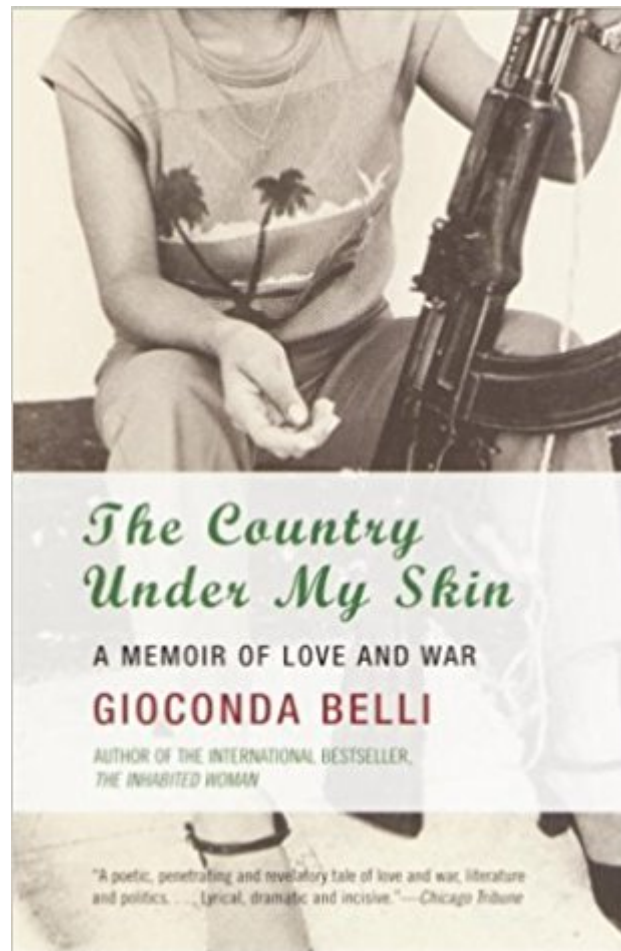




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# The Country Under My Skin: A Memoir Of Love And War



## Synopsis

"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 (Álvaro Fombona "A wonderfully free and original talent" --Álvaro Fombona --Álvaro Fombona •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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## Customer Reviews

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 *compa*— *Â*pero 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 Sandinistan revolution, such personal revelations may seem minor, but to Belli and her *companeras*, 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. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

**\*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 SeamanCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The title of this book is misleading: For one, it doesn't mention the fact that it's about Nicaragua, which is a central point. Yet I did like this book very much. It probably helped that I read it while visiting Nicaragua. It helped me understand the country and gave me a flavor for recent history. The writing is fluid and carries you from page to page as you wonder what will happen next in Belli's fascinating life. Some might say that she's preoccupied with herself and her cause, but I found her explanations of why she became as involved as she did to be compelling. I also loved her take on how her gender influenced her involvement in the war, and how she paved new paths as a woman with power and revolutionary tendencies. The name dropping is fun, her descriptions lovely, and the story a good read. I'd recommend the book to anyone who is interested in this period of history, as well as to those who want to learn more about the Sandinistas, Nicaragua's recent past, and the balance of power in this revolution that made the front pages of many world newspapers.

I thought I had long ago written a review for this great memoir. After all I used Belli's understanding of the struggle for a character in my novel. I apologize for not posting this sooner, especially since I read it in just a few days as it was full of suspense and steadily brought the reader to the understanding of a Revolutionary woman who was soon made to feel her services weren't needed anymore once the Revolution had happened. Perhaps that explains why the changes didn't last? Belli's story is one of great courage, fortitude and understanding. Belli, obviously loved her people very much, since she was one of the few who could have escaped but didn't. Belli is talented, not only as a poet, but also as a storyteller. I sincerely hope we get some more prose from this amazing woman and writer. Thank you for writing such a beautiful and eye-opening book.

This has to be one of the top ten books I have read. I am absolutely in love with Giaconda Belli's style of writing and reading this story made me experience a plethora of feelings from excitement and adventure to passion and heartbreak. She opens the book of her life for us and takes us from her childhood as a wealthy debutante in Nicaragua to rebel revolutionary. Her story is absolutely amazing and she tells it as an ideologist, rebel, revolutionary, wife, mother, lover, daughter, woman... It is the voice of a woman torn with doing what is right for her and her family, to what is right for her country to what her heart guides her to do. She's lived a life filled with passion and her

prose is expressed with pure heart. A beautiful book...

Senora Belli has given us a well-written but in my opinion, a rather egotistical look at her involvement with the Sandanista movement. It's challenging to take her commitment to a political movement seriously when we see how predictably irresponsible she was in her love life and observe her lack of commitment to her children. That being said, I found it interesting that the Sandanista revolutionaries started out as a pure and noble group looking for a better life for the poor, but as they achieved power, were corrupted by that same power.

A book of unbelievable passion, honesty and what it is like to be so involved in something beyond and greater than oneself. I could only read a few chapters at a time. I was then filled with so much passion myself for the cause of Nicaragua, her life, and the whole enterprise. I also thought she was so honest about herself, the Sandinistas, the Contras and all concerned. She had her own passions but she so understood the historical moment that she could see where the other side was coming from. I felt sad at the end for her small country against a giant, but proud of them for their struggle and dignity at the same time. A read that will stay with me for a long time.

The Country Under My Skin: A Memoir of Love and War is a very informative book about the Nicaraguan revolution written by Giocanda Belli who is a national poet of Nicaragua. It is a unique perspective in that she was raised as one of the Spanish heritage elite in Nicaragua but her heart was for the native peoples of the country and she was recruited by the Sandanista rebels for many activities from spying to transporting people across borders and diplomacy with sympathetic countries including Cuba and Panama. She lived out these years filled with risk taking and romances never hesitating to push the edges of safety to help bring down the oppressive government in Nicaragua. I read this in preparation of a trip to Nicaragua last March and it brought the recent history of the country alive for me. I even stayed in a hotel in the mountains that had been a rebel stronghold! If you are interested in the other side of the story about Central American revolutions than the one given us by Ronald Reagan, you will enjoy this book.

I have really enjoyed the book for its intelligent and beautiful language, its personal angle on historical events, and for its impressive and rare honesty. I was interested more in Nicaragua than in the life of the author and, honestly, I expected a rather tiring book written from a one-sided political perspective. I got MUCH more than I expected. I was truly impressed by the book and I am actually

very grateful to the author for sharing with us her life and her insights. This book is a rare gem and I think it should be more known. From a reader's perspective, the book starts very well, gets a little slow in the middle, and really picks up for the last 70 or so pages.

I loved the book. I needed to find out more about Nicaragua after I visited the country ( I lived in a family in Granada for 2 weeks which is the best way to understand local life - I was studying in a Spanish Language School) and fell in love with it. The book gave me additional info about the difficult times of the country and was interesting to read.

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