

**GIOCONDA BELLI (1948–)**  
***THE COUNTRY UNDER MY SKIN (2001)***

We had taken over. The experience evoked images of the Allied troops arriving at towns abandoned by the Nazis at the end of the Second World War. That was the kind of joy the people greeted us with, and that was the power void in which we found ourselves: a clean-slate situation. The state had been completely dissolved. There were no courts, no police, no army, no government ministries. Just abandoned offices, deserted military bunkers. It was an odd sensation to have been subversive guerrillas and fugitives only a day earlier, and now, suddenly—as young as we were, no less—to find ourselves in a city deserted by the ancient regime, conscious that from then on, everything was up to us.

Managua was in a state of euphoric chaos, and some people did succumb to anarchy. The disenfranchised pillaged the uninhabited, locked-up houses of the rich and the military. Guerrillas with their red and black bandannas took the vehicles that the Somoza supporters had left behind in their frantic flight, and drove with glee through the city streets at full speed. Men and women from self-appointed popular militia units decided to assume the role of traffic police or general vigilantes, arbitrarily performing some arrests . . .

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In Managua the initial chaos subsided relatively quickly, at least on the surface. The capital hadn't suffered nearly as much damage as some other cities, and apart from the boys in olive drab all over the place, Managua's day-to-day life began showing signs of a return to normality. The only exceptions were the nighttime skirmishes, which took longer to let up. . . . I remember hearing various members of the Sandinista leadership comment on how difficult it was for young men and women to live together in the same military barracks. For the first time ever, I heard someone suggest that perhaps women should be barred from active service. I considered that ludicrous and said so. How could they even think such a thing when women had already proven themselves to be as able fighters as men during the insurrection? Nevertheless, some months later, the top army officials . . . decided that from that point on women would only occupy administrative posts. They justified the decision by saying it was a question of money, that keeping men and women soldiers separate was a giant headache that incurred far too many additional expenses.

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With time, the Revolution's stance grew more and more rigid. Powerful economic groups and the extremist Left began to challenge the revolutionary reforms—the former because their own interests were being threatened, and the latter because their extremist demands were not being met. . . . Rather than working toward an all-inclusive social pact, we decreed a new order because we felt it was the only way to remain true to the impoverished masses. Lacking a democratic tradition of our own, we took advantage of the authority we yielded. We might have considered ourselves very benevolent, but the truth was we had inherited a long legacy of authoritarianism.

I would like to think that with time, the Revolution could have muddled through its own confusion to eventually arrive at a fair, equitable balance. Sadly, we will never know what would have happened to our nation if Nicaraguans had taken full responsibility of the country's future, without foreign intervention. Ronald Regan began his presidency in 1981. His electoral platform stated: "We deplore the Sandinista takeover of Nicaragua, as well as Marxist attempts to destabilize El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala."

All too quickly, the bad omens had become a reality.

**Taken from Gioconda Belli, *The County Under My Skin: A Memoir of Love and War*. Translated Kristina Cordero (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 249, 262–263, 276–277.**

**DOMINGO FAUSTINO SARMIENTO (1811–1888)**  
***FACUNDO (1845)***

. . . Don Juan Manuel Rosas, who applied the knife of the gaucho to the culture of Buenos Aires, destroyed the work of centuries—of civilization, law, and liberty.

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Rosas invented nothing; his talent was only that of copying his predecessors and combining the brutal instincts of the ignorant masses into a coolly planned system.

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Until within the last century it was the custom in all the countries of Europe for the executioner to be dressed in red. The armies of Rosas wore a red uniform; his likeness is stamped on a red ribbon.

The Argentine revolution of independence was symbolized by two blue stripes and one white one; signifying justice, peace, justice.

The amendment made by Facundo was approved by Rosas, was a red band, signifying terror, blood, barbarism.

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. . . did we not know from Don Juan Manuel Rosas how much terror can do, not only with the poor gaucho, but with the illustrious general and the proud, wealthy citizen. As I have already said, terror produces greater results than patriotism.

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Thus the interior had now a chief . . . Rosas had already begun to influence public affairs very decidedly. After . . . he was made governor of Buenos Aires, and until 1832 [he] filled the office as well as any other would have done. I must not omit a significant fact. From the first, Rosas demanded to be invested with absolute power, but was strongly opposed by his partisans in the city. By persuasions and deceptions he succeeded in obtaining it . . . The city of Buenos Aires did not then imagine that it could exist as an absolute government, whatever the principles of its political parties might be. Rosas, however, resisted, gently but ably. “It is not that I wish to make use of such power,” he said, “but, as my secretary, García Zúñiga, says, the schoolmaster must hold his whip in hand that his authority may be respected.” He considered this comparison entirely appropriate, and repeated it frequently—the citizens were the children, the governor, man and master.

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Rosas . . . learned all the entrances to the citadel, and all the ill-fortified points; and if he then left the government, it was only to take it by assault from the outside,

without any constitutional restrictions, without being fettered by responsibility to anyone. He laid down the truncheon to take up first the sword, and afterward the battle-axe. Not long after he resigned the government, a great expedition, led by himself, was prepared to extend and protect the southern boundaries of the province which were exposed to frequent invasions of the savages . . . But Rosas had no idea of engaging in any enterprise which tended only toward the good of the Republic. His troops marched as far as Rio Colorado, moving slowly, and making observations on the soil, climate, and other circumstances of the country through which they passed. They destroyed some Indian huts, and took a few poor prisoners; and this was all that was effected by the great expedition, which left the frontier as defenceless as it had been before, and is still . . . Rosas then raised for the first time his red flag, like that of Algiers, and assumed the title of Hero of the Desert, in addition to that already acquired, of Restorer of the Laws—those same laws which he was now about to destroy.

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Rosas assumed for himself the care of thinking for all; he must be the head, and the governors of the provinces the arms, hands, and feet, to execute his will; each member to be used, according to its capacity, for anything but thought in behalf of the Republic: the construction of the government was to be his own work.

**Taken from Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Life in the Argentine Republic in the Days of the Tyrants; or Civilization and Barbarism*, trans. Horace Mann (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1868): 53, 60, 138–139, 208, 219–221, 272.**