Dreaming of home: migrant spaces in *Felicia’s Journey*

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Hamid Naficy’s analysis of migrant cinema focuses on the varying relationships to the home-space within émigré films, shifting between outward-looking journeys of aspiration and imaginative returns to the lost homeland. The central narrative concern in such films is the search for a space in which to belong. *Felicia’s Journey* depicts a young girl’s migration from Ireland to the Midlands of England in search of the home that she fantasises finding with her former lover and father of her unborn child. Her encounter with the psychopath Hilditch brings the question of home-founding to the fore and reveals the fantasy and distortions of memory which underpin all constructions of home.

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In a 2004 paper, Brian McIlroy draws on Hamid Naficy’s analysis of migrant cinema to discuss several filmic representations of Irish emigrant experience. In particular, he utilises Naficy’s distinction between exilic, diasporic and postcolonial filmmaking in order to categorise Irish emigrant films according to their varying relationships to the Irish homeland. Included in his selection of films is *Felicia’s Journey* (Atom Egoyan, 1999), in which, he claims, Ireland functions as a traumatic reminder of loss, a feature which it shares with many other films depicting the Irish experience in Britain. Acknowledging that McIlroy’s paper is useful in emphasising the varying relationships to the lost homeland which emigrant films can express, this paper will seek to explore further the precise functioning of space within migrant narratives through a close reading of *Felicia’s Journey*. Whilst critics such as Rosemary George have argued that ‘the search for the location in which the self is “at home”’ drives all narrative quests, questions of homesickness and home-founding necessarily come to the fore within migrant narratives. This paper will argue that *Felicia’s Journey* gives expression to the fantasy spaces which structure migrant experience, alternating between the aspirational search for a new space of belonging and the nostalgic desire for return. It will suggest that whilst the desire that drives migrant narratives oscillates between these temporal poles of aspiration and loss, narrative satisfaction can only ultimately be expressed through a tenuous and temporary transformation of everyday space. Despite the dreams of home and permanence that haunt migrant fiction, these narratives can only find resolution in the ephemeral, in forging from moment to moment a habitable space within the inhospitable terrain of exile.

The experience of migrancy is fundamentally a problem of space, and more particularly a problematic relationship to the lost home-space. As outlined above, Naficy distinguishes three possible relationships between the migrant and the homeland, which he labels exilic, diasporic and postcolonial. For the exile, the absence of the homeland is most

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visceral and immediate, their relationship to it defined by a sharp sense of loss, whilst
diasporic and postcolonial positions are characterised by growing connections with and
within the host country and a relationship to the homeland which is increasingly mediated
through new forms of belonging. In migrant cinema, therefore, it is the differing
relationships to the concept of home that, for Naficy, become defining of the film. One of
the ways in which these various relationships to the homeland are captured is in the
journey structures which recur within these migrant films. Naficy sees these as being
dominated by three types of journey: ‘outward journeys of escape, home seeking, and
home founding; journeys of quest, homelessness and lostness; and inward homecoming
journeys’.4 Taken together, these structures capture the various relationships to space
which are central to migrant narratives. As will be illustrated in Felicia’s Journey, migrant
narratives shift between outward-looking journeys of aspiration and inward journeys to the
lost homeland which can occur only within the imagination. Yet between the idealised
spaces of past and future lies the present tense of migrant experience, a present which is
characterised by lostness and a search for those moments of belonging which can be
wrenched from everyday life.

The first image of Ireland which we see in Felicia’s Journey is from the perspective of
the departing emigrant. In one fluid movement, the camera tilts from a pale blue sky, down
past the green cliffs of the Irish shoreline, to the wake of a ferry cutting through the water,
until finally the figure of Felicia (Elaine Cassidy) emerges into the shot, standing at the
stem of the boat and watching her homeland recede into the distance. From this first
moment, Ireland is defined as a space of leaving and the question of home is thrust to the
centre of the narrative. Within this image Felicia appears as an apparently vulnerable
creature. Carrying only a schoolbag and wearing a flimsy dress which whips against her
legs in the wind, she seems ill-prepared for whatever journey she has set out on. We soon
learn that she has left Ireland in search of her one-time lover Johnny, who has gone to
England to supposedly work in a lawnmower factory. Unbeknownst to him, Felicia is
pregnant and she has travelled to England with the hope of finding Johnny and establishing
a family and home with him there.

Although Felicia’s Journey is adapted from a novel by William Trevor, its themes are
consonant with the greater body of work of its director Atom Egoyan. Born in Egypt of
Armenian parents, before moving to Canada at a young age, his films are marked by the
experience of exile and frequently return to the question of home-founding through the
search for alternative forms of family. Thus, although Felicia’s Journey constitutes a
departure in terms of setting and source material for Egoyan, it clearly resonates with the
thematic core of his work. The titles of his first two feature films Next of Kin (1994) and
Family Viewing (1987) explicitly evoke the centrality of the family theme, and both are
concerned with questions of ethnicity and identity as filtered through the experience of
family life. In Next of Kin, the young protagonist rejects his WASP family in order to
construct a new life within an Armenian family who have lost their own son. Here, the
undesirable home-space is rejected for a new one in which the protagonist’s identity may be
more satisfactorily negotiated. Similarly, Emily Wilson argues that both Felicia’s Journey
and Egoyan’s previous film Exotica ‘are rituals of initiation, staging scenarios where a
fantasy of a virtual family offers a space for departure from the family home’.5 Felicia’s
departure is forced and seemingly permanent, as her father evicts her from the home on
learning of her pregnancy. However, her search for an alternative family with Johnny will
lead her into the orbit of the psychopath Hilditch (Bob Hoskins) and the disturbing home
which he inhabits, still haunted by the virtual image of his deceased mother. Thus her
journey becomes a series of desired or actual encounters with home-spaces, as she rejects or
is rejected by both her biological father and Hilditch’s psychotic alternative. Driving her onwards is the search for an alternative family with Johnny, the idealised father figure of her yet-to-be-born child, and a home-space in which she can find comfort and the feeling that she belongs.

Felicia’s journey in search of Johnny and the home-space which she imagines he will provide can productively be considered in relation to the generic structure of the road movie. In their book-length analysis of the road movie in European cinema, Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli specifically address *Felicia’s Journey* as one example amongst several of recent European films which depict female characters on the road. Although the authors point out that, for the protagonists of these films, mobility is often equated with danger and the threat to the self posed by their environments, nevertheless, inscribed into the road movie structure is a basic narrative of optimism. As David Laderman argues, in the most general terms, the road connotes ‘possibility itself’. For Robin Wood, ‘a Utopian vision of social reform drives the road movie beyond society’s limits’, even if, as he suggests, the failure to realise this vision often sees the journey turn sour. Nonetheless, there is an implicit critique contained within the idea of hitting the road, a rejection of the limits which society imposes, indeed a rejection of the very concept of stability against which such limits are formed, and a search for a yet-to-be-encountered space which will facilitate new, and perhaps unimagined, forms of identity. If the conclusion of road movies inevitably sees the protagonist’s open-ended idealism replaced by a new set of constraints, this can never quite eradicate the sense of possibility which infuses the very structure of the narrative.

We first encounter Felicia ‘on the road’; in transition from the oppressive spaces of her hometown to the supposedly metropolitan centre of Birmingham. Her journey repeats the much visibilised trope of migration from Ireland’s rural periphery to the urban centres of the UK. This is a journey with strong connotations of loss in Irish culture, as is suggested by McIlroy’s brief survey of films depicting the Irish experience in Britain. Furthermore, as Stephanie McBride points out in her analysis of *Felicia’s Journey*, “‘taking the boat to England’ is a phrase and image teeming with meaning for generations of Irish emigrants”, and one which has increasingly become associated with the thousands of women who travel each year from Ireland seeking abortions. The fact of Felicia’s pregnancy and her rejection by her family immediately connects her story to theirs and brings to mind the forced migration of so many women from the sexual oppressions of the Irish state. Her own abortion will ultimately be suffered in isolation, emphasising the loneliness of this journey and the silence which surrounds these women’s experiences in Irish culture. Yet, at the same time, the journey which she undertakes is also one which has held the promise of economic betterment for Irish men and women alike, and indeed the chance of escape from the suffocating cultural confinements of an isolationist Irish society. Thus, the image contains a poignant discrepancy between Felicia’s naive optimism that Johnny awaits her in England and the image of vulnerability and loss which she presents to the viewer, between the aspirations of the road and the intimations of danger evoked by her fragile female form.

Nevertheless, alongside this sense of fragility, these first images do give positive expression to Felicia’s mobility; to her complete severance from the stability of place, that ‘segment of space’ which Naficy describes as ‘imbued with special meaning and value’. The small backpack in which she carries her belongings, as well as visibly suggesting her vulnerability, also conveys the lightness of movement which comes from this separation. Although Felicia may primarily experience this in terms of lack, as an absence of space which can be overcome only through the fantasised union with Johnny,
nevertheless, she exists in this moment as an identity in flux, between the childhood left behind and the imagined possibilities of a yet-to-be-encountered adult life. This in-betweenness is aptly expressed by the locations in which Felicia’s journey begins; the ferry and later the border control at which her belongings are searched. Egoyan comments on the incongruity of Felicia’s meagre belongings in this scene, which, along with her lack of passport or any form of identity, clearly unsettles the border guard and has the effect of making their encounter strange. Through Felicia’s naivety in this setting, the everydayness of border crossing in our globalised economic environment becomes something far more disturbing, ensuring that we cannot simply see Felicia’s journey to England within the familiar discourses of tourism or economic migration. Her movement remains something other, not easily recuperated within the dominant spatial paradigms through which we organise and understand our lives. Her desire for Johnny is so all consuming that it overwhelms any recognition of the spaces through which she journeys. The border which she crosses, like the scant information which she has of his whereabouts, are not recognised by Felicia as obstacles, so certain is she of her desire and so committed is she to the fantasy of union which drives her.

However, if the outward journey of home seeking and escape is one of the key narratives within migrant cinema, then, as Naficy points out, the optimism contained within such stories can easily give way to the experience of homelessness and being lost. It is clear to the viewer from early on in the film that Felicia’s belief in Johnny’s love and the future promise of a family and home together are delusions. Through flashback, it becomes obvious that she was nothing more than a momentary sexual conquest to Johnny and that he has deliberately concealed his location from her to avoid further contact. Furthermore, it becomes increasingly apparent that he has not gone to Birmingham to work in a lawnmower factory but has joined the British army, as originally declared by Felicia’s father. This marks him as not only deceitful but also unworthy of Felicia’s desire, at least within the nationalist cultural framework which dominated Felicia’s past.

The images of Felicia’s arrival in Birmingham pointedly express the gap between the fantasised union which generates her desire and the hostile realities of the space in which she finds herself. Following her encounter with the border guard, the film cuts to an apparent flashback of Felicia with Johnny, in an image which appears suffused with her desire. In extreme close-up, the camera glides past Felicia’s face as it is enveloped in Johnny’s hands. Lingering on his fingers as they softly caress her hair, the shot gradually reveals Johnny’s face which remains slightly out of focus as he whispers to Felicia. Throughout this brief scene, the images of their faces fill the screen, blocking out the world which surrounds them. His words echo this image of togetherness; ‘every minute, I’ll be thinking of you’, he declares, ‘every minute, you’ll be by my side’. This is Felicia’s fantasy of belonging, necessarily excluding the oppressive social spaces which seem to have come between her and her object of desire. Yet immediately after this image we cut to a shot of Felicia walking out of a bus station and into the urban centre of Birmingham. Here the camera frames Felicia in the bottom corner of the screen, dominated by the phallic tower which looms over her, aptly contrasting the intimacy of the flashback scene with this inhospitable city space and indicating the forces which will conspire against her desire. We next see her in the peripheral spaces of an industrial park where she repeatedly asks passers-by the whereabouts of a lawnmower factory only to be met with blank incomprehension. Throughout this, the camera insists on framing Felicia against her urban surroundings, filling images with tower blocks, motorways and overpasses. It is clear that if she is to forge a space of belonging with Johnny, it will have to be within a territory which is just as hostile as the Ireland which she fled.
It is Felicia’s encounter with Hilditch, however, that marks the end of any positive trajectory within her story. Although he initially seems to be nothing more than a lonely catering manager who wishes to help Felicia in her search, it quickly becomes clear that his motives, and his history, are far more suspect. He ends up deliberately misleading Felicia into a series of wild goose chases under the pretence that he is helping her search for Johnny, all the while planning her eventual demise. With his murderous designs on Felicia and his attempts to preserve his dead mother through video images, Hilditch has called to mind for some critics the cinematic prototype of mother-fixated psychopaths, Norman Bates. But the reference to *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) has another resonance for *Felicia’s Journey*, as both can be seen as truncated road movies in which the narrative agency of the female protagonist is thwarted by her encounter with the disturbed home-space of the male psychotic. Like Marion Crane before her, Felicia is drawn into this home under false pretences, reassured by the presence of a fantasised female figure. Similar to the dead mother whom Bates brings back to life in Marion’s presence, Hilditch creates the figure of an ailing wife in order to bolster his credentials with Felicia as a caring father figure. However, the mother is no less dominant in Hilditch’s psyche than Bates’, and it seems that he is condemned repeatedly to re-enact his childhood experience of domination and submission with the series of young girls whom he takes under his wing and then murders.

If our first encounter with Felicia on the ferry suggested a discrepancy between her appearance to us and how she saw herself, then her repeated inability to act in a way which might bring her fulfilment can be characterised as a recurring case of mistaken vision.

Figure 1. Felicia (Elaine Cassidy) isolated against the inhospitable city space. Image reproduced with permission from Icon-Entertainment.
Her idealised vision of Johnny as father and husband is clearly marked by the narrative as misguided. Indeed, in the scenes which she shares with Johnny prior to his leaving for England it is painfully obvious to the viewer what Felicia fails to see; namely that her feelings towards him are not reciprocated. Hilditch then furthers this misdirection of vision by encouraging her fantasy and helping her to follow up leads in the search for Johnny which he himself has invented. This sense of misguided or misdirected vision is most poignantly captured when Hilditch brings Felicia to a local Irish pub in the expressed hope of finding Johnny. Much to Hilditch’s horror, Johnny does indeed turn out to be in the pub, and for a few brief seconds he and Felicia share the same space. We see Hilditch’s face turn to consternation as he gazes over Felicia’s shoulder, before a reverse shot reveals Johnny in the background drinking a beer alone whilst Felicia’s face remains hovering out of focus in the edge of the frame. She never turns around and he soon finishes his drink and leaves. Yet far from suggesting the proximity of Felicia’s goal, this image merely reinforces how, even at this moment, the Johnny that Felicia has fantasised about remains permanently out of reach.

The irony of the paternal relationship that Hilditch fabricates with Felicia is that he suffers from the same failure of vision as she. Felicia’s failure to recognise her relationship with Johnny for what it is directly mirrors Hilditch’s failure to recognise the truth of his relationships with the girls he has killed. Indeed, the film suggests that Hilditch’s vision may be so unreliable that the things which he sees do not exist in any social reality but are merely the product of his own mind. In the scene discussed above, the unlikely idea that Johnny would just happen to be sitting in the same pub as Felicia and Hilditch suggests that his appearance may be nothing more than a symptom of Hilditch’s paranoia. This is reinforced by our knowledge that Hilditch could not know exactly what Johnny looks like, but also by the visual construction of the scene. In mid-conversation with Felicia, Hilditch suddenly starts whilst the camera cuts to a close-up which shows him staring over her shoulder. As the camera holds him in close-up, we see him momentarily switching his gaze to Felicia’s face before returning to stare past her once more. Yet crucially, when we are subsequently given a reverse shot showing us the object of Hilditch’s gaze, what we see is Johnny only now walking into frame with his back to the camera and Hilditch. He is barely recognisable until a few moments later when he turns and takes up a position by the bar. This raises the question as to how Hilditch could have seen and recognised Johnny some seconds earlier and reinforces the suggestion that Johnny is in fact an image that Hilditch has conjured into being, much like Felicia has herself constructed her own image of Johnny in her mind.

This theme of vision as unreliable or mediated through character subjectivity to the point of uncertainty runs through the film. The mediation of vision and memory ‘through technologies of representation’ is a recurrent trope in Egoyan’s work, expressed particularly through his use of video imagery as a means of accessing characters’ inner lives. In an alteration to Trevor’s novel in which the emphasis on video is entirely absent, Hilditch obsessively tapes and preserves his interactions with the girls which he kills, by means of a hidden camera in his car. Indeed, Egoyan suggests that the only way in which Hilditch can remember his past is through these visual mediations. Patricia Gruben argues that the film is ‘filled with material and metaphoric screens preventing the desiring subject from touching the object of desire’. This can certainly be said of the video images of Hilditch’s mother in her role as television chef, which he endlessly replays and which seem to act as a barrier for him from the terrifying reality of his childhood memories. Similarly, the fantasised image of Johnny acts as a barrier for Felicia, screening out the distressing reality of her situation as a pregnant teenager cast adrift by her family.
and her lover. Like Hilditch, the protection which this image affords her has been at the cost of memory and the truthful engagement with the past which is necessary for her to find any sustainable form of belonging in the present.

We can see Felicia’s failure to remember accurately as indicative of a more general failure of memory which is central to the experience of exile. For Egoyan, as a member of the Armenian diaspora, the issue of memory is a fraught one. Indeed, the ongoing denials by Turkey of the 1915 genocide against the Armenians as well as the long-time absence of a homeland against which remembrances could be measured ensure that the act of remembering is a deeply political one for Armenians. Discussing his 1993 film Calendar, which involves a photographer returning to Armenia to produce a tourist calendar, Naficy argues that Egoyan responds to uncertainties around the homeland with an over-investment in the image. He quotes Egoyan as declaring that ‘you can always go back to an image. But you can’t go back to a land.’ As Naficy argues, exilic filmmakers frequently ‘memorialise the homeland by fetishising it in the form of cathected sounds, images and chronotopes’ in order to imaginatively replace the intolerable spaces of exile with a fantasised space of plenitude and belonging. Similarly, the image which Felicia turns to during moments of crisis is an idyllic evocation of home, as is most pointedly captured in the scene in which Felicia has been persuaded by Hilditch to undergo an abortion. An Irish lament rises on the soundtrack as the camera pans past an old stone wall, revealing the lush greenness of the west of Ireland landscape in which Felicia’s father stands staring into camera. This open space then dissolves into an image of complete confinement. We see Felicia in close-up as she lies on a hospital bed, whilst gloved hands hold a mask over her face so that only her closed eyes are visible. The proximity of the camera, which hovers over her face, and the hands which grasp her head, mirror the earlier remembered image of Felicia and Johnny in embrace and act as a disturbing counterpoint. In this image Felicia’s agency has been completely removed and the fantasy of bodies in union is replaced by a loss of bodily control as Felicia gives up the baby which serves as her final connection to Johnny. It is at this moment that Felicia escapes into her imagination, and the image dissolves once again to the rural scene. Now the camera is set free to roam through the ruins of a church, in which it locates Johnny carrying a child on his shoulders towards Felicia’s smiling father. Again we dissolve to Felicia lying in the operating theatre before we return once more to Johnny, wandering through the fields towards the camera. His son sits upon his shoulders and, in a striking image, covers his father’s eyes so that he cannot see where he is going. Once again, the film returns to the theme of vision. But here, in this fantasised space of belonging, Johnny’s impaired sight indicates a comfort in his surroundings rather than an unwillingness to see. As the music subsides, the camera returns to Felicia, clutching her abdomen in a hospital corridor, briefly alone until Hilditch enters the image once more and leads her away towards the final confinement which he intends for her.

The image of Ireland which Felicia fantasises into being in this scene suggests the desire for return which is central to so much migrant literature and film. If the original encounter with the host country may be marked by a certain degree of optimism and aspiration, here the actualities of migrant life have generated a fantasy home-space which is located in the past tense of the lost homeland. As Naficy argues, the visual constructions of such spaces in migrant fiction tend to conform to Bakhtin’s chronotope of the idyll. These are frequently pastoral spaces, evoking connotations of kinship and permanence, in which the precarious spaces of migrant life are replaced by ‘the structural authority and certainty that only nature seems capable of providing’. This scene clearly conforms to such a description, with its images of fields and crumbling walls conveying both the
permanence of nature and the timelessness of the imagined nation-space. Ruins, the images of which recur within the scene, function for Naficy as powerful chronotopes that ‘condense the entire idea of nation’, and convey the idea of a space which is somehow out-of-time. This is a description which accurately reflects the representations of Ireland which occur throughout the film. A recurring criticism of William Trevor, and one which could certainly seem to apply to Felicia’s Journey, is that his novels convey an Ireland that is fixed in time and that his own experience as a long-time emigrant has left him unresponsive to the changes that have occurred in Ireland in his absence. Equally, Egoyan has stated that he ‘wanted to convey an impression of all these characters being lost in time’, whilst at the same time being wary of reducing Ireland and its culture ‘to some kind of parody’. However, we can make sense of the curiously anachronistic vision of Ireland with which we are presented in the film if we accept it as an image which has been filtered through Felicia’s subjectivity. As such, the Ireland that we see is always constituted through the backward gaze of the emigrant, and is defined therefore by its pastness.

The reunion with Johnny which Felicia first sought out in her journey to Birmingham is now achieved in her imaginative flight homewards. However, for Ireland to function as a utopian space in which Felicia’s desire to be with Johnny is fulfilled, it must necessarily be the product of memory failure. The oppressive social spaces which Felicia left behind are here replaced with an image of Ireland in which the characters share an ease of belonging and mutual love. However, the possibility and the poignancy of this image come from an acknowledgement of its impossibility. The image of Johnny playing with his son is affecting because it occurs at the exact moment at which Felicia’s fantasy of such a family is definitively ended. Ireland can only be re-imagined as utopian because the separation between this fantasy space and the space of social reality is absolute. Naficy argues that the idyll is a vision of space in which ‘all temporal boundaries are blurred’, in which time, in effect, becomes meaningless because no change is ever admitted. Yet there remains one temporal barrier that structures the migrant’s relationship to the idyll, which is the barrier between this space and the everyday reality of migrant life. In other words, the imaginative journey home can be undertaken only once the impossibility has been acknowledged of any actual return.

To conclude, we have seen how, within Felicia’s Journey, the eponymous journey becomes in succession one of home-seeking, homelessness and imaginative return to a homeland which is acknowledged as lost. The film depicts the imaginative spaces which structure the migrant’s search for belonging, which shift between future-oriented spaces of aspiration and spaces of mourning and loss. The fantasy of a future home-space which generates Felicia’s migrant narrative has been brutally undercut by the realities of exilic life, as is given most poignant expression in the final loss of her baby. It is when these fantasies have been finally destroyed that Felicia must take imaginative flight into the past, but this is a space which can offer scant solace. The question remains whether the film can offer a space of belonging which is not predicated upon utopian fantasies of permanence, but which is forged within the everyday sphere of social reality. Whilst critics such as Naficy frequently fetishise the liminality of migrant experience, seeing the migrant as a figure who challenges dualistic, place-based concepts of identity, the desire for a stable sense of space remains at the heart of migrant narratives. In Irish emigrant films, this stability is habitually sought within the pub, which is depicted as a communal space of refuge from the harsh experience of migrant life. However, in films such as Kings (Tom Collins, 2007) and 2 by 4 (Jimmy Smallhorne, 1998), the respite granted by these spaces is often shown to be tenuous, no less subject to the distortions of fantasy than the homeland which they seek to replace.
Felicia’s Journey is a narrative of awakening, in which the fantasies which enabled both Felicia and Hilditch to sustain a sense of belonging in the world have been steadily stripped away. Hilditch has been forced to confront the murderous reality of his past, the realisation of which causes him to take his own life, whilst Felicia has acknowledged the unreality of her imagined future with Johnny as well as the impossibility of returning to the life that went before. The film ends, appropriately, in a public garden, where we see Felicia planting bulbs in the earth, in an image with strong connotations of new beginnings. Significantly, this is a change from the original novel, in which the final image is of Felicia wandering the streets as a bag lady, devoid of any permanent place of residence. The garden has been a recurrent image throughout the film, from the pastoral images of Ireland that express Felicia’s fantasy of return to the image of Eden as a space of final redemption proffered by the Jehovah’s Witnesses which both Felicia and Hilditch encounter at crucial moments in the narrative. The garden image has had darker connotations also, as the space of Hilditch’s humiliation by his mother as a child and as the final resting place of his murdered girls, a fate which Felicia only just manages to avoid. However, if these earlier gardens resonate with the eternal, the park in which the narrative concludes is definitively of this world. It is, in fact, merely a small oasis of green within an urban space, and as the camera pans around it we see the high-rise buildings which pen it in on all sides. The Felicia whom we encounter here is no longer the child-like innocent who first set out on her journey. As we watch her move confidently through this space, her image is now that of a survivor. In voiceover, she intones the names of the girls whom Hilditch murdered, acknowledging all the histories which ended through their encounter

Figure 2. The garden image recurs throughout the film. Image reproduced with permission from Icon-Entertainment.
with him. These girls have become a new kind of family for Felicia. She carries their pasts with her, declaring that ‘I remember these names with every new face I meet’, and with her final words she entreats, ‘may we all rest in peace’. As she speaks the camera glides away from her and circles the surrounding buildings, whilst the sound of children playing and a discordant piano rise on the soundtrack. We are left with this unsettling image, without any final vision of a home-space in which Felicia may find peace. It reminds us that the stability of place promised by the image of home will always remain a fantasy, particularly for the migrant, who is defined by movement. The peace which Felicia desires will no longer be sought in a fantasy space of fulfilment but is rather carried within, transforming her encounter with the everyday spaces which she meets. This is Felicia’s journey, from the eternal to the ephemeral, from enrapture with the fantasy spaces of the exile to an acceptance of the lived reality of migrant life.

Felicia’s Journey’s final disquieting image reminds us of John Durham Peters’ suggestion that ‘diaspora teaches the perpetual postponement of homecoming and the necessity, in the meanwhile, of living among strange people and lands’.24 The search for home has been central to the film’s narrative as Felicia moves between intolerable home-spaces and those which are only ever imagined. However, her encounter with Hilditch has revealed the distortions and the failures of remembrance which underpin all fantasies of home. It is only, finally, by coming to terms with her own history that Felicia can move beyond these fantasies of past and future and begin the process of living in a strange land.

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Notes
4. Ibid., 33.
5. Wilson, Atom Egoyan, 114.
7. Laderman, Driving Visions, 2.
9. McBride, Ireland into Film, 41.
11. Egoyan, Felicia’s Journey, DVD commentary.
12. Ibid., 151.
15. Ibid., 251.
17. Ibid., 12.
18. Ibid., 156.
19. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 15.
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