

13 Aug. '99

Robert Minzesheimer  
Book Editor  
USA Today  
1000 Wilson Blvd.  
Arlington VA 22229

Dear Bob Minzesheimer--

Appreciated the review, and was particularly grateful to have someone clue in on the Bob Marshall aspect of my novel. You're right that he'd be worth a whole book; I'll mull, I'll mull. In any case, thanks for putting a shine on this one.

Regards,



# Lonesome travails of a philosopher sleuth

## Strange Loyalties

By William McIlvanney  
Morrow, 281 pp., \$20

By Ivan Doig

Special for USA TODAY

"I woke up with a head like a ro-deo."

No, it's not the ghosts of Raymond Chandler and his virtuoso of chin music and incidental private detective, Philip Marlowe. The creator here is William McIlvanney, a Scottish novelist and poet with his own way of making sentences sing. And his hungover tough 'tec is Jack Laidlaw, carrier of humanity's burdens and resident skeptic of the police department of Glasgow.

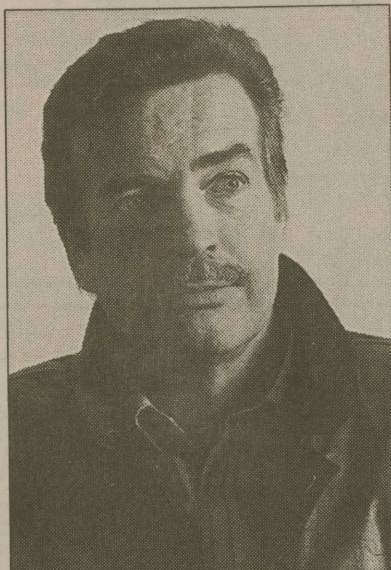
"It was a month since the bad thing had happened."

The victim of *Strange Loyalties*, in more than merely an obituarial sense, is Laidlaw's own brother. Schoolteacher and artist and divided soul in his own right, Scott Laidlaw had evidently walked in front of a random car one dark drunk night. (McIlvanney doesn't wimp around with daggers amid the antimacassars; in an earlier Laidlaw book, a character was forthrightly thrown off a bridge.) Accident, it has every appearance of. But then where, Laidlaw demands, did the accident begin? "When did my brother's life give up its purpose? ... Why do the best of us go to waste while the worst of us flourish? I want to know. That was on Perrier water. It was lucky I wasn't on the whisky." Regrouping from a grieving retreat into the bottle, Laidlaw embarks on a driven investigation not so much of Scott's death but of his life.

"The meek shall inherit the earth, but not this week."

Laidlaw's approach is to go forth and question, question, question, and the assortment of humanity he interrogates in his increasingly fascinating and personally troubling seven days of quest forms a class portrait of Scotland, and for that matter, plenty of other lands as well.

Big Jack unabashedly feels affection for the geezers and geezels drinking away the stubborn hours in pubs. He equally despises the upscale types content to stand on their wallets without ever looking around or beneath them; keep your eye on what happens to a literal pot of money when Laidlaw wreaks a little social justice.



By Murdo Macleod

**MCILVANNEY:** Personal tragedy strikes his detective Jack Laidlaw.

"'The world moves on, Jack,' she said.

"'Aye. But where to? That's what's worrying me.'"

This is the third Laidlaw book, but the first that is told in the detective's own musing-as-well-as-amusing voice. Switching from a successful formula to unrelenting first-person narration is the kind of gamble, as a McIlvanney character might put it, apt to leave you shirtless. Particularly in a detective series; can you imagine having Sherlock Holmes take over and pontificate *all the time* instead of Watson's narration?

But if Laidlaw doesn't always bear McIlvanney's learnedness lightly, at least he is open about it: "I was a middle-aged detective who liked to try and read philosophy, like someone studying holiday brochures in the poorhouse."

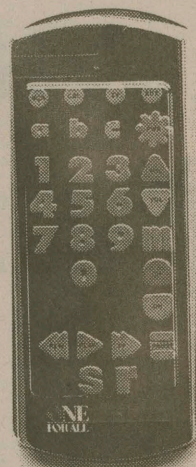
In Laidlaw's Glaswegian streets, policeman is pronounced "polis-man" and he is exactly that — a being of the polis, the classic Greek word for city, for sense of community. William McIlvanney is giving us a provocative detective series not about just bodies but about the body politic; "the terms on which we have agreed to live," he has Laidlaw say in anguish and anger. "My quarrel was with all of us." Laidlaw's is a lover's quarrel the world needs more of.

Ivan Doig is the author of *This House of Sky* and *The Two Medicine* trilogy.

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# USA TODAY

VIA SATELLITE

55# : ?

ROBERT WILSON  
BOOK EDITOR

1000 WILSON BOULEVARD  
ARLINGTON, VA 22229  
(703) 276•5486 / (800) 872•8632

500 words,  
due May 1 - 806





March 31

Dear Ivar,

Well, I couldn't turn up the McIlvanney galley, so I had the publisher send them directly to you.

Our reviews run about 500 words, and I'll give you a May 1 deadline. Thanks,  
Bob

ROBERT WILSON



17021 Tenth Avenue N.W., Seattle, Washington 98177  
(206) 542-6658



p. 18 { The victim of Strange Loyalties, in more than merely an obituarial sense, is Laidlaw's own brother. Schoolteacher and artist and divided soul in his own right, Scott Laidlaw had evidently walked in front of a random car one dark drunk night. (McIlvanney doesn't wimp around with daggers amid the antimaccasars; in an earlier Laidlaw book, a character was forthrightly thrown off a bridge.) Accident, it has every appearance of. But then where, Jack Laidlaw demands, did the accident begin? "When did my brother's life give up its purpose?...Why do the best of us go to waste while the worst of us flourish? I want to know." That was on Perrier water. It was lucky I wasn't on the whisky." Regrouping from his grieving retreat into the bottle, Laidlaw embarks on a driven investigation not so much of Scott's death but <sup>of</sup> his life.

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Ivan Doig is the author of This House of Sky and the Two Medicine trilogy of novels.



6 April '92

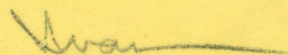
Dear Bob--

Here's the McIlvanney review. Thanks for letting me take it on. If you need to reach me about the piece, I'll be here at the phone until April 16, and back from vacation on April 27.

Social Security #: 516-44-4410.

I hope you're thriving.

all best,

A handwritten signature, possibly "Ivan", written in dark ink.