Chinghiz Torekulovich Aitmatov was born on 12th of December 1928 in Sheker, a village in the Soviet Republic of Kirghizia. Both his parents were literate and had enjoyed schooling in a society of oral tradition. It is remarkable that the future writer’s mother, although belonging to a Muslim society with nomad way of life, with authority and power exercised above all by men, had been given access to education. As to Chinghiz Aitmatov’s father, he was one of the first Communists in Kirghizia, devoted to a cause which in his eyes was great; in the late thirties he was invited to Moscow in order to receive higher instruction in Marxist philosophy and there, in the Soviet capital, Torekul Aitmatov in 1937 was arrested; he disappeared.

Chinghiz, the eldest of his four children, later on dedicated one of his books – Materinskoje pole, Mother Earth – to his living mother and his dead father, saying of the latter that he, the son, does not know where Torekul is buried. Presumably Torekul Aitmatov died in prison or in a concentration camp. In his son’s books the theme of the young boy who has lost his father at war or by human or political oppression and injustice appears more than once, and most clearly and openly in “I dolshe veka dlit’ia dien”, A Day Longer than a Century (1981). There two small boys lose their father who is made a prisoner by Stalin’s police because he has started writing down, for his children, his memories of his participation in partisan fighting in Yugoslavia. This father, longing for his dearly loved children, dies of a heart disease soon after his arrest, a heart attack, of a broken heart, so to speak, because his love for his sons was so deep and passionate that he could not bear to be separated from them and deprived of the fulfillment of his paternal duties.

During the Second World War, the adolescent Chinghiz Aitmatov lived in his home village Sheker, where he entered into acquaintance with sorrow and suffering: for he was made, at the age of fourteen, secretary of the village administration and as such had to deliver to the bereaved families the official note announcing the death of a father, son, husband or brother. He also knew the grievous experience of hunger and poverty, his own and that of all those who were still living in the
village after all the able-bodied men had gone to join the Red Army. At that time the boy Chinghiz came to know how strong and courageous women can be. He also met with dedicated old men and adolescents, and with veterans of the army who had come back from the war, having lost an arm or a leg but still able to take part in the hard work which was being done by the rural population at home.

The first story Chinghiz Aitmatov was to write, in opposition to Soviet war literature in general, given to celebrating heroes eager to fight and to die for their country and their fellow citizens, tells us of a young soldier born in Central Asia who refuses to risk his life in a war the Russians are having with the Germans, a war he himself, so he says, has nothing to do with. Therefore he becomes a deserter and hides in the mountains in the vicinity of his village. Chinghiz Aitmatov had difficulties in getting his story published, and before the publication the young writer had to shorten it considerably. Only recently has he published the complete version of "Litcom k litcu" (From Face to Face).

Before turning to literature, the young man had studied the natural sciences, zoology and veterinary medicine, and he had worked for some time as a zoo technician, a specialist in animal breeding. He has a very great knowledge of animals, both tame and wild - this knowledge is helpful in the creation of allegory and myth - and the writer says that he endeavours to describe the animal according to its own experience of life, instead of imitating other writers who are interested in animal life but describe animals with too human a view and within a human interpretation.

In the early fifties Chinghiz Aitmatov began to publish his first writings. He used his Kirghiz mother tongue with great art. In a short autobiographical note which he wrote in 1971 he said that his paternal grandmother, a wonderful woman, introduced him into the language and the culture, the customs and the oral poetry, of Kirghizia. But thanks to his open-minded parents, Aitmatov as a small boy acquired a good knowledge of Russian - therefore he is able to write his books indifferently in the Kirghiz or in the Russian language and to himself translate his books from one of these languages into the other.

When he had discovered his vocation for literature, Aitmatov went to Moscow and studied at the Gorki Institute of Literature. After finishing this course of introduction to writing and literary creation, he worked for some time as a journalist, having been made a correspondent of Pravda in Kirghizia. This activity brought him the opportunity to observe