



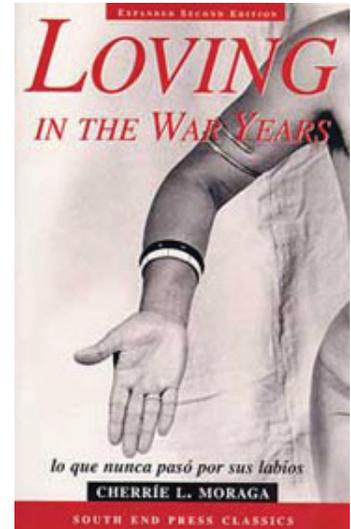
Loving in the War Years Cherrie Moraga

Loving in the War Years, written by Cherrie Moraga, presents its reader with various critiques and desires for the future of the Chicano/a movement and Chicana feminism in particular. Moraga discusses historical myths and narratives of Chicana culture. She reveals her own struggle as a lesbian and her interaction with men in her community. She also discusses the role of academia and writing within the Chicana Movement. Moraga tackles a wide array of issues facing the Chicana community, ultimately concluding that education, compassion, openness, and pride among Chicanas are the tools necessary to help the movement progress.

Moraga sets a high standard for her writing as she quotes Kafka that “A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us” (174). This inevitably compels the reader to ask the same question in regard to *Loving in the War Years*. Does Moraga’s writing serve as an “axe” to the frozen sea, or is it simply just another book?

Loving in the War Years can roughly be divided into two parts. Although the entire text flows along the continuum of Moraga’s life and struggle as a Chicana lesbian, the first section of the book, pre-1995, is presented in a journal format. While the post-1995 segment “A Flor de Labios” seems to take on a format common to academia.

The first section of *Loving in the War Years* reads like a coming of age story. It is wrought with the confusion, frustration, and beauty that accompany maturity and the inward search to find oneself. This is clearly present in Moraga’s struggle to find her own identity as a Chicana with a white complexion, and to understand and freely express her sexuality and sexual preferences. Moraga’s struggle to define herself in relation to others, and particularly in the Chicana/o community, her attempts to balance her mother’s values with her own, and her struggle to take pride in herself, all serve as an “axe for the frozen “sea inside” the reader.



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Reviewed by Mary Feeney



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The confusion and personal struggle Moraga recounts speaks to the reader as one is able to insert one's own struggle into Moraga's words. Moraga's poetry, in particular, depicts her struggle between two worlds.

Initially these worlds seem to collide. However, as the reader soon learns, Moraga progresses to a level where she is able to join those two worlds into rhythmic, strong poetry. Her poetry blends English and Spanish, intertwining them to create a fine-tuned song leaving any reader emotionally moved. In mastering a blend of these two languages, Moraga is defining her own blend of two cultures. Her poems are the metaphor for her own being. She emerges from feeling torn between two worlds to embracing both worlds, uniting them in poetic harmony. It is clear that writing, as a form of contemplation, is the medium for Moraga's coming of age.

Moraga's writing, especially her earlier works of the 1970s are laden with confusion. This initially compels one to believe that Moraga is too confused to speak for the Chicana movement. One wonders how she can criticize a weak disorganized movement, when she too appears weak and disorganized. How then, one asks, can she define and speak for a movement? Yet, as the book progresses this question is answered. Moraga is the movement. And as a Chicana lesbian who emerges from confusion to stand proud, she is the ideal spokeswoman for a movement that must emerge from its own confusion to stand proud. The reader is witness to Moraga's growth and coming of age as *Loving in the War Years* is a journal proclaiming her Chicano/a lesbian identity. This is the "axe" that she successfully provides for her audience.

The second part of Moraga's the book, titled "A Flor de Labias", contains writings from 1995-1999. This segment marks a clear departure from the earlier journal-style writing as it takes on a more "academic" format. Moraga moves away from the previous personal narration of Chicana lesbianism and her personal struggle with family and peers to discuss the political, economic and artistic debate in Chicana/o theory. Her language also transforms from the emotional poetry of her youth to the rhetoric of a professional academic.

In "A Flor de Labias", Moraga defines art as a representation of culture. She calls for the recognition of art and narratives written by, performed by, and witnessed by the "others" of society, women and people of colour. She discusses the lack of funding for the arts and its inaccessibility to anyone outside of the white-middle and upper-class societies of the United States.



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Moraga then extends this discussion into the use of language and rhetoric to represent ideas, create violence, and mend disputes. She defines language as a weapon of empowerment and a tool against oppression. This inevitably leads her into a critique of academia in the United States. Yet, unfortunately, in her critique of this academic world of language and theory, Moraga seems to fall into the very behavior she is attempting to criticize. Her language takes on a highfalutin aura of academic rhetoric. She is no longer the author speaking to the heart of the reader, but a professor addressing students and academic peers. The “personal”, the confusion, and the emotion, which made her earlier writings so powerful, are virtually nonexistent in the second section of *Loving in the War Years*.

Loving in the War Years is an important work because it is a narrative of the underrepresented. Moraga addresses important issues to not only the Chicana/o movement but to all activists, non-activists, and people who oppress and are oppressed. Unfortunately, *Loving in the War Years* attempts to address too many varying topics within one text. This results in a scattered text which lacks continuity. It seems to lead the reader down many roads without taking the reader anywhere in particular.

Finally, Moraga quotes August Wilson as to the purpose of a critic. “The true critic does not sit in judgment . . . a judge and final arbiter of a work’s importance or value” (161). So surely, this reader is not the final arbiter of *Loving in the War Years*. In closing, one must ask the most important question that Moraga puts to herself, Is this book an “axe to the frozen sea of our hearts”? One must acknowledge that each sea is different and each reader may require a different type of axe. Certainly Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years* can serve as that axe, especially as it narrates the cultural memory of an individual Chicana lesbian. And what more can an author do, but tell the story and immortalize the narrative?