



NANCY GRANITZ

**YOUNG AT HEART:** Now 75, the author has battled cancer

# Chronicle of a Life Foretold

## Volume 1 of García Márquez's memoirs evokes his early years

BY DAVID GATES

**A**MONG THE ODD FACTS THAT longtime aficionados of Gabriel García Márquez probably know and the rest of us don't is that during his apprentice years he wrote a radio soap opera—which, luckily both for him and for literature, was a flop. So it's appropriate that this master synthesizer of high and popular culture, who wrote "One Hundred Years of Solitude" listening to Debussy and the Beatles' "A Hard Day's Night," ends the first volume of his projected three-part memoir with a cliffhanger. On the final page, he's still a struggling novelist and an obscure journalist (except in Colombia), just landed in Europe for his first time, intending to stay four

days; he says this will stretch into 10 years, but doesn't know why. And he's just received a letter from the woman he'll marry, contents undisclosed.

The next installments may or may not appear—García Márquez, 75, has had cancer—and though he's surely our most influential living writer, we may or may not stay tuned. "Living to Tell the Tale" abundantly exhibits his gift for observation: he recalls that soap opera being recorded onto a disc "with a needle like a plow that left tufts of black, luminous, almost invisible filaments, like angel hair." A trip with his mother to sell the old family home in a now deserted town is as powerful an evocation of ruin and nostalgia as anything in his fiction. And it was his breakthrough as a writer, leading him out of "rhetorical invention" into "poetic truth."

But too much of this memoir is merely told, not evoked. The Colombian literary scene of the '40s and '50s must have been lively: even García Márquez marvels at the thought of a time and place when poetry mattered. Yet it's inert on the page; if you don't already know the players, you won't get much sense of them here. Too many anecdotes seem to be set down just because they happened. Do we care that a friend showed him a film script to which "I added something that I do not recall today"? And moments that meant everything to him mean nothing to us because his accounts of them are so vague and sketchy. He hears Colombian musicians who affect him so powerfully "that what had been a childhood enthusiasm was revealed to me ... as an inspired craft that would accompany me for the rest of my life"—and that's all about them.

"Living to Tell the Tale" gives foreglimpses of what's to come: García Márquez's friendship with Fidel Castro, the composition of his midlife masterworks and what it must be like to be the most revered writer on the planet. One tantalizing hint: even in his august 70s, "at gatherings of young people who could be my grandchildren, I have to make an effort not to feel younger than they." We can only hope he lives to tell the good stuff better. ■

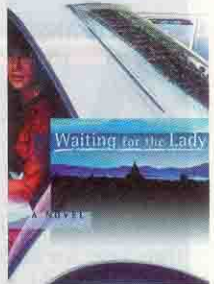
# Lust and Democracy

## A rare novel set in Burma

BY JOE COCHRANE

**T**HE TITLE OF CHRISTOPHER G. Moore's clever new novel, "Waiting for the Lady" (342 pages. Heaven Lake Press), refers to Burmese pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. And though Suu Kyi herself barely makes an appearance, this rich, languorous tale of love and suffering keeps her quest for democracy in the spotlight. Moore, a Canadian who's lived in Bangkok for 14 years, has written more than a dozen novels based in the region, mostly grimy detective stories. His latest manages to offer a sharp picture of life under Burma's military junta while preserving his trademark themes of lust and decadence among expatriate men in Asia. His narrator, Sloan Walcott, is a cynical, 53-year-old American photographer who smokes pot, drinks beer and cheats on his wife. He also becomes obsessed, for complicated reasons, with meeting Suu Kyi.

CHRISTOPHER G. MOORE



One of Moore's greatest strengths as a writer is his knowledge of Southeast Asian history. "Waiting for the Lady" brings the reader along on Sloan's quest through the beautifully tragic Burmese state, craftily weaving together an account of the country's colonial history with its current political problems. Moore captures Sloan's banal philosophical musings with great relish: "Much of life is like reading a bad translation of a great work of literature," he notes. "We can never know the original."

The book follows several compelling story lines—including a love affair between a Japanese officer and a Burmese comfort woman—that come together in a gripping climax. It takes so long to reach, however, that some readers may tire of Sloan's boorish behavior. The dialogue also reverts to silliness at times, like when Sloan has to stop himself from asking Suu Kyi (yes, he finally does meet her) the color of her panties. Still, in "Waiting for the Lady," Moore paints a memorable picture of a country woefully underrepresented in fiction. ■