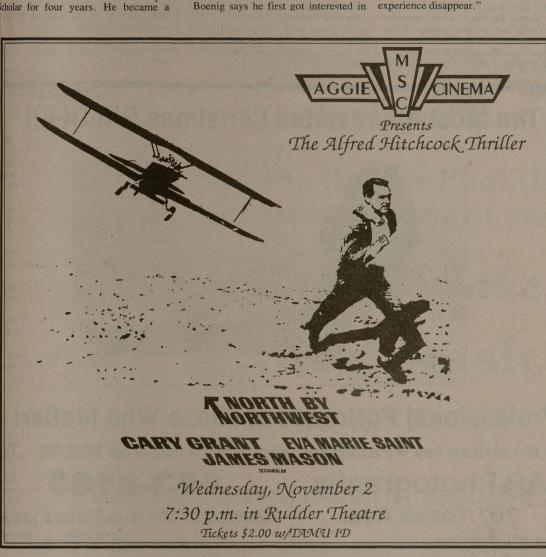
Boenig says that other than two or three poems and the mystery novel, his writings are primarily literary criticisms.

'We have to write criticism to survive in this profession," Boenig says with a smirk. "I don't do it to stay alive, but because I can hopefully see things about a work that other people haven't seen be-

Boenig says he believes that too many people write just for the sake of writing. There are too many people who want

He is the associate editor of Studia Mystica, a literary journal devoted to the study of spirituality in the arts. Boenig has written the majority of his criticism on nature and the roles spiritual matters play throughout our lives and literature.

"I'm interested in literature for mystical reasons," he says. "When I read a work it affects me emotionally. Literature is mythical and it helps you understand yourself. The mystical approach to literature gives that myth a reality, and the boundaries between text and personal



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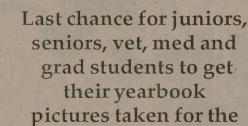








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