RULES OF THE ROAD

A film by

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Der Text basiert auf dem gleichnamigen Dokumentarfilm von 1992.
Die Interviews wurden wortgetreu in Umgangssprache transkribiert.

This script is based on the 1992 documentary film of the same title.
The interviews were transcribed verbatim in colloquial language.

The prologue is accompanied by the sound of the sea. We see the wake of a ferryboat. The mainland is not in sight.

Johnny Collins (voice only): When you leave Ireland, your body leaves Ireland. Your heart always stays behind. You always long to come home – even so it's only the side of a road.

It's your homeland.

Dissolve

London at the End of the 20th Century

London, Shepherd's Bush. Pan down from a motorway bridge to reveal a caravan site below. It is inhabited by Irish Travellers. The roar of traffic can be heard clearly.

The main titles follow

London, Ferry Lane Traveller Site. Sam Power is working with a long pole on a fire barrel from which flames are blazing. A boy brings arm-thick cables in a wheelbarrow, which Mr. Powers throws into the fire. Next to the fire barrel lies a huge pile of cables ready to be melted down. The barrel is perforated at the bottom so that the molten lead can drain away. The floor is littered with solidified lead. All this takes place amid caravans and playing children.

Scrap yard. Gizzy, the owner, stands in a hall already filled with piles of scrap metal. In his hands he holds an irregularly shaped chunk of lead, which obviously comes from one of the illegal smelting facilities.

Gizzy: Basically, it's a piece of lead which has rerun from cable. Which the tinkers go round the road – the roadside people – pull it out. They sometimes manage to buy it and what they do is melt it down – get the lead back out – the copper wire back out and sell the two articles separate.

Obviously, now this is a thing of the past. It can't be done anymore, because of the waste trade is a licensed trade now. The controlled waste – this is illegal. No more can cable or burning wire be burned on an old tip in the air because of the ozone or whatever. If they're caught doing it now, they are fined astronomically, 1,000 – 2,000 pounds.

Back at the caravan site. Sam Powers is now laboriously stripping the cables by hand. Using a hammer and chisel, he slits the coating lengthwise until the inner wires are exposed so that he can pull them out. In the background, another open fire is ablaze.

Sam Power: A day's labour would cut out: twenty pound. It's slow – but time is our own ... We have plenty of time to do it.

Now I've cut the cable, and I'm going to pull the copper wire out of it.

What's in it? – So, that's the lead.

"**Scrap metal wanted!**" Three Irish Travellers unload a truckload of scrap metal and tip it onto the pile in the hall. One of them climbs onto the back of the truck and hands down bags containing smaller items. Inside these bags are cables and tins, as well as precious metals such as brass and copper, which are invoiced separately.

Gizzy: They have a go at anything, some legal, some illegal. But they have to get a living like everyone else. So, it's basically all, there is too it.

And there was a little story of a place not far from here. A road where one or two lorries were parked, and the police knew about it, and one night they set a raid and went round there. When they came back – I don't know – two or three police cars, they chased them – not tinkers – well Irish tipper-drivers, and they chased them across some wasteland, but what they didn't realise: they didn't leave anyone in charge of the motors. So, when they came back, they'd gone round the other way and completely wrecked their cars.

Ferry Lane Traveller Site: Sam Powers removes his work gloves and takes a cigarette break. A dog watches him curiously.

> **Sam Power:** When did I come to this country from Ireland? It'd be '57. You just pulled where you want. Today you won't pull where you want. Travelling is finished.
>
> I'd reckon another three months, two to three, and I think I'll be going home. My days is finished here. A lot of old travelling people is trying to get home now. Because if you die in this country, it's too much – the cost of living is too expensive to bring a person home.
>
> Ireland is home, there's no home over here. There's no home over here.

London, Shepherd's Bush. The temporary halting site under the motorway overpass has, over time, become a permanent home for Travellers. Their caravans are squeezed between the bridge piers of the numerous on- and off-ramps, with traffic constantly rolling overhead. The camera pans away from the campsite and onto the expressway.

> ***Song***
>
> *Well, the day that I left Ireland*
> *Sure things were very slack*
> *I rounded over to Glasgow*
> *And I'm wishing to get back*
>
> *I was gathering old pot metal*
> *And more times bones and rags*
> …

Narration

London, A-40 West. The starting point of our film journey – a quest to discover the ways of modern nomadic lifestyle. A contemporary road movie foregoing the familiar cliche of romantic escape. Instead, we focus on those who not only herald a sweeping economic migration, but are also the living exponents of an odyssey. An odyssey reflecting the state of mind of an absolute industrial society.

Ireland

Song

An old man come to me one day
Thought I was rather green
Down in the corner of his sack
There were bricks you could plainly see

Shall I say old man, take up your sack
Sure I'm not in the game
You can handle bricks or mortar too
I'm a rambling handy man
...

Our journey is along lonely Irish country roads in our Magirus Deutz four-wheel-drive truck, which has become our home on wheels. A horse-drawn carriage approaches us. We follow the covered wagon, which eventually leads us to the McInerny family.

Narration

Travellers have wandered the Irish countryside for centuries. They were tinsmiths, harvesters and migrant labourers, fortune- and storytellers, horse traders and peddlers, knife-grinders and scrap dealers – always performing a welcome chore for the settled population. As the centuries went by, the "Tinkers" – like nomads of other countries adjusted their life-styles to the changing conditions. But with the present generation the traditional life on the road comes to an end.

The precise origin of the Travellers is a matter of speculation. The crop failures of the 19th century are repeatedly blamed for pushing large numbers of farmers from their small parcels of land. Today, the Great Famine of 1845–1848 is widely regarded as the catalyst for the formation of the tinker clans in Ireland. The famine, however, decimated the entire island. One million died of starvation, and at least as many fled Ireland's misery by emigration. Although thousands were forced from their homes, only a few remained true to the road. And it was these wanderers who gradually evolved their identity as Travellers. The road became their home.

By the side of the road, a camp has been set up by the McInerny family. Mother Nelly and her six daughters are sitting around the campfire, cooking their evening meal. The sons are tending to the horses. In addition to the two barrel-top wagons, there are two tents by the side of the road used for accommodation.

> **Nelly McInerney**: Well, I come from Meena myself, County Tipperary. My own family's name is Tooheys from Meena. All belonging to my family lived in Meena. They had a coal store there at one stage. An uncle of my father's.
>
> So, he took to the road – father took to the road and never went back. He's still travelling around. So that's the way I was brought up travelling.
>
> We're all having our tea when this lad came out. He spattered a whole load of water on top, and he ruined all the food for us. We went raging. So, he went for the guards. He brought the guards. And the guards told us we had to leave. So, we left that and we came into another place, and the council comes out again and says we have to move out there. We moved out of there, and we moved to another place, and on they come again.
>
> So, I got really vexed with them then for all the moving we were after doing. I really tore into them and I said: "You go have a good fuck off with yourself! If you were all of the council men in Ireland – I'm not leaving here! Before you go any further – I've just had my belly full of you, and I'm going to take no more of it. I'll leave here the one way: If you find me a place to stay. I'll go this minute." So he went away and I never heard tell of him no more. (Laughs)

Narration

One in nine Traveller children did not reach their first birthday and one-third of Traveller children died before the age of fifteen. At the same time, only five percent of the adults were older than fifty. Poverty is generally considered the cause for such a low life expectancy. Neither nature nor civilisation cares whether a human being is treated justly. The following poems bear witness to this.They were created by a traveller woman who could not read or write when she was young.

A covered wagon with traditional, colourful paintwork is pulled by a horse down a country road.

With one cut, we switch back in time to 1965, we can only guess by the colours of the barrel-top wagon approaching us, as the archive material from that time is in black and white. The wagon joins a group of Travellers who are setting up camp for the night on both sides of the road. Horses are unhitched, campfires are lit, and many people welcome the newly arrived family.

> **Chrissy Donoghue Ward** (voice only): There's a lot of them gone very young, and I thought if they had more human rights would they live longer? And because the people didn't care for them, they didn't care for themselves, so life was short.
>
> So, this is a poem about all of our souls. When people ask me: Where were you born?

Where Were You Born
On History

Where were you born
It doesn't matter I'm sure
Born to a mother
On the side of a road

She gave birth to a baby in winter wind
In a camp back road
They moved her wagon
With nowhere to go

Packing her extra bundle
Just a day old
Walking the road in winter rain
In her body so much pain

Ireland never worried
Only the Lord
Another little bundle
With sadness in the heart

Where were you born
It doesn't matter I'm sure
When you are a Traveller
On the side of the road

The trouble you get
When you belong to a clan
A Traveller-Tinker
With stars in the heart

Moving around
With a jolly sound
Blocking the pain
Away from your heart

Tinsmith Johnny Collins skillfully crafts a bucket from a sheet of metal using a hammer and tin snips. A simple square tube serves as an anvil for shaping the seams with a wooden mallet.

Mr. and Mrs. McDonagh, an elderly couple, live in the same halting site. They have been through a lot in life. A conversation develops in front of their caravan.

Mr. McDonagh: The time I'm talking about, you'd be stuck there by the side of a little ditch with a tent and there could be (*demonstrating*) that height of snow. Now when the guards would come out, maybe around 12 or 1 o'clock, drag the tent from over you – pack it out there through the snow – you'd be lying there on a wad of straw. And you had to get up.

Now you would best bet go and leave that place. You'd keep going through the snow until you come onto some place that you'd have to clear away the snow and try to put up that tent again. Now, you'd have no firewood because you wouldn't see the sticks because of the snow. And you mightn't be there three hours till you were beat out of that.

Mrs. McDonagh: We were all living within houses – down in Connaught – down below Athlone. And they were all beat, all beat and run like sheep – beyond up across the bridge and then they could go where they liked then after.
They took to the road …

Mr. McDonagh: … They took to the road and they never left it. They never left it. Starting from that they'd build little bits of tents the best way they could. Maybe if there was an old shed in the fields they might go in there for a night. Our life at that time, you'd be as well dead as alive – because we suffered too much.
Because when I was up to eight, up to nine years old, I often had to tie bags round me feet to keep them out of the frost and snow.

Question: Could you tell us about your family, how many children you had?

Mrs. McDonagh: Fifteen! Tell them: fifteen.

Mr. McDonagh: We have sixteen, yeah sixteen.

Mrs. McDonagh: Fifteen!

Mr. McDonagh: Fifteen? – Fifteen!
We have nine living out of fifteen. Five boys and four girls.

Back to Johnny Collins, the tinsmith, singing an old Traveller song.

Song *Hammer it out*

Well, I can make a bucket now and I can make a can
And I can handle Katy well as good as every man
Oh, hammer it out, hammer it out, hammer it out to hedgerows

Well, here comes old Jim Donovan and he's flying on his bike
Again, he went to Thomas serving God and have your life
Oh, hammer it out, hammer it out, hammer it out to hedgerows

Well, Thomas married Katy to be happy all the life
Thomas and Jim were the best of friends and Thomas got a wife
Oh, hammer it out, hammer it out, hammer it out to hedgerows

Now all you boys in Clare, take a tip from Thomas and his wife
And everything over and under you be a bachelor all your life
Oh, hammer it out, hammer it out, hammer it out to hedgerows
…

Johnny Collins: Well, I learned the trade from my father, and he learned it from his father before him – going back hundreds of years. They picked it up off each other. Father from father to son.

You see, back years ago when the Travellers were around, we used to pull into what we call a camp, and we'd stay there for two or three weeks – as long as we had to stay there – so we'd do all the work in the area. Then we'd move maybe twenty or thirty miles and we'd do the same. So maybe in a year's time we'd be back in the same camp. We used to keep in a circle all the time.

We'd probably end up in the same camp as we started in – but we'd always got work. Until the plastic came in and killed off the trade altogether – nobody was buying off us, so we were wasting our time making the cans or buckets.

Narration

The far-reaching economic changes have forced the traditional Travellers from the road to settle at the peripheries of cities. And so, our journey takes us to the west coast of Ireland from the countryside to the cities.

Scrap metal collector Frank Toohey takes a load of old iron to a scrap yard in his pick-up truck. This is followed by an interview at home in his caravan.

> **Frank Toohey:** When the harvest was increasing, we were getting more food, we were beginning to get our own money and life was beginning to come on for us. We were able to buy our own food.
>
> And we heard of a thing called the social welfare. And it was six pounds a week. So, my father went in and he signed up for it and he was getting six pounds a week.
>
> Things began to buck up for us. So, my mother and father died. A great part of my brothers. And I got married and I have ten in the family now, nine girls and one boy. And we collect scrap and we get the dole. So, we told them that we only can see life as all we get to feed eleven is one hundred pounds – just the bare survival. So, it's because of the collection of the bit of scrap that it helps out with the amount of dole. And there's no such thing as any hardship, real poverty and real hunger. We escaped that from the bit of scrap.

Narration

Galway, located opposite the Aran Islands, is the westernmost point of our journey. Today only a few Travellers still travel. The majority cannot afford to move. Even though the Travellers represent a minority, their numbers are astonishingly high. Today some 25,000 Travellers live in caravans in Ireland. Another 80,000 live in England.

Nobody Likes Us
Family Clan

Nobody likes us
We have different ways

Nobody likes us
I wonder do we care

We don't really need them
We've plenty of friends of our own

We stick together
Through thick and thin

We're not lost
We have our own people

Till the day we die
We don't have no rights

You know that's true
In this life what can we do

Because nobody likes us
Why should we lie down and die

We have our family
To share all our lives

Galway

Hill Site is a large Traveller camp in an open field with electricity pylons. Scrap lies scattered between the caravans. Children play and work among it. There are horses and open fires. Some families are busy tidying up in front of their caravans. A mother bathes her little boy in a metal tub outdoors, with his siblings helping her.

Narration

The family is the basic economic and social unit – comparable to the Romany or Sinti. To assure marriages within the clan, the wedding matches until recently were made by parents when the daughters were fourteen, fifteen or sixteen years old. Catholic in faith, they themselves gave birth to an average of twelve children.

Occasionally brides never met their husbands until their wedding days. There was only one way to upset the parental wedding plans: the adolescent girl would run off with her boyfriend and the two would remain in hiding until the following morning. The romantic marriage was then assured. Once, a young woman's virginity was placed in question, she had no choice but to marry. This run-away-match was used by Kitty Delaney – sixty-five years ago at the age of sixteen.

Kitty Delany, an 81-year-old woman who keeps her caravan neat and tidy, is lost in thought as she reminisces about her youth and her time as a parent.

> **Kitty Delaney:** Because I think when the match is made neither the girl nor the boy will be satisfied. They go by their parents but a lot of them shouldn't. I think it's up to the girl – it's up to yourselves – because both sides have to be very satisfied. Because you're getting married for life, aren't you. It not like something for minutes.
>
> We struggled through life. We came on to have a big family. Nineteen, four dead and fifteen alive. Nine boys and six girls.
>
> Any time I ever had a child, it was the very same as if I never had one. You'd just have your baby – you'd come out – you'd wash and

clean and look after the rest of them. You weren't thinking about yourself at all. You were thinking about the family at that time.

It's no joke if you have to rear a big family there and go out – day in and day out – caring for them. It's not like you have a steady job and a good home – then it's very easy to rear a family. But you have to try and keep them clean, try and keep them going to school. You have to keep them fed number one and you have to keep them in their own place number two. Keep them out of trouble and bother – thanks to God we never got none of it anyway. We had a good old life.

Black-and-white archive film from 1965 showing a poor roadside camp made up of barrel-top wagons and makeshift tents. Many women and even more children are huddled on the ground. At night, the large families gather around the campfire in front of the wagons, while the men drink beer. In the morning, a Traveller makes a tin bucket and his wife ties fabric flowers. Both are wearing tattered clothes.

Molly Collins, Nancy, Geraldine and other women with their children on their laps talk about childbearing and family planning, then and now.

Molly: So, there was no family planning, that's why the women had the bigger families. So, we used to go by the routine of our mothers – that you had to have big families, that if you did anything against it, like we'll say, abortions which you hear now and things like that. That is a sin, and I count that still as a very big sin in my own way.

And we didn't know anything. How to manage to keep yourself from having big families. But the younger women do know.

Nancy: The changes for the women – the women at that time had very large families and they had children nearly every year. Some of them. Some of them had maybe fifteen children, maybe twenty. And maybe – the lowest family might be ten. But the woman today has very much lower families than that. The highest family in my generation maybe six or seven will be a very large family.

Geraldine: The younger girl – I wouldn't have a large family myself. I'd like two or three probably, whereas I came from a family of ten. That wouldn't be me now, I'd say.

Nancy: The women today have an easier life than the women years ago because the dole came in and the women could live on that. Whereas the women years ago had to go out and beg for what they had.

Molly: When I got married in 1953, it was hard times. But I thought I was going into luxury because my husband had a green cover over the tent and I thought that was very good to have. But still I had to beg the day that I got married.

Geraldine: Some people know how to beg these days but I wouldn't know how to do it, so I wouldn't do it. So, it's all changing all the time. And I would say it's changing for the better will say.

Night-time cable burning: Young folks light up a bunch of pallets and toss the cable bundles they collected earlier into the roaring fire. After turning the smoking bundles several times, they pull them out of the fire with long poles. They leave the now bare wires to cool down next to the fire pit. As it is night-time, the black clouds of smoke are hard to detect.

Narration

The women's growing independence has long undermined the man's authority as head of the family. The women are gaining power. Usually they are the ones who represent the family to the outside world and deal for instance with charity or welfare organisations. The men can claim only one domain as exclusively their own: when it comes to confrontations with the police.

In the past the men were responsible for horse and cart – essentials to the nomadic life-style. Automobiles don't require such constant care. The traditional skills have become obsolete, and so the fathers have no trades to teach their sons. Family structure and destination are gone. Today's Traveller families have apparently lost their inner balance.

Ballinasloe

Winnifred Hartey's family is preparing to move on. They have gathered in front of their caravan with relatives and a total of thirteen children. The caravan is being made ready for departure and hitched to the car. But the trailer combination gets stuck in the mud and cannot get off the spot. The remaining people help to push it forward. They finally manage to drive off.

> **Winnifred Harty:** I have four kids and the last place we were in was a place called Shannon, County Clare. I booked them in a school there, but the Gardai (*police*) came on and moved us off. So, we're here a week now since this Friday coming and with our kids booked into a school over there, we're still moved off here – because if we don't go, they might get a JCB (*tractor)* and pull us off altogether and leave our caravans on the road. And everything inside the caravan would be broken. Everything like that. They don't really care. So, just for peace we'd move away from them.
>
> I was reared in a house – it's very hard to cope on the side of the road because I was born and reared in a house. I have four kids now, which I would love to be reared back in a house. But it's so hard to get a house there and this is why we're on the road.
>
> Because the council is so hard to give us houses. And there's only a few halting sites for so many families, and there are so many families picked for them. And we're not lucky yet. We may be some day lucky for a site. All we really need is just a site for the water and toilets and to keep the kids clean.

Narration

Headed for Dublin we travel the island from west to east – leaving southern Ireland all behind.

Mick
Identity

Mick, you're always dirty
We never see your face
You're feet they're always smelly
People think it's from this place

What am I going to do with you
No matter how hard I try
I never really change you
You're just like a dirty-faced child

If you were tidy
Your happiness would be gone
When you are dirty
You have the soul of a happy man

When you pick the children
You surely ruin their clothes
The little children love it
But Mommies cock their nose

Mick, you're so happy
And contented in the mind
No matter what people say about you
You turn around and smile

If you had a white shirt
And a matching tie
The children wouldn't know you
They'd walk the other side

It would be sad to change you
It could do a lot of harm
That's the way God made you
With your easy-going mind

Periphery of Dublin

It's a wild mess of junk vehicles. Car batteries, tyres and other spare parts have been removed and are now lined up along a main road. Between them, three caravans and a few makeshift sheds are placed. This is the realm of Cider John McDonagh, which he shares with his family, several dogs and ducks. A customer is on the site removing a wheel.

Cider John McDonagh: You get a man looking for an old tyre, an old spare wheel – everybody gets punctured sometime. You know what I mean. If they come in here to me, they can buy a second-hand tyre and the whole lot and shooting gallery for four or five pound.

Secondly, I have this caravan here for myself and the wife and kids … All you see around there is old scrap batteries over here. I'll show you.

Come over here and I'll show you. I've a sore leg at this moment now – it's not too long since I had fall. Now what I do with those batteries is this way – watch. I drain them like that. Now I drain them in a way. (*The battery acid runs into an open barrel*). Now. Well, I surmise now for a minute that will do. Now when that's full, I take the drum from here and I spill it out in the road.

Now what do I with those yokes here? You have one of them – you may need a window – you may need a bumper or a horn. I can supply that. If you go to the garage they're going to charge you full fee. If you come to me, it's a quarter of the amount. Now I have my own water up there. My own water. I have my own toilets. I have my own transport. And then again – come up here and I'll show you. Now. Come up here and I'll show you that. *(He is walking around the caravans*)

It's like taking a bird off a tree and putting him in a cage. What do you do with him? You put him in jail.

Well to put me in a house you do that. There is my life and there is my living. There I will live and there I'll die. That's my story and that's it. Now I hope you accept that.

Cider John McDonagh has invited us into his caravan. His wife Jane is cooking stew and will join us later.

Cider John McDonagh: Well, I'm not a rich man. I wouldn't call, well, I'm not poor in a way. I had money at one stage. But I was panicking at the time because the money I had I couldn't account where it came from. I gambled a lot of money on horses, and I burned some of it in the fire through panic. I threw it into the fire, and I got away from the problem I had at the time. But money is not everything. See your faith is a good thing to have. If you believe in the Almighty God, who else do you have to believe to?

Jane McDonagh: Our Lady of Knock that's what I believe in. And that's why my child got cured. He was completely deaf in one ear. But when I found out he was deaf, I took him to Knock, on the pilgrimage, and I've done three years. Brought him back for three years to Knock. And thanks to our Lady of Knock he got cured without doctors.

Cider John McDonagh: Look at this. After a year and a half! Look at the bone is still coming through the side. Would you call that a success? Doctors? How do? *(Pointing to a saint's image stuck in the sock:)* That's where my faith lies, in of our Lady there. I have more respect for that piece of paper than I have for all the doctorshipment that's gone into that.

Jane McDonagh: For any sickness I think a person should believe in our Lady. Because she has the power and if you have the faith, she has the cure.

Cider John McDonagh: If you hadn't that little bit of faith, it's no good. It's like praying to him up there and having no meanings in it. Faith is a great thing to have and if you haven't belief you have nothing.

Dublin

Narration

Since the sixties the Travellers have migrated to the cities to work a new niche: they live from other people's rubbish. This destroys the culture and identity of the industrial age's last surviving nomads.

Since then, the government attempts to force the Travellers to take up sedentary lifestyles. The thriving welfare state simply defined them as a problem, as outcasts requiring assimilation.

The survival artists of the past were far less affluent than the Travellers today. But the price is high: Mobility and self-reliance are forgotten virtues. Cut off from their roots they remain strangers in their own country. New forms of dependence are created. One-fourth of the Travellers live in housing schemes like these or at least attempt to. Many rooms stand empty because entire families prefer to live in one room – the traditional way. Such problems of adjustment to the new environment led to further discrimination.

Dublin Traveller Accommodation Scheme. A social housing development on the outskirts of the city comprises simple, identical single-family bungalows and parking spaces for caravans with flat tyres. Some of the concrete houses have boarded-up windows, indicating that their residents have moved out. The dreary atmosphere is intensified by a high earth wall that additionally encloses the fenced-in settlement. A group of children are using the earth wall as a playground.

> **Chrissy Ward:** When they built those houses, they don't consult the Travellers. They don't ask them what do they want, or what would they like. They put what they think that they like for the Travellers and no questions asked. And when they do do it, they put a lot of high walls around the Travellers. And you're put away so that you feel you're locked up and kept away from another world and you're in another planet.
>
> It was very, very hard for Travellers to get used to a closed-in space. It was very, very hard for ourselves, and I'd never stay in my own house except for my children going to school. If I live long

enough to see the children be educated, I'll be out of it. I'm in it, I clean it, I look after it. I put everything in there, but my heart is not in it. I'll never be in it, and I'll never call it my home.

Because life isn't worth living if you are not born free. But those settled community couldn't understand us – because we have different hopes – we have a different way of living. Even although we're living in houses, we're living in a dream.

It sounds crazy but we're not in them – if you know what I mean. We're just living in the past and we're living in a dream and we're hoping for the day that we can be free and take off.

Road to Nowhere

Dublin Dunsink Dump: Young Travellers search the landfill for recyclable materials. To do this, they must rummage through huge piles of rubbish by hand. They tear open hundreds of bin bags and stow the recyclable materials in their own sacks. One of them finds a bunch of cables. Others climb onto the freshly dumped rubbish to get the best materials first. Black clouds of smoke can be seen in the background. Paddy sits on an overturned washing machine and tells his story. Meanwhile, more waste bin lorries deliver load after load of rubbish.

> **Paddy:** Well, if there's a strike in the bin lorries that collect people's rubbish – outside their houses, you know – it gathers and gathers, it stacks there. And then when the strike is over settled community can see how much rubbish that they're producing. They don't realise that until that happens.
>
> For the settled people who throw it out – that's their rubbish. They just dump it because it's no good to them. But it's good to us – the scrap like. Not the rubbish, the scrap out of the rubbish. Like it's aluminium or copper. That's money for us.
>
> It's getting recycled for the refinery. But it's other people's rubbish that we have and we just sell it to the scrapyard.

The metal workshop for Traveller apprentices is equipped with all kinds of machines to teach young people metalworking skills. Here, under supervision, they learn how to mill and drill, polish and weld.

Narration

In the past, Traveller children learned from their parents the rules of survival. As the inherited strategies are no longer viable, new types of vocational trainings are required. Here the natural gifts of Travellers as artisans are encouraged. But in Ireland, a country experiencing permanently high unemployment numbers, the Travellers are the last hired and the first fired.

The Tinkers had developed a language of their own called "Gammon" or "Cant" contemptuously named as underworld jargon. Like the Latin of physicians or the English of barristers, the main purpose of this secret language is to safeguard meaning from outsiders. The "Tinkers' Talk" evidences their Irish roots, for it is derived from a Celtic antecedent long native to the island. Today only some one-hundred and fifty words of Cant remain in circulation. Enough, however, to make every English sentence incomprehensible.

Davey Collins *(teaching teenage pupils in a classroom):*
Well, we'll say good morning, everybody. Now you know why we are here. Because our language was dying out and I come here for to learn you back the language again. Because our culture is dying out if we let it die out. And if we keep the words going, well, the children will know in time what it was about anyway.

You'd use it to keep the law or other people out of your business. And if they asked you: “What did you say?” You'd switch to a different word on the spot. You'd say: "Don't bless the bloke!" – "*Don't tell the man*!" But if he said: "What did you say?" You'd say: "It's a fine day sir, isn't it". He couldn't know what you said.

Davey Collins in front of his caravan. A couple of kids are running around him. They jump on the scrap cars.

Davey Collins: The children you tried to learn a language to outdo these people, you know, – it was called the "Cant". But they would learn from looking at you anyway. Most of them picked it up. From 10,12,14 years of age they'd be looking at what you've done, and you wouldn't have to learn them much. They'd learn it themselves. But then they dropped out of that, and they started going to school; they changed.

In them days none of them could read or write. More than three-quarters of them today can read and write. They know what it is to live a different kind of way.

If they're selling something they don't know how to sell it. They just go to sell it straightforward, but they wouldn't know how to get twice the price for it. I have to laugh at it, wouldn't you?
I would rather be a Traveller the whole time than anything else. I think it's better crack this life.

Bad Things in My Mind
Eviction

The shiny buttons
The long black coat
The tall hat
With the fancy crown

The heavy baton
The cowboy gun
Belong to those police
Who always came around

Our hearts were scared
When they came near
They kicked our fire
And called us names

And moved us off
At the crack of dawn
We had no breakfast
Because of those shiny buttons

We couldn't stay
Sent us hungry every day
Kicked our tent
Flat on the ground

Rain from heaven
Would spill down
Wet our blankets
While police laughed and jeered

Our poor children
Standing in the rain
Those bad things in my mind
Will stay till the day I die

Dublin, Finglas North, Avila Park Halting Site – this is Chrissy Joyce's new address since she was evicted. In her caravan, a video of the eviction is playing on the television next to her. It was recorded by Father Paddy, the Travellers' community chaplain.

> **Chrissy Joyce:** The eviction was a few council men, an awful lot of Gardai (*police*). My sister-in-law was seven and a half months pregnant with her first baby. She asked the policeman what was going on. He told her that an eviction was taking place. So, she wasn't long married, she had a lot of valuable stuff inside her caravan. She asked them to give her time to move her Delft and stuff and they said they wouldn't. So, she sat on the tow-bar of her caravan thinking that would prevent them moving out the caravan.
>
> One policeman walked over to her and he says: “If you want to have what you're having – that baby – I advise you to get up from where you're sitting. Because if not, I'll lift you with a kick and it'll be on the ground in minutes.“ So my sister-in-law broke into tears, you know.
>
> But my father said, shouted: “You can't treat us this way and you shouldn't treat us this way and you haven't got the right!“ So one of the police men drew out and hit my father. So my sister-in-law then got very angry and she pulled the policeman and she said: “Don't hit him he's an old man and keep your hands off and there's no need to treat us this way.“ So with that the policeman grabbed a hold of her blouse and stripped her.
>
> We didn't have a solicitor to support us. We didn't have no legal means. My caravan couldn't be replaced. It had to be scrapped. It was of no use to me anymore, it had to be scrapped.

A roadside camp with several parked caravans. Cable scraps lie around, a fire is smouldering. A police car pulls up and one of the Travellers approaches. When the officer in the back seat discovers our camera, he abruptly ends the conversation and lets the policemen drive on.

Mr. McDonagh: It's just impossible. All our camping places where we used to stay they have them all blocked up. So, it's more their fault than it is of ours. If they didn't block the places, then we would not have to move.

I parked down the road here as you know yourselves. I was one night there, and they moved me out of it. You were there when I had to move. It was late. At least it was dark and there were no lights in the caravan. Moved in here and we're expecting to get another night in here. Now I'm waiting on a fella coming here. He could land at any minute and just tell me to move off again. If I don't move, I will be brought to court in Naas.

Relocation at night: The McDonagh family must move on. The Ford Transit is driven backwards up to the caravan. The children throw several dogs into the cargo area while the eldest son helps to hitch up the caravan. However, the old Ford is unable to pull the caravan onto the road where cars are speeding by. Everyone has to push. As the car/caravan unit pulls away and drives alongside the camera, you can hear that one of its wheels has a flat tyre. With a loud rattling noise, the caravan disappears into the darkness.

The next morning, another police patrol with two officers is already on the scene ...

Mr. McDonagh: I explained to them that I was moving over to here. I said I wasn't moving. They said they'd take me to court in Naas. I told them I didn't mind. I'd go to court. I'm not going for the moment. That's the whole lot of it.

Dissolve

Narration

A mountain of rags is all that greets us when we came to visit the family the next day. Of course such eyesores do little to endear Travellers to local residents. But then again, the locals also do not exclusively show their bonny sides:

Gates and trespass markers, walls of clay and the machinations of authorities metamorphosed into stone barriers bear witness to former Traveller camping sites. First, their culture was wiped out, and now they are being physically expelled. Like grotesque monuments to intolerance, these monoliths girdle a great many Irish roads. The Travellers are left with no place to go. And they never knew a place where they could stay.

"**Temporary Dwellings Prohibited by Order**" – it doesn't remain at the level of mere prohibition signs. Roadside verges are systematically blocked off with boulders to create a de facto situation.

Old Traveller: Everywhere you go, young man, is all blocked in. It's all stones and all shored – everywhere where we used to camp before is all closed in and shored. We have nowhere to go.

Three years and a half here, sir, and they're shifting us from one site to another and everywhere we go they're closing us in here.

His son: Do you know if you move a caravan today – well the next morning at 8 o'clock it'll be blocked out the same as that there – with a heap of clay. As you move, they keep blocking you and blocking you out. It's simple as that. They don't want you on the ground. That's the way they really do it like, do you know what I mean?

The family living by the roadside has made the area as homely as possible. Patchy laundry is hung on a washing line. The old man is working on a metal barrel with a hammer and chisel. Metalworking still plays a role here, even though pots and buckets are no longer manufactured. We return once more to Johnny Collins, the tinsmith from Dublin.

Johnny Collins: I feel there is no future for any Traveller in Ireland – or for the biggest majority of them anyway. I think you'll see an awful lot of people emigrating to England. At least they'll get jobs in other countries, when they can't get it in their own native country. We are Irish people. We're more Irish than the Irish are themselves. I am not a history man, but I have been told that. That the Travellers are the real Irish people in Ireland. But we don't feel like that – we don't be treated like that – we do be treated the opposite – like the Black people Africa. The Black people all over the world.

So, discrimination is very tough for us, so we don't get any opportunities, our kids don't get any opportunities and of course as an Irishman I feel sorry about that.

Like everybody else in his native country we should be treated as equals. We've got to pose and act as equal people – we should be treated as equal. But it doesn't work that way. Of course I'm sorry to see that, especially in my own country. Any man would feel the same in his own country if he wasn't treated as equal to anybody else.

Dissolve

Song for Mary
Emigration

I write this song for Mary
For I am going away
This song is only for Mary
In my heart she will always stay

I write this song for Mary
She's my only love
Without her I will die
I will never smile again

When I get to Britain
I will write to her every day
If I had work in my own country
I would never go away

I will leave my heart in Ireland
And I am on my way
I write this song for Mary
My tears are dripping away

I will send for Mary
One fine summer day

Swansea
Great Britain

Briton Ferry by night: The many lights on the structures of the refinery plant in the background hint at its vast size. Its true extent is hidden in the darkness. Mr. O'Brain stands in front of the plant, with a scratchy throat and a handkerchief in his hand.

Mr. O'Brian: Well, when we were in Ireland things were very bad and there wasn't much doing. There was no such thing as dole or anything like that at the time. And things wasn't as good as in this country. Everyone was talking about this country, how good it was and so the most of us emigrated to this country. We had nothing.

It's pure hell to tell you the truth. It's hell, this site. The people are falling asleep here from this factory at the back of me. This factory keeps people falling asleep here.

It's very, very unhealthy. And sometimes that big chimney there – see that big chimney – that lights up all this ground – lights up all this place completely. With gas explosion there, they had police, ambulances – everybody had to go there. They thought the place was going to blow up.

They not even warned us about it. And everybody in the locality knew about it. But down there, we didn't know about it. And it was ready to blow up completely.
So that's it.

The next morning, the full extent of the facility becomes apparent: a forest of countless chimneys, flues and stacks, framed by three enormous cooling towers. Against this backdrop lies a wasteland dotted with caravans and vans. People live and work in this inhospitable setting. Even children play and dogs roam free. Amidst a heap of discarded electronics, Tom can be found sitting on the ground and dismantling switch cabinets in order to extract their valuable copper components.

Tom: You don't get nothing for nothing по more. Because everybody is out of work and if anyone has got a bit of scrap, they want money for it now. When they were working they didn't mind.

They were glad to get rid of the rubbish, but now you've got to pay for it. Take less money at the end of the day. Well, it took me two weeks to collect all this. It's hard to make a living out of it because it's depression everywhere, isn't there?

Narration

Although we realised our tour wouldn't be calling on the most scenic landmarks of Wales, nowhere else have we encountered anything like Swansea. Meanwhile, we have developed a second sense for where to meet up with Travellers: there, where two highways intersect with a railway line and in the background a sewage plant with the entire area bordered to an airport. Many English industrial cities have become synonyms for the buyout attitude typical of late capitalism.

What remains behind is a desert of civilisation, inhabited by those left behind by progress. Little distinguishes the now unemployed terrace house owners overburdened by debt from those who call nothing their own. No wonder the Travellers are such a thorn in the sides of the locals. Although for far and wide not a single tree grows, the citizens don't protest against the refinery, but against the ones camping alongside.

On the other hand the symbiotic relationship between industries and Travellers leads to extreme situations regarding, for instance, hazardous waste disposal. Many drums containing poisonous substances simply stand unattended. Coincidence? Sooner or later a few plucky scrap men turn up, dump the poison into the nearest waterway, and then are paid their refunds for returning the empty drums.

Freedom is just another word for nothing left to lose.

Cardiff

A dozen historic barrel-top wagons with traditional paintwork have been arranged in a circle, facing inwards to form a wagon fort. A few carts and tents stand next to them. However, there are no horses or Irish Travellers to be found. The inhabitants are young down-shifters, known as New Age Travellers. In the middle of the wagon fort, a campfire burns and many inhabitants have gathered around it with their children. Among them are Jemma and Justin.

Jemma: Up to now, when it came to gypsy rights we didn't have any. Because if a gypsy officer would come up to us to see about re-siting or something he'd say: “You're not Gypsies, you're hippies. So, you don't count.“

And so, all of a sudden, now that they've taken the rights away, we're all the same people. But when it came to be given any rights, we didn't have any.

Justin: That's our relationship: I suppose we're a problem. (Laughs)

Jemma: And it's being exaggerated beyond belief this year. To the point where they say: "Oh God, it's time to do something about these people", you know. But we haven't changed, we are just the same as we have been.

It wasn't directed so much at us, as at all the Irish Travellers that are coming over. That we were being used, media-wise, to provoke the situation. So that they say it's time to have new laws because these people are being so out of order.

Narration

The irony of fate: as the traditional Travellers give up their nomadic lifestyle, their barrel-tops are purchased by “New Age Travellers“. Today, the New Agers are nearly the only people left on the road.

The A-40 was formerly one of the major routes used by the Irish Tinkers. Leaving Fishguard's ferry harbour they would cross down from Wales into England, continuing on as far as London. Today meeting an Irish Traveller along this route is a rare event.

Many consider the New Age Travellers as Hippies embarked upon an adventurous lark. Others sympathise with the New Agers as people who also reject living in a world of norms and conventions.

Regardless of whatever brought the New Agers on the road, they suffer from the same repressions as they themselves. Only, the Irish Travellers in England receive a few token privileges as an ethnic minority. But the resentment brewing against the New Agers is directed towards and abused against the Irish Travellers. The slate of new laws applies to everyone regardless of background or heritage.

Hills and Hollows
Living on the Edge

Hills and hollows
You seem to climb

In your heart no peace of mind
Travelling through
This troubled land
Can't find hope to live on

Smoky cities, noisy sounds
Mental patients walking around
Stolen cars late at night
Drunken people having a fight

Bags of glue, treasure dust
Smoky engines in a line
Black chimneys with thick black smoke
In this land there's no hope

Hills and hollows
You seem to climb

Seeking for peace of mind
Grave problems full of fear
Upset people
Do not care

Crying out
For broken hope
All they have is plenty
Of fumes and smoke

Bristol

A typical English row of terraced houses, characterised by exposed brick walls and bay windows. Small front gardens separate the front doors from the pavement. Mr. McDonagh and his 14-year-old son are carrying rolled-up carpets on their shoulders, which they intend to sell. A potential customer has opened the door and is looking at one of the carpets. He is wearing a name tag and a pistol holster.

Mr. McDonagh (to the client): I do it for less than half price.
I won't charge you for looking.

I do it for less than half price.
It is washable.

Somebody says: “Some of you gypsies was around here last week, and I bought something off them and I don't want to buy off the gypsies. Why don't you go on and work right for yourself?“ A lot of people gets jealous of each other. Somebody buys one, somebody goes along, phones up the police, the police come along and hassle you. Because it's only jealousy of each other. It looks nice but it is not the real McCoy. It is fancy. It is good enough to last twelve months, maybe more if you are looking after. But in the caravan where I come from it wouldn't last a week with the kids in and out and the muck.

‘**Build your own dream home**’ reads the billboard advertising the new housing development in Bradley Stoke, near Bristol. So far, only the ring-shaped access road has been built, and a few Travellers have settled there with their caravans. Mary, the founder has brought her vocal supporters with her to back up her demands.

Ten Kids (shouting in chorus:)
We want a camp!
We want a camp!
We want a camp!
...

Mary: I am one of the Travellers that live here on a transit site that I opened in a field because people had no place else to go. And this road is called the "The road to nowhere" because it doesn't solve problems for to take us off one piece of the road – only fifty yards across the road – and put us on another road. The problem lies with the local authority, and the local government of Bristol. We really don't ask for much, only a proper home – we have our homes – now we are asking for a piece of ground to put them on.

Back on the A-40 eastbound. The monotony of the motorway is interrupted by bridges, overpasses, and slip roads. These mark the approach to the first London suburbs.

Narration

We are on our way back to London. The mind racing with pictures. Enriched by another piece of European reality – and having lost a few more romantic ideals.

Mikeen McCarthy (voice only): We used to have our fires lighting outside and we'd all have our playing accordions and our fiddles and step dancing. I was a storyteller and a folk singer. We used to freely enjoy life. And people used to come from far and near to see us. But that's all finished with now. The television took over – and if you're caught lighting a fire outside the fire brigade will come out and quench it ...

Narration

Again, the Travellers encounter an uncertain fate. Until recently, each county was responsible for maintaining a set number of Traveller camping sites. The majority of districts did not fulfil their obligations. So here the Travellers couldn't be shifted easily. But now a new law defines simply stopping a caravan off-road as an illegal act – regardless of whether a caravan site exists or not. The caravan is confiscated, and those unable to pay their fines are placed behind bars. With such bankrupt attempts to master the consequences of a self-made problem, the mess is just multiplied.

Through London's heavy traffic, we arrive at the starting point of our journey: the Traveller camp under the motorway bridges in Shepherd's Bush. There we meet the man who sang the Traveller songs in the film. It is Michael “Mikeen” McCarthy.

> **Mikeen McCarthy:** We didn't choose to stop travelling we didn't choose to come into the cities. We wasn't left to stay in the country. It was the country we were used to. We were always hard working people out of the country – tarmacking and concreting and everything, but we never got that long staying. We had to keep moving on and moving and moving.

Narration

Over the course of centuries, the Travellers have coped with changing living conditions by adjustment. Their cultural heritage, however, is no longer passed on. Their's is a knowledge transmitted by oral tradition. As the elders die off, so too disappears their cultural legacy.

> **Mikeen McCarthy:** We all came to the same decision that there's no life on the road for the young people. And putting a travelling man into a house is like getting a man from cardboard city and putting him in prison. He'd sooner be in cardboard city than in prison.
>
> It's the same way with travelling people. We wasn't reared in houses. We didn't know anything about houses. That's why I say to you: it's the end of the road. They feel very bitter because they want to be on the road, the travelling people. Young or old.
> I want to die on the road. We can't do that.

A vast number of high-rise buildings surrounds the Travellers' camp, which is squeezed between motorway and railway bridges. The exposed aggregate concrete façades are adorned with uniform rows of windows and balconies, forming huge, anonymous residential silos. These are housing factories, settlements that are manifestations of gigantism made of concrete. It's easy to see why the former nomads would never exchange their way of life for that of the settled population.

Mountain
Epilogue

Burry me high in a mountain
In a coffin made of all glass
High in the mountain
Where I can see the stars

Then I can look down
And see you
And walk all around
With bright light from a lonely star

If you burry me low
I'll smother
I know
And lonely without the stars

Or burry me
In the fork of a tree
How happy I will be
The robins will sing for me

Won't need no flowers
Nor visitors at my grave
Won't need no wreathes
Nor stone for my head

Just burry me
High in a mountain

Fiction – Non-Fiction
Film Edition