



# The Country Under My Skin: A Memoir of Love and War

By Gioconda Belli

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"A passionate, lyrical, tough-minded account of an extraordinary life in art, revolution, and love. It's a book to relish, to read and re-read. Unforgettable." -- Salmon Rushdie

An electrifying memoir from the acclaimed Nicaraguan writer ("A wonderfully free and original talent"—Harold Pinter) and central figure in the Sandinista Revolution.

Until her early twenties, Gioconda Belli inhabited an upper-class cocoon: sheltered from the poverty in Managua in a world of country clubs and debutante balls; educated abroad; early marriage and motherhood. But in 1970, everything changed. Her growing dissatisfaction with domestic life, and a blossoming awareness of the social inequities in Nicaragua, led her to join the Sandinistas, then a burgeoning but still hidden organization. She would be involved with them over the next twenty years at the highest, and often most dangerous, levels.

Her memoir is both a revelatory insider's account of the Revolution and a vivid, intensely felt story about coming of age under extraordinary circumstances. Belli writes with both striking lyricism and candor about her personal and political lives: about her family, her children, the men in her life; about her poetry; about the dichotomies between her birth-right and the life she chose for herself; about the failures and triumphs of the Revolution; about her current life, divided between California (with her American husband and their children) and Nicaragua; and about her sustained and sustaining passion for her country and its people.

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## **The Country Under My Skin: A Memoir of Love and War By Gioconda Belli Bibliography**

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## **Editorial Review**

### **From Publishers Weekly**

Belli's upper-class Nicaraguan family was unsympathetic to the Somoza dictatorship, but would have been shocked to learn that their 20-something daughter was joining the underground Sandinistas even as she worked her bourgeois day job at a prestigious advertising agency. This lush memoir follows Belli from her sterile marriage to her first affair, from her first published poem to her first subversive act, and then through a series of exiles, until her triumphant return to her liberated homeland... only to face another struggle to liberate her own heart. The account is both intensely personal and informatively political. Belli (*The Inhabited Woman*) was no mere sympathizer or mistress to a compaero but an active militant and strategist in her own right. She smuggled weapons, ran roadblocks, formed factions with revolutionary tendencies, argued strategy with Castro and represented liberated Nicaragua at Third World conferences from Moscow to Tripoli. An honest, insider's account of the very real debates surrounding this major revolution would be valuable in itself, but Belli offers more: a frank examination of her own struggle for love. Only after a series of disastrous affairs does she realize she must stop adjusting herself to how she expects her lover will react and just be herself. Next to the monumental upheavals of the Sandinista revolution, such personal revelations may seem minor, but to Belli and her compañeras, the battle was only half won if women were again relegated to mistress-to-the-mighty status. Belli shares her story in some 50 brief chapters, each subtitled to foreshadow content—an oddly reassuring format. 8 pages of photos not seen by PW.

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### **From Booklist**

\*Starred Review\* Belli, author of the acclaimed novel *The Inhabited Woman* (1994), could have simply enjoyed the benefits of upper-class Nicaraguan life as a young wife and mother, but privileged domesticity could not contain her questing spirit. She soon launched a successful advertising career in Managua, found her soul mates among writers and revolutionaries, and became both a celebrated poet and a Sandinista, risking her life in her country's fight for freedom. Belli's dramatic and heroic story is an epic of liberation both personal and communal, and she chronicles her harrowing experiences with magnetic candor and lithe lyricism, sharing her insider's view of the Sandinistas' hard-won, tragically brief victory and the wrenching anguish of their annihilation thanks to Reagan and Bush and the Iran-Contra debacle. Motherhood and love affairs under fire, gun running and media work, poetry prizes and exile, and ceaseless combat against misogyny and despair, Belli's powerfully told story reveals the symbiotic give-and-take of body and soul, art and politics, and altruism and pragmatism that make up the human continuum. A tribute to beauty, valor, and justice, Belli's giving and clarion book is also an antidote to fear and apathy, and a reminder that freedom is always a work in progress. *Donna Seaman*

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### **Review**

“A poetic, penetrating and revelatory tale of love and war, literature and politics. . .lyrical, dramatic and incisive, Belli's soulful self-portrait and paean to her beautiful, beleagured country is at once timely and timeless, tragic and life-affirming.” —*The Chicago Tribune*

“Love and revolution have rarely been so splendidly and provocatively intertwined than in this heretic memoir of a woman's sensual and intellectual voyage of self-discovery in Nicaragua.” —Ariel Dorfman

“Gioconda Belli's memoir reads better than a novel. It recounts her larger-than-life experiences as a

revolutionary, lover, and mother with honesty, passion, intelligence and, above all, poetry. **The Country Under My Skin** is as much the story of Nicaragua as it is one extraordinary woman's dreams.” –Cristina Garcia

“The poet and novelist Gioconda Belli has written no ordinary memoir. This book is about American history, North and South; about power and the seeds of revolution; about one woman's life and choices entangled among many lives--and deaths--expended in the unkillable hope for human freedom and love. If her life seems romantic, she writes with the strength and clarity of a realist.” –Adrienne Rich

“Unravels [the] contradictions. . .all too common among powerful women—with characteristic candor and dignity. . .Often joyous, surprisingly fluid.” –*Salon*

“Engaging. . .When Belli speaks from the depths of her woman's insight. . . her prose pierces the heart. . .A window to one woman's extraordinary journey.” –*San Antonio Express*

“A surprisingly frank picture of the movement. . .Belli presents a complex picture, revealing the ego clashes and massive blunders as well as moments of incredible bravery under fire.” –*Los Angeles Magazine*

“Belli recalls with engaging candor the course of a life lived to the full. In its twist and turns, moments of danger followed by intense romantic encounters, Belli's memoir can resemble exuberant historical fiction. . A luminously written, always insightful account of one woman's encounter with personal and political liberation.” –*Kirkus Reviews*

“Gioconda Belli has had a unique place in modern Nicaraguan history. . . . [Her] progress through her various love affairs mirrors Nicaragua's history during the same period. . . . Introduces us to an astute veteran of two eternal wars, one between the sexes and one that pits the world's poor against its rich.” –*The New York Review of Books*

“A lush memoir....both intensely personal and informatively political....An honest, insider's account of the very real debates surrounding this major revolution would be valuable in itself, but Belli offers more: a frank examination of her struggle for love.” –*Publishers Weekly*

“A tribute to beauty, valor, and justice. Belli's giving and clarion book is also an antidote to fear and apathy, and a reminder that freedom is always a work in progress.” –*Booklist*

“Romantic and engaging.” –*Philadelphia City Paper*

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