

Carlo Alberto Gallo interviews **András Maros**

András Maros (1971) is a writer, playwright and screenwriter from Budapest, Hungary. He is one of most popular authors of his generation in his home country. He has written more than 250 literary publications in Hungarian national journals, weeklies, dailies. His two novels and three collections of short stories were published by the most prestigious Hungarian publishers; they were all received very well by both the critics and the audience ([Love Forty](#), 2013, Magvető Publishing, Budapest; [Gotta Go On](#), 2012, Magvető Publishing, Budapest; [Lemonade](#), 2008, Ulpius-ház Publishing, Budapest; [I Want To Hear Names](#), 2003, Palatinus Publishing House, Budapest; [Pouffe](#), 2001, Palatinus Publishing House, Budapest). His plays have been performed by national theatre companies. The one called Suspicious Moves was selected and produced by WorldPlay 2013 (an international staged reading festival in Vancouver, Canada). He has written two screenplays that were turned into produced movies: [Overnight](#) (a Hungarian-German-Indian co-production, 2007), director: Ferenc Török and a short film called *Rubberman* (2002), director: Károly Ujj Mészáros. He is the recipient of national awards, national and international fellowships. You can check out his homepage at andrasmaros.com. His novels [Love Forty](#) and [Lemonade](#) are represented for Italy by [AC² Literary Agency](#).

In the 1980s, in his teenage years, András Maros was a promising junior tennis player. Today his hard-working attitude pays off in his literate output: more than 250 publications in national literary journal, five books of fiction, several staged plays, screenplays turned into produced movies . . . His last book, Love Forty is a very funny sports memoir of a guy who was lucky enough to have the chance to occasionally go to Western Europe and play international tournaments there. On and off his trips he was constantly dreaming of breaking out—both from his own limitations as an athlete to the East Bloc—and becoming an international tennis star. Looking through the entertaining level of Love Forty, the reader will also come away with a powerful sense of what it meant to live and grow up in Eastern Europe, being isolated from the Western world while continuously desiring to be a part of it. Did you expect that Love Forty would be such a success?

I was pretty sure that with this book I would not only raise the attention of people who read contemporary literature anyway, but *Love Forty* would reach a much wider audience: first of all readers who like sports, secondly readers who are now in their thirties and forties; because they are the ones who were, just like the young tennis player narrator, in their teenage years at the time Communism died in Eastern Europe. But surprisingly enough, a younger group of readers got hooked on the novel, too: they tend to look at it as an “alternative and funny” history book.

Indeed, a critic of Népszabadság (national daily newspaper sold in the largest volume in Hungary) wrote the following: “Through the life of a Hungarian tennis club which copies the professional foreign ones—and is therefore funnily unprofessional—we get to know the ‘behind-the-iron-curtain-life’ of Hungary better as if we were watching the television news of those times. The humor of the book does not come from the author’s intention to be funny but from the absurdity, from the grotesqueness of the decade.”

True, I guess.

Tennis memoir: that’s how you categorized it. Is it really non-fiction?

It’s walking in and out of fiction and non-fiction. Which is something that has always interested me, even when I took my first steps in my writing career. I started out as a journalist (in 1995) but I

found facts boring. I realized that I was plugging in more and more fictional elements in my newspaper articles to make them more interesting and entertaining. I didn't wait till the editors caught me doing that, I left before, and "officially" began to write fiction. But my starting point in a new project is still often a real fact or just a real sentence that I catch somewhere. Then I twist around, extend and shape this raw material into a form that it becomes a story that corresponds to the actual problem that interests me at the moment. Back to your question and to *Love Forty*: when I began to publish short stories and novels, I was pretty sure that one day those important youth years that I had spent in sports would be written somehow, in some form. Even though a few of my previous writings had sports elements, motives in them (i.e. my play *Trash* is about a maniac 'basketball father'), *Love Forty* is definitely the one that sticks to the facts of my life the most. For the sake of the flow of the story, I had to invent effective chaptering and editing methods which sometimes required me to insert fictional elements, links, "bridges". But I must tell you: these transitions take less than 5% percent of the book. But they're still there, so, to be fully true to myself, I must admit that it is not a 100% non-fiction book. It's a novel.

Similarly to Love Forty, another of your novels, Lemonade is a tough one to label as well—but that one for a different reason. Am I right?

Yes, but only in Hungary. Because an entertaining literary novel is something that we don't have that many of. In Great Britain or in the US, nobody would question that literary quality can be matched with an easily digestable story, but here if your book is an easy read, critics get suspicious . . . In that sense *Lemonade* is more like the British-American model (which is very much my taste). I truly believe that a story with exciting twists and turns or with a funny narrative can be quality literature and at the same time it can talk about serious, contentful themes.

In some reviews you are referred to as the "Hungarian Nick Hornby".

Yes, after *Limonade*. Because, as I just said, it's an entertaining story, an easy read . . .

. . . which, in lower layers, contains serious material.

Yes, that's my "writer's intention" if you will . . .

Your writing style reminds us of American authors, your themes and topics are intercultural (or if they refer to Hungary or Eastern Europe they do it an a perspective that is appealing to foreigners) . . . the question is pretty obvious: do you plan to have your books published in foreign countries?

Yes, that's next step. I am quite optimistic that amongst my completed books at least *Love Forty* and *Lemonade* will shortly find their ways to foreign readers. I hope they'll soon be translated to several languages and will be published in foreign countries.