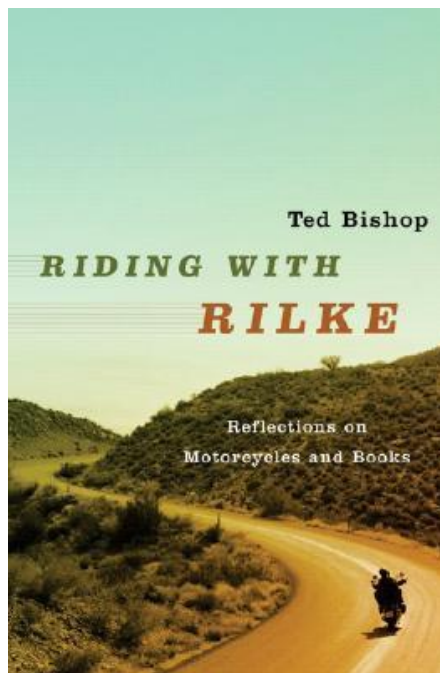




# Riding with Rilke: Reflections on Motorcycles and Books

*Ted Bishop , Edward Bishop*

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## **Riding with Rilke: Reflections on Motorcycles and Books** Ted Bishop , Edward Bishop

Ted Bishop took one last ride before the fall term. When he tried to pass a tractor-trailer at 80 miles per hour, his motorcycle began to vibrate out of control. Bishop was flung into a ditch, breaking his back in two places, shattering a wrist and ankle, and collapsing his lungs. Left with time to write and reflect, Bishop produced *Riding with Rilke*, an account of the epic motorcycle trip he had completed just before the crash. Here, Bishop takes readers from Edmonton to Austin, through the classic landscapes of the American West, and to a few of America and Europe's most famous cities as he reconciles what it means to be both a road dog and a researcher. Whether describing the shock of holding Virginia Woolf's suicide note in the British Library or the outlaw thrill of cruising small American towns on his Ducati, Bishop meditates with wit and honesty on the tangled interplay of life, work, and art.

## **Riding with Rilke: Reflections on Motorcycles and Books Details**

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## From Reader Review Riding with Rilke: Reflections on Motorcycles and Books for online ebook

### Vanessa says

This is the best nonfiction book I've ever read. Totally smooth and a page turner cover to cover. Not once did I stop because I was bored. Ted Bishop seamlessly entertains the reader down each highway of anecdotes, tales of D.H. Lawrence here, elegies of Virginia Woolf there, and the whopper of riding with Rilke at the end. From laugh out loud hilarious to heart wrenching Bishop is a master storyteller, the elegant tour guide feeding you history and story with the same spoon of honey. I cannot wait for another book by him. Heck, even a book on fonts is looking damn fine from here.

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### Leila says

The thing about reading personal nonfiction is, if you don't like the person (or, to be nicer, if you are unable to empathize with the person), the subject matter can be as perfect as you want and it still won't be a fulfilling read. That's what happened for me here. Bishop seems to hope that his mildly self-deprecating, off-the-cuff styled humor will make him seem cool and humble. Instead, he seems to hit too close to the truth when he jokingly confesses that he can never be as cool as the bikers and movie figures he measures himself against. On top of that, his mildly misogynistic (mainly by omission and minimization of the women in his story) attitude is distracting. I love modernism and I love motorcycles, but I wish Hsing, his girlfriend, had written the book instead.

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### C says

Technically, he's riding with Joyce and Woolf, not so much Rilke. Rilke doesn't rear his poetic head till the epilogue. Yes, I said the same thing, "but why...?" One quote summed it up for him. I can't copy that here because it'll ruin the surprise...right?

I want to give this five stars, but I'm held back by the narrative dragging badly in some spots. Around those spots, though, is an enjoyable, very quotable book. It bummed me out a bit, not to have sticky notes in hand to mark spots, OR the book on my kindle where I could highlight and share!

In one case, he's talking about books as sentient things that decide when the time is right to be read. How, if you try to force yourself to read them when they're not ready, they'll fight you and leave you exhausted. How, when looking for the book or a passage, you won't be able to find it. OH how I FEEL that! And how, when the time is right, they practically fall into your hand. You read the text and absorb it in a way you never could have but for the time being right. I so loved that.

Another point (easier to find), he quotes Robert Bringhurst:

"If you use this book as a guide, by all means leave the road when you wish. That is precisely the use of a road: to reach individually chosen points of departure. By all means break the rules and break them beautifully, deliberately and well."

There is some nice prose in there dedicated to motorcycling. There are some things we all think, I feel, when

we head out on our bikes. Some funny truths, some romantic truths.

Again, I so want to give it 5 stars. I almost feel I should give it 5 stars simply because I have 2 chapters left to read, interrupted because \*I\* had to go out and go for a ride and get it out of my system (marking as "read" since that'll be finished tonight). But, those parts that drag really crawled for me. So that one star has to get knocked off.

Definitely worth a library check out, and I will say I'm more curious about Virginia Woolf and James Joyce than I was before.

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## Heidi Nemo says

Tweed vs. leather--and often annoying. Occasional moments of insight. He rode all over the US and Canada, but he didn't even CAMP?!

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## Spyder says

A book about motorcycles and books... Hell yeah!!! Two of my favorite things. An interesting read for a non-Academic though I admit that the story drug on a little as he described his research endeavors. Having lived in Austin for 9 years and knowing the Hill Country as well as I do, as well as, being familiar with many of his other well traveled routes through various travel books, maps and personal driving experiences made this little book a lot of fun to read.

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## Marc says

This book took about a day to get through cover-to-cover, and was entertaining. I expected something more academic, or at least with a greater connection between the author's two worlds of motorcycles and literature. Instead, he occupies both worlds and has anecdotes from each, but they don't blend well and the pacing of the book suffered as a result of lack of transition between the "bike" and "books" sections.

The opening of the book, describing his crash, was chilling and very well written - and is largely the inspiration for me buying the book.

Overall, it is a good book, filled with interesting bits and well worth reading, but isn't as significant as Pirsig's "Zen & The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance," which, for me, still sets the bar for philosophical motorcycle travel narrative.

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## Keith says

If you don't love motorcycles but you do love books this is the read for you. If you happen to also love

motorcycles then this book is doubly satisfying. Author Bishop, a professor of English at the University of Alberta, narrates his tale of a southern road trip from Edmonton to Austin. Bishop is on sabbatical and traveling to the Harry Ransome Center at UT Austin to use that center's magnificent manuscripts collection in furtherance of work on Virginia Woolf. While Woolf gets her due - there's a wonderful description of Bishop reading Woolf's suicide note - so do James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence and cowboy librarians and the Austin music scene and high-end book collectors and motorcycles and books. I've never owned a motorcycle but I came away from this understanding why people ride and also why they read. Recommended.

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### **Barry Bandstra says**

Edward "Ted" Bishop is an English professor at the University of Alberta, Calgary. He is driven by two impulses: finding primary sources in literary archives and pushing his Ducati Monster to the limits. I found this book to be thoroughly engaging: both his reflections on riding and his stories of research. And, he is a darn good writer. Admittedly this is a niche book; how many people out there want to hear about non-Harley motorcycling AND literary criticism? But he tells the stories soooo well.

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### **Juan says**

#### **Motorcycles and Literature**

This was a very special book. The story telling by Ted Bishop is intellectually driven and charming. I recommend it to anyone who loves the adventures of the outdoors and the written word.

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### **Bob says**

A novice to the American West rides through it on motorcycle. Narrative is much like other travel writing.

Clarity in discussion of 'place' is fuzzy at best. Caught many times with incorrect positioning of places. The worst infraction is his visit to Monument Valley...just outside Moab, UT. Looking at acknowledgements, it is clear where the problem lies. When not writing about the road, he seems to be clear and concise. In turn, it is not surprising that he seemed to do a lot of research about those things. However, there are no "thank you's" to people who helped him with information about place. In turn, his sense of place is sometimes jumbled or incorrect.

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### **John says**

Very well written, great stuff about motorcycles, authors, bookstores, back roads, and small towns. I enjoyed the little things he tossed in there without going too far off on a tangent, such as the typeface he likes to use, or how pulp paperback books are printed too far into the gutter and use cheap glue to bind the pages together. He does very well writing about his favorite authors and books, without it getting dry or boring. He made me miss Edmonton.

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## Pat Loughery says

I really enjoyed this one. The author is a college professor of English, specializing in modern literature. He's also a motorcycle enthusiast. The story is the memoir of his ride from Calgary to Austin for a sabbatical research project, and takes on library archives, James Joyce, TS Lawrence, Virginia Wolfe, motorcycle touring, the Ducati brand, and other topics.

It's far deeper on the literature side than the motorcycle side, but it did a good job of describing the love many of us have for motorcycle travel. It introduced me to modernism, and even his descriptions of typefaces and bookbinding - which sounds totally boring - was pretty interesting.

The book is fairly philosophical. Somewhere in the rough genre of Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, though I enjoyed this one more (although I last read ZAMM when I was a 20-year-old, so perhaps I should revisit it).

Oh, and the Rilke part of the title was a bit misleading. Rilke's work only shows up late, and in a small snippet. I was disappointed in that, but it didn't ruin the book by any means.

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## Ray Argyle says

A charming little book, even if you're not a motorcycle enthusiast -- which I'm not. But Ted Bishop, a professor of English at the University of Alberta (at time of writing, 2000, at least) takes us on a combined motorcycle-literary voyage down the spine of the Rocky Mountains to the Ransom Library in Austin, Texas, and back to the Yellowhead Highway in B.C. Actually, Bishop begins in B.C., with a horrific accident that puts him in hospital for weeks. Only after 238 pages of often droll bike and book talk do we return to him in recovery mode, in the book's epilogue. In between, we share Bishop's joy in James Joyce and Ulysses, T.E. Lawrence, D.H. Lawrence and sundry other authors whose lives were touched by the Southwest U.S. locations (Taos, Sante Fe, etc) that he takes us to. We also gain some insights into the complicated but most often comfortable life of the academic. Bishop is worked up by the blue covers of the early editions of Ulysses, and writes a paper for the Joyce Studies Annual which earns him a trip to Rome. Nice work if you can get it! This book;s been around for awhile, but you should read it if you can find a copy. The Rilke of the title, you may have guessed, is the oft-quoted German poet.

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## Sarah says

*"I have accepted that it is my destiny to leave a trail of sunglasses through life, but I never lose my map. My map. What could be a worse omen for the first day of a trip? Bad karma. Starting a journey you should be calm, centered, complete, like a samurai, at one with his sword, totally focused on the task. Not flailing about like a man trying to pick up an exploded bag of marbles. It was all Hsing's fault."*

A grown man loses his road map on a trip, and, sorry, let me get this straight, it is his *girlfriend's* fault? We'll get back to my hatred of the narrator later.

First, formatting-wise, this book was a disaster. The timeline was all over the place and difficult to follow. The book is advertised as the man's accident and recovery being the focal point of the novel, but in reality, it is merely a footnote, and an excuse for him to pretend to be badass for a second while actually spending a majority of the book talking in depth about his unfinished literary work. I still am not sure how his road trips

to and from Texas, his trip to Europe (why was that even included?), and the accident work out in the timeline.

Now, getting onto the narrator. I hate the narrators in many books that I end up enjoying as a whole anyways. This was not one of them. First, let's mention the subtle misogyny displayed by Ted. His long-term girlfriend is mentioned briefly throughout the book, usually when he is either a) complaining about her nagging b) complaining about her not answering his calls or c) reasoning with himself on why he shouldn't hook up with a random 19-year old girl he meets (his girlfriend is only the afterthought that comes to mind after his worries about STDs).

*"But when a woman rides her own bike, you're immediately converted to chopped liver on wheels. You pull into a gas station and there's chaos, pump jockeys leaping over each other, begging to check her tire pressure, fill the tank, change the oil, anything. You, you get nothing. No attention, no service, no chance."*

What follows is a 2-page long tantrum about riding with his girlfriend makes him feel invisible, where instead he could be praising or admiring the fact that somehow a dorky scholar like him managed to snag a badass doctor who rides a BMW as a girlfriend.

Secondly, the moment he leaves the border of Canada, there is nothing but disdain for the landscapes and people he encounters. He travels through some of the most beautiful places in the world, but his admiration never travels further than the local coffee stands. The people he meets don't gasp and ask for his autograph when he mentions he's from Canada, or that he's riding a motorcycle, and so of course he takes major offense to this and writes off all Americans as snobby and rude. Hey, it may be true, but why the hell are you riding through the entire country if you hate it so much? He rides through southern Utah, known universally as a gorgeous, world-renowned red rock landscape, and he writes it off as a boring desert. His mind is so closed, and it was depressing to see the world through his eyes.

Finally, he is cocky in his ineptitude, and it is incredibly off-putting. He boasts about not knowing how to fix a single thing on his bike, except how to tighten the chain. Oh, except he has to get that replaced at one point because he doesn't actually know how to do that either. He seems to love that he fits perfectly into the "wealthy mid-life crisis" category of motorcycle enthusiasts, and while there is nothing wrong with that, the way he presents himself could have been done in a much less unpleasant way.

The fact that this review is so negative reflects my passion for the subjects of this book - both bikes and literature - and it is unfortunate that they have been represented in such a way by such an annoying and repulsive narrator. If you're looking for a similar book, I would recommend *Ghost Rider* by Neil Peart. That's not a five star book either by any means, but a much more interesting read on a similar subject.

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## Tom says

A travelogue and a memoir of ideas about literature, motorcycles, people and places. This satisfying book is more thoughtful consideration and educated reflection than swagger, pussy and motors, and that's a good thing. Compelling memoir written by a Canadian lit prof who toured the West astride his Ducati Monster. *Riding with Rilke*, to me, was a celebration of the finer connections between people and the places they inhabit, the past and the present. I loved it.

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