

25 Great Books by Refugees in America, by Gal Beckman, New York Times, January 30, 2017

One way to regard the refugees in the news these frenzied past few days is as potential Americans, individuals and families escaping bad situations who imagine themselves building new lives here. What these particular refugees could become in this country, and how they could contribute to our society and culture, is a question stuck in suspended animation. But we do have the power to look to the past. And in the literary realm it's unquestionable that refugees, once here, often make major contributions.

1. **Bertolt Brecht, "The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui" (1941) Country of origin: German; Fiction.** Reason for leaving: Fled Nazi Germany for Denmark in 1933, and then came to the United States in 1941 when war broke out.
2. **Hans Augusto Rey and Margret Rey, "Curious George" (1941) Country of origin: Germany; Children's.** Reason for Leaving: German Jews who escaped from their native Hamburg to Brazil and then France, only to leave again for the United States in 1940 just as the Nazis invaded.
3. **Karl Polanyi, "The Great Transformation" (1944) Country of origin: Austria; Politics & Social Sciences.** Reason for Leaving: With Hitler's rise, prominent socialists like Polanyi were imperiled, so he left for England in 1933 and then arrived in Vermont in 1940.
4. **Thomas Mann, "Doctor Faustus" (1947) Country of origin: Germany; Fiction.** Reason for leaving: An opponent of Hitler's rise, Mann left for Switzerland in 1933 and eventually emigrated to the United States in 1939.
5. **Theodor Adorno, "The Authoritarian Personality" (1950) Country of origin: Germany; Non-fiction.** Reasons for leaving: After being dismissed from his teaching position in 1932 by the Nazis, Adorno left to study at Oxford and then moved to the United States in 1938.
6. **Hannah Arendt, "The Origins of Totalitarianism" (1951), Country of origin: Germany; Politics & Social Sciences.** Reasons for leaving: In 1933, Arendt, a German Jew, left her country and eventually settled in Paris, where she helped Jewish refugees. Once the Vichy regime took over, she herself was interned as an "enemy alien," but managed to emigrate and settle in New York in 1941.
7. **Leo Strauss, "Natural Right and History" (1953), Country of origin: Germany; Civil Rights.** Reasons for leaving: Already teaching in England when the Nazis came to power, Strauss was prevented from returning and moved to the United States in 1937.
8. **Vladimir Nabokov, "Lolita" (1955), Country of origin: Russia; Fiction.** Reasons for leaving: Born to Russian nobility, Nabokov and his family fled the Bolshevik Revolution, living in a succession of European countries. He eventually moved to America in 1940, where he took up work as an entomologist at the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard, among other jobs.
9. **Isabel Allende, "The House of the Spirits" (1982), Country of origin: Chile; Fiction.** Reasons for leaving: Allende fled to Venezuela in 1973 after the coup that brought down Salvador Allende, the socialist leader and her father's cousin. She moved to California in the late 1980s.
10. **Czeslaw Milosz, "Bells in Winter" (1985), Country of origin: Poland; Poetry.** Reason for leaving: After surviving World War II in Poland and initially joining the postwar Communist government, Milosz defected in 1951, eventually emigrating to the United States in 1960.
11. **Joseph Brodsky, "Less Than One" (1986), Country of origin: Soviet Union; Essays.** Reason for leaving: Put on trial and into psychiatric institutions for his dissident beliefs, Brodsky was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1972.
12. **Nuruddin Farah, "Maps" (1986) Country of origin: Somalia; Fiction.** Reasons for leaving: Exiled from Somalia in the mid-1970s for writing about life under the harsh rule of the dictator Mohammed Siad Barre.

- 13. Ariel Dorfman, “Death and the Maiden” (1990), Country of origin: Chile; Play.** Reasons for leaving: A cultural adviser to the deposed socialist leader Salvador Allende, Dorfman was forced to flee the country in 1973.
- 14. Reinaldo Arenas, “Before Night Falls” (1992) Country of origin: Cuba; Memoir.** Reasons for leaving: Imprisoned for his writing, he was able to emigrate to America as part of the Mariel Boatlift in 1980.
- 15. Cristina Garcia, “Dreaming in Cuban” (1992), Country of origin: Cuba; Fiction.** Reasons for leaving: Her family was among the first wave of people to escape from Cuba in 1961 shortly after Fidel Castro took power.
- 16. Henry Kissinger, “Diplomacy” (1994), Country of origin: Germany; International Relations.** Reasons for leaving: A German Jew, he fled with his family in 1938.
- 17. Loung Ung, “First They Killed My Father” (2001), Country of origin: Cambodia; Biography.** Reasons for leaving: Escaped from Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, ending up in Vermont.
- 18. Madeleine Albright, “Madam Secretary” (2003), Country of origin: Czechoslovakia; Biography.** Reasons for leaving: Hitler’s takeover of parts of Czechoslovakia forced her family, supporters of the early Czech democrat Edvard Benes, to go into exile and finally emigrate to the United States in 1948.
- 19. Dinaw Mengestu, “The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears” (2007), Country of origin: Ethiopia; Fiction.** Reasons for leaving: His family fled Ethiopia’s Communist revolution in 1980, when he was 2, and they found their way to Peoria, Ill.
- 20. Ishmael Beah, “A Long Way Gone” (2007), Country of origin: Sierra Leone; Memior.** Reasons for leaving: Forced to become a child soldier at the age of 12, Beah eventually escaped Freetown in 1997 with the help of Unicef and ended up in New York City.
- 21. Masha Gessen, “The Man Without a Face” (2012), Country of origin: Soviet Union; Politics & Social Sciences.** Reasons for leaving: Gessen’s family was Jewish and denied religious freedom in the Soviet Union (or the right to freely emigrate). In 1981 her family was granted permission to leave.
- 22. Vaddey Ratner, “In the Shadow of the Banyan” (2012), Country of origin: Cambodia; Fiction.** Reasons for leaving: Ratner and her mother escaped the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979 after enduring four years of forced labor, starvation and near execution. They immigrated to rural Missouri.
- 23. Gary Shteyngart, “Little Failure” (2014), Country of origin: Soviet Union; Memior.** Reasons for leaving: Like other Soviet Jews, Shteyngart and his family felt discriminated against in the Soviet Union and were allowed to emigrate in 1979.
- 24. Viet Thanh Nguyen, “The Sympathizer” (2015), Country of origin: Vietnam; Fiction.** Reasons for leaving: Nguyen’s family escaped Vietnam in 1975 and lived in a Pennsylvania refugee camp before settling in Harrisburg.
- 25. Vu Tran, “Dragonfish” (2015), Country of origin: Vietnam; Fiction.** Reasons for leaving: Born in Saigon in 1975, five months after the city fell to the North Vietnamese, Tran left by boat in 1980 with his mother and sister, spending five days at sea.