

DECEIT

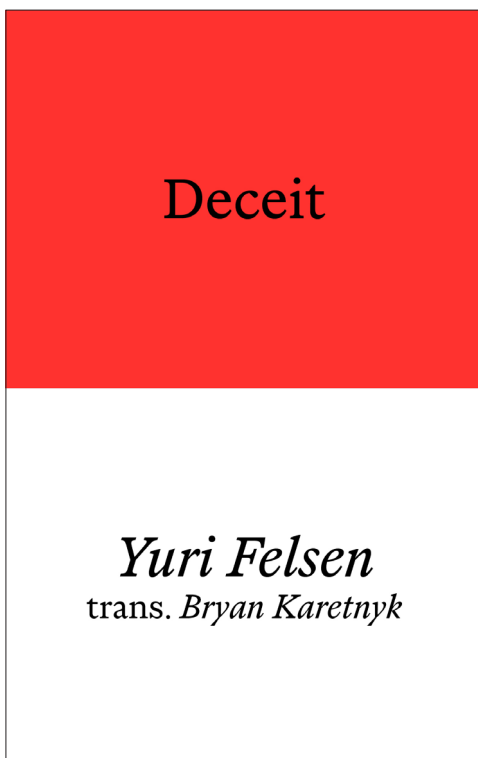
by **Yuri Felsen**

translated by **Bryan Karetnyk**

The lost debut novel by Russian émigré author Yuri Felsen, published for the first time in English in a new landmark edition.

'This is ... real literature, pure and honest'
Vladimir Nabokov

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Originally published in Russian in 1930, ***Deceit*** is the first major work by **Yuri Felsen**, referred to by his contemporaries as 'the Russian Proust', a significant writer of the 20th century Russian diaspora who died in the gas chambers in Auschwitz in 1943, and whose legacy and archive was destroyed by the Nazis.

Set in interwar Paris and taking the form of a diary, the novel relates the complex and fraught relationship between an unnamed narrator and his love interest and sometime muse, the beguiling Lyolya Heard. Subtle and profound in its exploration of love, deceit and betrayal, Felsen's novel is a daring and highly original work of psychological fiction.

Quite unlike any other writer in the Russian canon, Felsen evokes in rich, poetic, idiosyncratic prose not only the Zeitgeist of interwar Europe and his émigré milieu, but also its psychology and the existential crisis of the age. What Nabokov achieves with images and the physical world, Felsen does with the emotional and metaphysical.

This is the first English translation of this landmark modernist novel, and the first time that any of Felsen's full works have been translated into any language other than Russian.

ABOUT YURI FELSEN

Yuri Felsen was the pseudonym of Nikolai Freudenstein. Born in St Petersburg in 1894, he emigrated in the wake of the Russian Revolution, first to Riga and then to Berlin, before finally settling in Paris in 1923. In France, he became one of the leading writers of his generation, alongside the likes of Vladimir Nabokov; influenced by the great modernists such as Marcel Proust, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, his writing stood at the forefront of aesthetic and philosophical currents in European literature. Following the German occupation of France at the height of his career, Felsen tried to escape to Switzerland; however, he was caught, arrested and interned in Drancy concentration camp. He was deported in 1943 and killed in the gas chambers at Auschwitz.



ABOUT BRYAN KARETNYK

Bryan Karetnyk is a British writer and translator. His recent translations include major works by Gaito Gazdanov, Irina Odoevtseva and Boris Poplavsky. He is also the editor of the landmark Penguin Classics anthology *Russian Émigré Short Stories from Bunin to Yanovsky*.

PRAISE FOR *DECEIT*

‘The miracle of Yuri Felsen is how his apparently Nabokovian rhythms lull you into a false sense of security, before a sudden and chilling exposure to the weather of a walk where the whole elegantly interwoven conceit of the narrator is ripped apart. And the pain of someone like Walser glints through a decadent surface of exiled life in Paris, to hint at darker shadows to come.’

– **Iain Sinclair**

‘Towards the end of this strange novel in the form of a strange diary the narrator declares that ‘it is impossible to live without deceit.’ What has preceded this bald statement is the work of a connoisseur of deceit in its multitudinous forms, the most potent being a subset of self deceptions described in painful raw detail. It’s a work steeped in absolutely joyous misery.’

– **Jonathan Meades**

FURTHER NOTES FOR EDITORS ON *DECEIT*

Throughout his literary career, Felsen worked on a great literary project, variously titled ‘The Recurrence of Things Past’ and ‘A Romance with an Author’. Constituting by the time of his death almost a dozen short stories and three novels—*Deceit*, *Happiness* and *Letters about Lermontov*—Felsen’s ambitious project, published in some of the emigration’s most prestigious literary journals, earned him the moniker ‘the Russian Proust’.

Felsen’s writing has only recently been rediscovered in Russia, and his collected works were republished in their entirety in 2012. To date, only brief extracts of Felsen’s writing have been translated in obscure, out-of-print anthologies; as such, this translation is an exciting, landmark publication in the author’s history.

ABOUT PROTOTYPE

Prototype was founded in 2019 by Jess Chandler, co-founder of the independent publishing houses Test Centre and House Sparrow Press. Established to continue and develop the work begun by Test Centre, Prototype is committed to creating new possibilities in the publishing of fiction and poetry through a flexible, interdisciplinary approach. Through the discovery of high-quality work across genres, Prototype strives to increase audiences for free-form contemporary literature.

Recent titles include Sam Buchan-Watts’ *Path Through Wood*, Emily Critchley’s *Home*, Sheffield Poet Laureate Otis Mensah’s *Safe Metamorphosis*, Lucie Elven’s acclaimed debut novel *The Weak Spot* and *The Boiled in Between*, the debut novel by Turner Prize-winning artist Helen Marten.

In November 2021, *Two Twin Pipes Sprout Water* by Lila Matsumoto was named a Poetry Book Society Recommendation for Winter 2021. In December 2021, Prototype were awarded a PEN Translates award by English PEN for *Island mountain glacier* by Anne Vegter (translated by Astrid Alben), published in March 2022.