



# The Lark and the Laurel

Books Reviewed:

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[Clive Barnes](#) [3]

~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

With the current revival of the historical novel for young people, it is good to see a reissue of the first children's novel of one of the leading writers of the genre's heyday: the first of the eventual eight books in the Mantlemass series. In hindsight, the novel is marked as much by the time of its writing, when feminism was stirring again, as by its historical setting. Rich in the detail of country life at the close of the fifteenth century and unfolding at a leisurely pace by today's expectations, it reveals the transformation of Cecily Jolland, the sequestered and naïve daughter of a minor aristocrat. When her Yorkist father flees the country on the accession of the Lancastrian Henry VII, Cecily is sent to her aunt in Sussex. The redoubtable Dame Elizabeth rules her estate at Mantlemass in an egalitarian spirit and with entrepreneurial zeal, raising rabbits for sale for their meat and fur; and, under her tutelage, Cecily, raised by her father for a dynastic marriage, learns to think and act for herself and makes her own choice of husband and future. This reprint has an admiring preface from Kevin Crossley-Holland whose own career as a writer of historical novels spans the 40 years since this title first appeared and whose recent style, in very short chapters and extensive use of dialogue, contrasts with Willard's more reflective and descriptive approach. I hope this novel finds the audience it deserves among young people rather than nostalgic older enthusiasts, but I am not sure that the use of the original illustrations by Gareth Floyd, fine though they are in themselves, will now attract young people of 12 or 13, who might appreciate the story. These days, they suggest a younger readership.

Running Order:

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