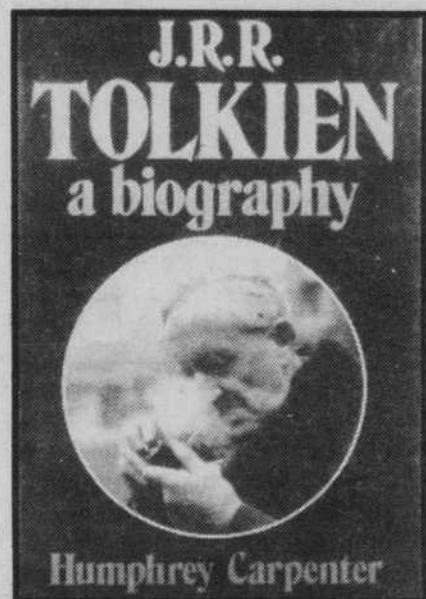


Books

J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography
By Humphrey Carpenter
287 pages, \$10 hardcover
© 1977 George Allen & Unwin



Writers are often personally uninteresting. J.R.R. Tolkien is a case in point. His writings are magnificent achievements, products of an imagination of vast power and originality. Yet otherwise he was quite ordinary. Except for the publication of his books, there was nothing truly remarkable about his entire life.

Given commonplace material, a gifted biographer can produce a good book anyway. After all, the creative imagination of an author, if nothing else, is important. Unfortunately, Tolkien's biographer (Humphrey Carpenter) is not exceptionally skilled. Thus, *J.R.R. Tolkien* is basically the mediocre story of a rather dull life.

Raised first by his mother and then by a priest, Tolkien was trained as a scholar, a Catholic and an old-fashioned Edwardian gentleman. He went to a good school, where he exhibited an ability to master ancient languages, and then pursued his studies at Oxford in impressive style.

He married, fought in World War I without distinction, returned to Oxford as a professor. Other than producing some medieval scholarship and *The Lord of the Rings* he did little else with his life.

Having disparaged this biography in the first place, one feels no need to attack it at length. It is lacking in selective detail, is repetitive and generally fails to bring alive the characters that appear in it, Tolkien included. Carpenter's taste is also a problem; for example, he compares Tolkien's literary mind to a compost pit, an analogy neither accurate nor delicate.

But the book is useful for its illumination of Tolkien's work. Much of his inspiration came from his studies of ancient Northern European civilization. As a renowned philologist and linguist he spoke and read, among other dead languages, Old Icelandic, Gothic, Early German, Anglo-Saxon and many dialects of Middle English. He drew upon the fragmentary mythology and literature of these cultures for his own creation of legend.

Tolkien called his writing "subcreation." He believed that what he was writing was not so much fiction as fundamental truth, "true mythology." In *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*, he aimed to discover a mythology for England. The sources for it were his knowledge of medieval times, his love for England and its countryside, a poetic imagination and a profound sense for the nobility and tragedy of human character.

Carpenter is Tolkien's authorized biographer. As such, he has had access to Tolkien's papers, and to members of his family and his friends. So, all of the facts of Tolkien's life are in this book, although they are not presented with much flair. Yet, those interested in the sources and history of Tolkien's work will learn a great deal from this biography.

However, *J.R.R. Tolkien* is actually recommendable only to true Tolkien buffs. It is by no means a definitive biography. Perhaps a writer with more insight into Tolkien's life and work will eventually bring out a better portrait of him.

Until then, we can easily be content with his own works, flights of an imagination unique in modern literature. **By Eric Neiman**

The Art of Fine Dining
Edited by Nonie Fish and Estelle McCafferty
131 pages, \$8 paperback
©1978 Friends of the Museum
Gourmet Group



A new local cookbook manages to blend foods for both body and soul, bringing us perhaps a step closer to enlightenment in the kitchen.

The Art of Fine Dining published by the Gourmet Group of the Friends of the Museum, University Museum of Art, does more than celebrate the art of cookery. Containing reproductions of art works related to eating, the book completes a circle from food as art to food in art. The result is a beautiful publication that is as much a collector's item as a collection of recipes.

The black and white reproductions that garnish the pages remove this book from the cookbook genre into a class of its own. Ranging from an etching of a luxuriant

carrot by Rene Rickabaugh, to a photograph of a sterling silver teapot handcrafted by Max Nixon, the works of local artists (as well as some from the Museum's permanent collection) were selected for their food-related content. Eugene artist Mark Clarke's fresh whimsical sketches are especially appealing.

More than 150 recipes, contributed by local artists, chefs, Gourmet Group members and Museum staff, span the menu from hors d'oeuvres to desserts, with such provocative names as Melange du Brocoli, Frick-A-Dilly, Oregon Trifle, Coq au Riesling, Flaming Spinach Salad Italian, And Cracker Jack.

The book stresses fresh regional foods: Pacific seafoods, Oregon-grown chickens and Willamette Valley vegetables. Even a quick thumb through the pages is sure to stimulate a Pavlovian response.

For added insurance, I tried several of the recipes myself. The Beer Cheese Soup is hearty and satisfying, with the additional plus of being simple to prepare. But be careful with the seasonings; "salt and pepper to taste" can be a tricky business.

The Crab on Avocado Shells is a rare treat combining two of the most delicious edible items in creation. I m-m-m-ed my way through the meal in total bliss.

As a dedicated quiche fan, I couldn't resist sampling the Green Chili Quiche. Quiche is one of those adaptable foods like omelettes, to which you can add any

number of ingredients successfully, and this recipe is a definite success. But be forewarned: it's not for people who take their tacos without hot sauce. The chilies may be too zesty for a delicate palate.

Since wine is the crowning glory of any meal, it is appropriate that the book includes a *Short History of Oregon Wine*. Oregon is on the same latitude as Bordeaux, the famous wine-producing region of France. This fact makes it a little less surprising to learn that Oregon has a wine industry of its very own. Why not try a bottle of Oregon Gerwurztraminer with your next roast chicken, or how about a Willamette Valley Pinot Noir to compliment a cheese souffle?

It takes a feat of mental gymnastics to see a connection between art and a Big Mac. But there is an element of art in food preparation when it is done with care and expertise. *The Art of Fine Dining* is infused with the special attention to quality that can indeed bring cooking and eating into the realm of the arts.

Try *The Art of Fine Dining*. All proceeds go to the museum, so its purchase will benefit the arts, as well as your stomach.

The book is available at the University Museum of Art, Meier & Frank, Grape and Grain, Reed and Cross, Danish Imports and Mike O'Brien's Living Room Bookstore. Look for a large paperback with a glossy, silver cover.

Strudel, anyone? **By Lee Sherman-Stadius**

How would Freud relate to O'Keefe?

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Conflict. Conflict. Trauma. Trauma. Freud's diagnosis?
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