



**About the author: Judit Kováts** - writer and historian-archivist. She has had numerous academic articles published on the 19<sup>th</sup> century including several on the Age of Reform and has a particular interest in war history and military ordinance. She has had a number of essays and short stories published in various literary journals and on internet portals. Denied is her first novel.

Judit Kováts:

## Denied

2012, novel, 255 pages

**“You can’t free yourself of the past. You have to confront it.”**



The story begins in **1942** but the teenage Anna Somlyói and her girlfriends are more interested in love than the war. They are initially smitten with Governor Miklós Horthy’s son, a young and handsome pilot, and they secretly carry his picture with them wherever they go. Platonic infatuation is eventually replaced by true love in Anna’s last year at school when she loses her heart to András, a boy she has known since early childhood. Sadly, their love fails to flourish as war pulls the young couple apart.

As the front gets closer, local residents spend more and more time in underground hideaways as families try anything they can think of to keep their daughters safe from the evil clutches of Soviet troops: Anna manages to stay protected for the longest while but is eventually caught and raped on a daily basis from then on. They later take her to do “remunerative labour” from where she manages to escape several weeks later.

**Judit Kováts’ fascination for oral history has led her to interview eyewitnesses about the war, the front and the Russian occupation as well as kulak persecution and forced collectivisation. She collected over one hundred hours of material from twenty-three interviewees and this then became vital source material for her novel, which takes the Second World War as its theme and is narrated by an eighty-five-year-old woman who was a young girl about to graduate from grammar school in 1944.**

**This novel presents us with a picture of the war through a girl’s broken life in a way that history books and archive materials never could. Anna Somlyói is a fictional character but all that she tells us did actually take place in Hungary during World War II.**

The author’s documentarist approach results in a rather minimalistic style as Kováts presents us with events and leaves us to draw our own conclusions. Facts are stubborn things: events follow on one after the other and deeds rather than theories do the talking. Everyone struggles to stay alive in what is a critically reduced existence as they try to gain even the tiniest advantage for themselves, which could mean the difference between life and death.

**This book forces us to confront our past in a fascinating story with meaning of equal weight to its literary merit.**

## THE AUTHOR ABOUT HER NOVEL

„...We are not guilty of our fathers' sins but we have a duty to deal with our past in a responsible manner.” Elie Wiesel



“(...) Anna Somlyóí is a fictional character but everything she says did actually take place in history. **This novel presents us with a picture of the war through a girl's broken life in a way that history books and archive materials never could.**

**The novel looks closely at the question of confrontation, or rather lack of such confrontation, with the past.**

(...) It is an undeniable fact that, unlike many other countries, Hungarians have still not succeeded in **confronting their collective past** and have stepped into the 21<sup>st</sup> century without having fully dealt with the atrocities of **the Holocaust**, the injustices of **the 1956 Revolution**, or **the changes** that came to the country when **the Iron Curtain eventually fell away.**

The following question also occurred to me: **if we eventually feel the need to confront the past, what is it that we will find?**

What past will we see? The problem is that, over the years, so many “facts” have been changed, manipulated or simply denied and hidden from view!

I also wonder if we really do want to discover our past and, when we have, **whether or not we will be able to come to terms with it and accept it as our own.**

**My novel does tell of heroic deeds but also** describes the way in which people fought to get their hands on treasured possessions left behind by deported Jews and pulled clothes from the still warm bodies of dead soldiers to clothe their freezing bodies. It describes **scenes when people were willing to kill “their own kind”** because they were on the side of the Russians, or because they were battling to save themselves or someone close to them.

Perhaps most importantly of all, I think **it is important to say that our generation is beyond blame for the events of the past as none of us were alive back then but I agree with Elie Wiesel in that we are not guilty of our fathers' sins but we have a duty to deal with our past in a responsible manner. (...)**