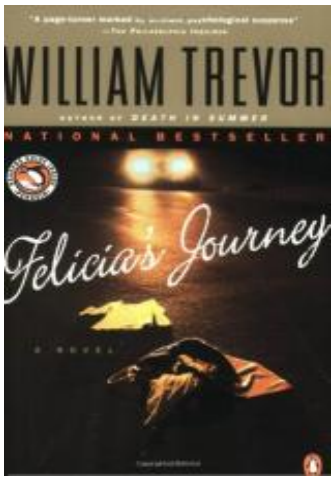
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Felicia's Journey

by William Trevor



About the Book

William Trevor has long been hailed as one of the "very best writers of our era" (The Washington Post). In both his short stories and his novels, Trevor manages to shed light on the darkest corners of the human heart. It is no surprise, then, that with Felicia's Journey Trevor uses his gifts as a master storyteller?spare, lyrical prose; a tightly woven story; and finely drawn characters?to turn out this psychological thriller.

Felicia, the unlikely heroine of the story, is a young Irish girl from a strongly conservative Republican family. Having lost her job at the local meat-canning factory, she is forced to stay at home to care for her widowed father, two brothers, and great-grandmother. Just when she begins to lose all hope of escaping the gloom of her existence, a charming man called Johnny Lysaght returns home from England to visit his mother. It doesn't take long for Johnny to seduce the naive and impulsive Felicia. Nor does it take long for him to return to England, leaving Felicia pregnant and with no forwarding address. Once her family discovers her secret, and realizes that the baby's father is a traitor?having joined up with the British Army?Felicia is tossed out of the house and goes to England in search of her lover. It is a quest that will prove futile. Johnny has told her that he works in a lawnmower factory in the Midlands, but it soon becomes clear to everyone but Felicia that he has willfully deceived her.

A combination of innocence and faith keeps Felicia wandering, and ultimately delivers her into the hands of Mr. Hilditch, an outwardly decent man who appears to come to her rescue. But the more benevolent Mr. Hilditch becomes, offering Felicia cups of tea, a meal, and a bed for the night, the more his predatory nature reveals itself. And although the reader slowly realizes that Mr. Hilditch is a monster, planning to add Felicia to his collection of girls in his "Memory Lane," there is something so lonely and pathetic about him that one can't help but feel some compassion for him.

Felicia's journey brings heartache to those around her?her father, heart-sick after denouncing her; Johnny Lysaght, lying on the ground bleeding after being beaten by Felicia's brothers; and even Mr. Hilditch, slipping increasingly into insanity, finally fully aware of the horrors he has committed. In the end, Felicia returns to the streets where she once

searched for Johnny Lysaght, alone and homeless, but liberated?from Johnny, from the memory of her dead mother, from her controlling father, and, most of all, from Mr. Hilditch's "Memory Lane."

Discussion Guide

1. How does Trevor portray the differences between the English and the Irish landscapes? How does the Ireland Felicia leaves differ from that of De Valera's dream, the Ireland "whose fields would be joyous with the sound of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, with the laughter of comely maidens"?

2. Trevor never describes what has happened to Mr. Hilditch's girls in "Memory Lane"?Sharon, Jakki, Elsie, and Gaye. What effect does this have on the story? What does this lack of information reveal about Hilditch himself?

3. What effect does the ending have? Would Felicia have been better off staying in Ireland? Why does she seem to accept her final fate so readily?

4.Both Hilditch and Felicia are haunted by memories of their mothers. How are both mothers portrayed in the novel? How is each character controlled by these memories?

5. What is the significance of music in the novel? What does the music Hilditch listens to reveal about him?

6. What does Hilditch's final visit to the Spa foreshadow? What does the Spa represent?

7. What ultimately allows Felicia to escape Hilditch's house?

8. What impression of Johnny Lysaght do we have? How does Trevor portray him?

9. Is Felicia truly an innocent at the end of the novel, or has she gained a deeper understanding of the hand that fate has dealt her?

Author Bio

William Trevor was born in Mitchelstown, County Cork, in 1928, and spent his childhood in provincial Ireland. Among his books are **Two Lives**, **My House in Umbria**, **The Collected Stories**, **Felicia's Journey**, **After Rain**,**Death in Summer**, and **The Hill Bachelors**. He is a member of the Irish Academy of Letters and lives in Devon, England.

Felicia's Journey
by William Trevor

Publication Date: January 1, 1996
Paperback: 240 pages
Publisher: Penguin (Non-Classics)
ISBN-10: 0140253602
ISBN-13: 9780140253603