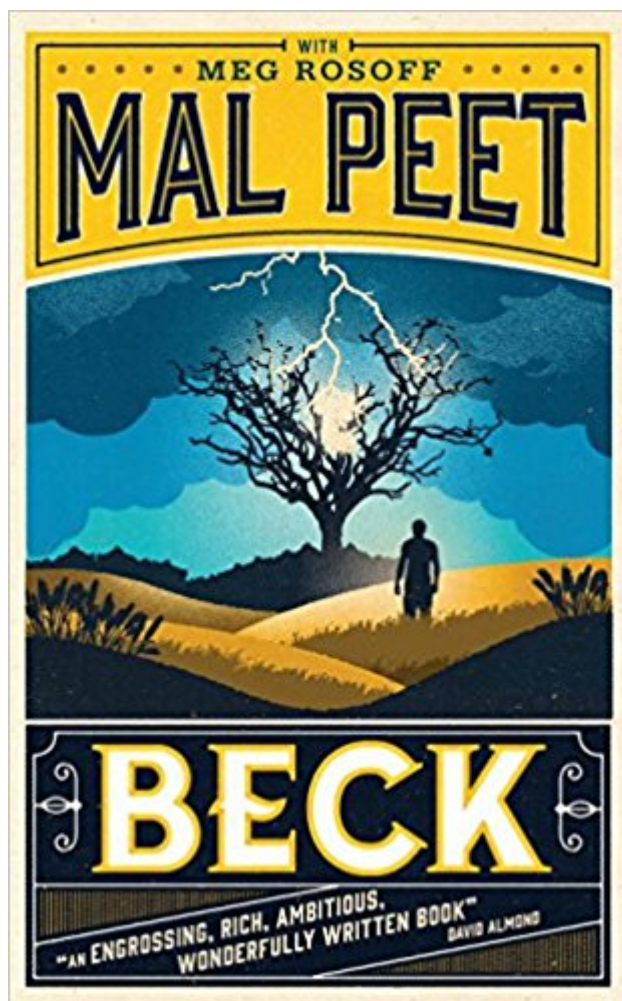


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# Beck



## Synopsis

From Carnegie Medal-winning author Mal Peet comes a sweeping coming-of-age adventure, both harrowing and life-affirming. Born of a brief encounter between a Liverpool prostitute and an African soldier in 1907, Beck finds himself orphaned as a young boy and sent overseas to the Catholic Brothers in Canada. At age fifteen he is sent to work on a farm, from which he eventually escapes. Finally in charge of his own destiny, Beck starts westward, crossing the border into America and back, all while the Great Depression rages on. What will it take for Beck to understand the agonies of his childhood and realize that love is possible?

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A gritty and inspiring survival story, Peet's final novel, completed by Rosoff after his death, has the stoic quality and soul of a Steinbeck tale...Harrowing but hopeful, it's a memorable portrait of a boy struggling to love, be loved, and find his way against overwhelming odds. •Publishers Weekly (starred review) This final novel from the deceased Peet, completed by Rosoff, is a not-quite-YA, not-quite-adult historical fiction story of hardship after hardship...The book itself is incredibly ambitious, as was Rosoff's task of finishing it. Beck is a passive character in his own life, but in the moments when he pushes himself to take action, readers will finally get some satisfaction. A heartbreaking, painful work that gives hope to the restorative power of true human connection. •School Library Journal (starred review) Characters' dialogue is often rendered in earthy regional dialects, while the narrative prose is

brilliantly evocative and precise, producing a sweepingly epic physical and emotional journey. Heartbreaking, hopeful, and inspired. [Kirkus Reviews \(starred review\)](#) Whether a hardened heart can--or should--leave itself vulnerable to love is brilliantly explored in this powerful, vividly told, beautifully written collaboration. [Shelf Awareness for Readers \(starred review\)](#) Peet's posthumous novel, completed by Rosoff, follows Beck from his meager beginnings in early twentieth-century England to his harrowing first days in Canada...older teens and adults who appreciate literary historical fiction might find plenty to appreciate in this story of a hard-won discovery of redemption and home. [Booklist](#) This book tackles big issues: racism, sexual abuse by clergy members, poverty, and examines the effects of childhood trauma on developing adults. The plot is driven by Beck's need for security and acceptance, and his traumatic past influences the brooding tone of the novel. A well-written work on a difficult topic, this book would be best introduced with a trigger warning. [School Library Connection](#) Some of the harshest episodes of Beck's life are captured in passages of stunning grace, typical of the late Peet's writing. [Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books](#) Readers will feel Beck's torture, both physical and emotional; they will experience his physical hardships but also rejoice when he discovers true love. Beck will be enjoyed by Peet's fans, as well as lovers of historical fiction and adventure. [VOYA](#) From the very first pages it's clear we are in the hands of a master storyteller (or two; as explained in an appended note, Rosoff finished the novel after Peet's death). The vibrancy, earthiness, and originality of the prose is startling; the spot-on dialogue adds to the immediacy; secondary characters are vividly portrayed. There are no wasted words; no too-lengthy descriptive passages, yet somehow we see, smell, experience everything. [The Horn Book](#) Not since *A Monster Calls*, the novel Patrick Ness wrote based on a story idea from the late Siobhan Dowd, has a collaboration from two of my favorite authors felt so bittersweet. But Beck, Mal Peet's posthumously published novel finished by his friend Meg Rosoff, comes close. [BookPage](#) Peet and Rosoff use such poignant and stark language...In the end, it's a love story; not about how two people fall in love, but how one person despite hardship can finally feel worthy and open enough to accept love. [Globe and Mail](#) The writing is to be savored in this life-affirming novel about the resilience of the human spirit. [Buffalo News](#) An epic story set in the 1920s and '30s for erudite, mature readers. [Boston Globe](#)...exquisitely written novel. [People](#)

Mal Peet (1947–2015) was a critically acclaimed and award-winning writer. Besides his young-adult fiction, he wrote several illustrated books for younger children with his wife, Elspeth

Graham. Meg Rosoff is the author of *How I Live Now*, winner of the Michael L. Printz Award. She also received the Carnegie Medal and the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award and was named a National Book Award Finalist. Meg Rosoff completed Mal Peet's unfinished novel, a promise she made him before he died. She lives in London.

Liverpool 1907, Anne Beck had just been sacked from her job. On her way home Anne passed a black man stood outside the local pub, as the landlord had refused to serve him. His white shipmates had bought him a drink and a bite to eat, this is what lured her towards him. She took him home with her where they had one night of passion, and then he was gone. The result of that night of passion was born nine months later, Beck. When he was eleven years old, his mother caught the flu and subsequently died, meaning that Beck was sent to a Catholic orphanage. Over the coming years Beck was treated harrowingly. Starting off in Canada, where him and a few of his orphanage friends were sent to stay with priests until the time would come for them to find new homes. Filled with anger and mistrust, did Beck ever get out of the cycle of hardship and cruelty, to become a man who was capable of love, and a happy ending? Firstly, I need to give potential readers a warning. This book has been marked as a Young Adult book, but with graphic scenes of violence, plus emotional, and sexual abuse, I would say this book is not suitable for those under 16. Yes, it is a story true to life and these things happen, but it does leave images in your head, that even I at 39 years old I could not shift for a few days. The book does have you thinking about life and the hardships that black people endured, having been deemed second class citizens and looked down on by society. Beck himself though is a mixed bag, his story is filled with emotion, but at times the writing was a little lacking, meaning that I didn't always connect with him. The book takes you to some dark places, and yet at times also gives you an uplift. It is thought-provoking, and tough to read in parts, but if you get the chance, I feel that this is going to be one of those books that in the future will become a modern day classic. I'm just sorry that Mal Peet didn't live long enough to see the end result of his book. Beck was completed by his good friend, Meg Rosoff. Reviewed on [Whispering Stories Book Blog](#)\*I received a free copy of this book, which I voluntarily reviewed

My thanks to NetGalley for the opportunity to read and review *BECK*. *BECK* is beautifully written. It is a difficult read because it is based on historical injustices in the early 1900's. I was drawn into the storyline as the author chronicled Beck's misery as an orphan sent to Canada and all the abuse s he endured. It was very dramatic and terribly brutal and raw. Beck's character didn't evolve until the

last 10% of the book. The first 60 pages were terribly graphic depicting child and sexual abuse. The couple with whom he experienced familial love abruptly ended, and their situation was not resolved. Most of the book had unresolved scenarios, but I saw this as a picture of an orphaned black boy: wandering, walking because he had no where to call home , physically and emotionally. Then there was Grace. Grace, the woman, and grace, that divine attribute that had eluded Beck his entire life. The literary elements are breathtaking: the burning tree, the burning man, and Beck's resolve never again to be consumed by the fire of hate and bigotry. The denouement is uplifting, thankfully. Beck finally finds grace and salvation. I am distressed this is considered a children's book, however. It most certainly is not. It is a hauntingly dark, beautifully written saga of a very dark time in history.

This is a brave and beautifully written book. Realistic, yet imaginative and filled with evocative language, it reminded me of the power of human connection to save the soul. I felt like I was along with Beck, the main character, as he made his harrowing journey to self-discovery and love. It brought to mind those rare, yet transformative relationships in my own life and, like them, this book will always be with me.

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