

I WAS BORN in February 1930 in Zamoly, Hungary, in the middle of a stunningly cold winter and an equally severe economic crisis. My parents were of poor peasant stock and they were Protestant. They were at the mercy of bad crops but were also stubbornly independent in their religious beliefs and this helped them to survive.

Until the age of twelve, I had only rural notions about the world. For example, I couldn't imagine summer without the crackling of hay, dust-laden acacia trees and sleepy hens. Once in my later years, as I was at the beach on the Atlantic, I heard in the snapping of tall waves the sizzle of a startled flock of starlings.

World War II initiated me into adulthood from one day to the next. I should have said, with some bitterness, that the war made me contemporary and urbane. I was thrust from the side of oxen into the thicket of twentieth-century catastrophies. During the war, my village changed hands seventeen times within three and a half months. After the front moved on, we buried people and animals for two days. After that the trenches and underground bunkers.

My first writings were born of indignation. Understandably, they had more moral worth than aesthetic. Even now one can detect the muffled struggle of these two forces in my poems and lyric texts that masquerade as prose. My education consists of four years of honor courses in high school and two semesters of play at a university. After that I fled from any kind of dogmatism and pedagogical direction. To be brief, I'm a self-taught man.

Fourteen books of mine have seen print: seven volumes of poems and seven volumes of prose, including two books of essays. I wrote a book on Cuba and another about the transformation of Hungarian village life. I should also mention my

writing of screenplays in collaboration with Ferenc Kósa and Sándor Sára. Together we have written the scripts for six feature-length films, including *Ten Thousand Days*, the winner of the Grand Prize at the Cannes Film Festival.

The many genres carried me toward one fundamental concern: to preserve the "I" in our war against dehumanizing impersonalization. If miracles don't interest us anymore, then what good does it do if they happen? If the ocean visits me by coming to my window and I, the host, don't know anything about myself, then what good will it do?

*Sándor Csoóri*