Clarion Review

General

A Cross for Irvin: The Evil That Dwells
Henri Delevanta
Softcover $15.97 (340pp)
978-1-4259-7079-6
★★★★☆
(November 2006)

> *…there is reasoning behind everything that happens to you or around you and you may be the subject or the object of the cause.*

Lynchburg PA is a rollicking town whose residents really only have time for love and white-collar theft. At the shady center is Reverend Irvin Daniel(s) Jr. who takes great satisfaction from his corruption. He can skim funds and charm parishioners out of their panties before brunch yet still have most of the day available for lending a hand to the mentally ill. Meanwhile his flock is blissfully distracted by talented musicians such as gospel-belter Mattie Wilkinson and Ivy LaRue the classically trained Creole chanteuse. Rather than call Irvin on his apparent ambition to be the crookedest pastor in Pennsylvania they mortgage their houses for him and hand over life insurance benefits.

> *He's been walking on a wire for years without falling.*

Delevanta's Lynchburg is quite an integrated place. Irvin's congregation and friendships include both blacks and whites; the few tensions mentioned are on the level of city government. Irvin's influence reaches into bank boardrooms drug houses and even the White House. The ride is fun except for the good folks who keep turning up deceased. A growing string of deaths do not fall into an obvious pattern at first although the cross affixed to Irvin's neck holds a singular significance which is gradually revealed. The author impishly enjoys seeing just how far people will be pushed. One example when Irvin decides to propose marriage to one of his main girlfriends he seems to botch it. He calls her by the other girlfriend's name and jokes about marrying the second woman as well. The proposal is accepted anyway with great enthusiasm.

The Author's Note lays out Delevanta's commendable concern for the plight of the mentally ill his catalyst for writing this book. A paralyzing volume of errors in this section suggests that *A Cross For Irvin* will verge on unreadable. However the rest of the text has been rendered smooth by competent editorial attention. The most notable uncorrected aggravation is the fact that Irvin's last name may or may not end with a letter *s*.

The author a preacher's son has put in time as an organist a choir director and a jazz musician. He notes the fast-moving gossip and competitive jealousies common within individual churches. This first novel is lively and just a little forgivably messy with a large cast of characters. Some passages which first scan as supernatural actually offer an inside view of psychosis. Dream sequences are a bit graphic though not inconsistent with the imaginations of the disturbed people whose challenges Delevanta wishes to highlight. *A Cross for Irvin* doesn't provide the most sympathetic portrait of psychopathology but it's well stocked with salacious revelations and written with energetic verve. A recommended read.