



# Happiness

*Yuri Felsen*  
trans. *Bryan Karetnyk*

Winner of an English PEN Translates Award

*Happiness* (1932) is the second novel in Yuri Felsen's cycle *The Recurrence of Things Past*. Written as a diary addressed to his beloved Lyolya, it unfolds as an intense stream of consciousness in which Volodya – its anxious, self-scrutinising narrator – revisits the fragile equilibrium of their difficult relationship.

When new figures enter Lyolya's orbit, Volodya's hard-won certainties begin to collapse. Forced to contend with a series of rivals – a Soviet film star, a dashing ex-soldier, a wealthy businessman – he is driven ever deeper into jealousy and self-analysis, with tragic results. As the relationship fractures, Volodya probes the uneasy bond between emotional suffering and artistic creation, and the elusive nature of happiness itself.

Set among the exiled Russian community of interwar Paris, *Happiness* offers both a vivid social snapshot and an unnerving psychological portrait. Felsen's exploration of desire, rivalry, masculinity and self-deception, shaped by shifting sexual and emotional mores, feels strikingly modern.



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. After his death he fell into obscurity and his work is only now being translated into English.



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*.

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## PRAISE FOR *DECEIT*

‘This is ... real literature, pure and honest’  
– Vladimir Nabokov

‘The prose is electrifying, irascible and melodic, a potentially unruly mixture brought harmoniously together by the translator Bryan Karetnyk.’  
– *The Spectator*

‘Homeless, identity-less, country-less, the wondering writer turns inwards to find himself anew. Where is the real him, Felsen is asking. The real love? ... There is something liberating in the search. The tragedy of exile also offers opportunity, a spur to explore and define oneself anew.’  
– Peter Pomerantsev, from the introduction to *Deceit*

‘So far, so very Proust, of whom Felsen was an acolyte. Witness his long, elastic sentences, and some of their favourite tricks, such as the centrifugal spin from a transient feeling to a pronouncement on humanity... Felsen’s name deserves to be conjured with, just as it was before Paris fell.’  
– *The Telegraph*

‘This translation is a formidable achievement... reading these pages as the narrator minutely examines his own judgments has a hypnotic effect. Layer after layer is stripped from the narrator’s mind until we are left with the core: *amor vincit omnia*.’  
– *Literary Review*

‘For reasons that are evident from the first page, Felsen achieved with the publication of *Deceit* the reputation of a Russian Proust, an accolade reinforced by Karetnyk’s splendid, lucent translation.’  
– *Hong Kong Review of Books*

‘Timely, relatable, and thoroughly absorbing, if *Deceit* proves anything, it is how little both our interior and exterior lives have changed over the span of a tumultuous century.’  
– *Los Angeles Review of Books*

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