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Same Old Moon

A play

Geraldine Aron

Samuel French - London
New York - Toronto - Hollywood



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SAME OLD MOON

Same Old Moon had its premiere at Ireland's Druid Theatre in 1984. Garry Hynes directed Jane Brennan, Marie Mullen, Sean McGinley, Ray McBride, Mary Ryan, Mairead Noone, Rebecca Bartlett and Pauline McLynn in a production designed by Monica Frawley with lighting by Barbara Bradshaw.

A revised production was staged at the Oxford Playhouse on 18th April 1991. The play was subsequently presented at the Globe Theatre, London, by The Theatre Division on 3rd May 1991 with the following cast:

Desmond	James Ellis
Bridie/Granny Cleary	Britta Smith
Brenda	Gabrielle Reidy
Peace/Mrs Brown	Eileen Nicholas
Bella/Di/Nurse	Clare Cathcart
Mother Superior/Café Daphne/ Mrs Geeny	Joan Sheehy
Mooney/Michael the Postman/ Caruso/Mr Mullen	Tony Guilfoyle
Mark/Kevin/Priest/ Trevor/Bartender	J. D. Kelleher

Directed by **Jenny Killick**
Designed by **Joe Vanek**
Lighting by **Mick Hughes**
Choreography by **Terry John Bates**

The play is set in London, Dublin and Galway, and takes place between the 1940s and 1980s

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(See also page ii)

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SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Prologue

ACT I	SCENE 1	1980s.	Living room and bedroom of a small London flat
	SCENE 2	1941.	A Dublin pub
	SCENE 3	1950.	Bedroom of Dublin house
	SCENE 4	1950.	Office of a convent school
	SCENE 5	1951.	Bedroom of a Galway house
	SCENE 6	1953.	Kitchen of a scruffy café
	SCENE 7	1953.	Kitchen of a Galway house
	SCENE 8	1953.	A street in Galway
ACT II	SCENE 1	1953.	A street in London
	SCENE 2	1953.	Playground of Rest Centre
	SCENE 3	1956.	Epsom racecourse
	SCENE 4	1961.	London bedsitter
	SCENE 5	1962.	The London flat
	SCENE 6	1962.	On board a ship
	SCENE 7	1965.	The London flat
	SCENE 8	1968.	On board a ship
	SCENE 9	1968.	The London flat
	SCENE 10	1976.	A hospital ward
	SCENE 11	1980s.	The London flat

CHARACTERS

Brenda
Desmond
Peace
Bridie
Bartender
Mooney
Mother Superior
Bella Rafferty
Granny Cleary
Priest
Café Daphne
The Voice of Enrico Caruso
Michael the Postman
Kevin
Mr Mullen
Mrs Geeny
Mrs Brown
Di
Trevor
Mark
Nurse

A company wishing to reduce the size of the cast may divide the roles between five women and three men, as follows:

Women

- 1 Brenda—nine to forty +
- 2 Bridie—thirty-eight to sixty-eight. Granny Cleary—eighty
- 3 Peace—thirty-three to sixty-two. Mrs Brown—fifty
- 4 Bella—seventeen. Di—twelve and twenty. Nurse—twenty
- 5 Mother Superior. Café Daphne. Mrs Geeny. All mature.

Men

- 1 Desmond—thirty to sixty-six
- 2 Mooney, Michael, Caruso, Mullen. All 40 +
- 3 Priest—twenty. Kevin—twenty. Trevor—twelve.
Mark—twenty-four and twenty-eight
Bartender—thirty

CHARACTERS

- Brenda.** Age nine to forty. Accents: Western Irish, London and well-spoken London. Perhaps reddish hair.
- Peace.** Thirties to sixties. Brenda's aunt. Full of anger and resentment. Wears glasses at all ages. Literate Irish accent. (Galway if possible)
- Bridie.** Thirties to sixties. Brenda's mother. Gentler than her sister Peace, lovely when young and always well groomed.
- Desmond.** Thirties to sixties. Brenda's father. Preferably red haired. Less cultured than Bridie's family. A charming but destructive Dubliner.
- Bartender.** Dublin man. Thirtyish.
- Mooney.** Forties. A Dublin acquaintance of Desmond's.
- Mother Superior.** A stout Dominican nun. Galway accent if possible.
- Bella Rafferty.** Seventeen. The town tart. Big, brazen and full of herself. Able to dance.
- Granny Cleary.** Brenda's Granny. A truly ancient version of Bridie.
- Priest.** Brenda's fantasy. Handsome, sexy and super cool. Able to dance.
- Café Daphne.** Forties. Colourful and vulgar. Galway accent if possible.
- The Voice of Enrico Caruso.** Fortyish. A make-believe Italian tenor, who is actually an Irishman. Able to sing.
- Postman.** Forty. Galway man. Very inquisitive.
- Kevin.** Twenty. Brenda's shy, melancholy cousin from Dublin. A quiet, simple young man.
- Mr Mullen.** Forty. A rough, scruffy Dubliner.
- Mrs Geeny and Mrs Brown.** Fifties. A pair of cold-as-charity social workers. Specs on chains, stout shoes, WVS types.
- Di.** At twelve she's a violent cockney urchin, skilled at walking on stilts. At twenty she's a nifty dresser. Able to dance.
- Trevor.** Another cockney urchin, aged twelve. Skilled at stilt-walking.
- Mark.** Twenty-four and twenty-eight. Brenda's boyfriend and husband. Rather formal, conservative and well spoken. Able to dance.
- Nurse.** Twenties. Crisp and competent.

SUGGESTIONS FOR STAGING AND COSTUMING

Same Old Moon can be staged with minimal sets, moved on and off swiftly so that there's no loss of pace between the scenes. As one scene ends, actors can strike their furniture and props, sometimes while delivering lines, and while items for the next scene are brought on. Thus the scene changing becomes an integral part of the play. Where possible, items such as a picture, a laundry rack, a statue, etc can be flown in. When this convention is used, a group of key artefacts should remain DL throughout the play, making it clear that Brenda is reviewing her life.

Because Brenda appears in almost every scene, playing nine to forty-plus, a good costume for her might be a simple navy pleated skirt and a well cut white shirt. This can be accessorised as required, with a jacket, a school blazer, a jumper worn on or around the shoulders, scarves, hair bands etc. Her footwear can be changed as needed to show the passing of the years. A classic bob works well for her hair, which ideally would be the same colour as Desmond's hair.

The other players' costumes should be appropriate to their life and times.

TO BE USED IN PROGRAMME IF REQUIRED

The Explorer

By Brenda Barnes Aged 9

Rosary Convent, Galway, Eire, Europe,
Earth, the Wold, The Universe.

This man called ~~went~~ Conrad wanted to
Explore the world to see would he have ^a
more ^{enjoyable life} Gas in ^a another ^p Place ^e than ^e the ^p Place
he was in.

He got a boat and rowed off. He went very
fast in the beginning. But then his arms
went weak and he had to slow down.

When he had seen everything He ^h Rowed
home and said to his wife in a very
^{amused} a noid voice. "Dorathy" he said "I may
as well have stayed where I was because
no matter ~~wh~~ how far I went in the boat
I could not get ^a Away from the same
Old moon."

The End.

poor spelling

4/10

For Bill and Sheila Fahy
Garry Hynes and Ned Sherrin.
With love and thanks.

PROLOGUE

1980s

The stage is empty except for a group of artefacts DL. There is a stool, a small statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, an old teddy-bear or doll, a school exercise book, brown school sandals and a pair of white socks

As the CURTAIN rises we hear a gentle passage from the Mozart theme music, which continues softly throughout the scene

Brenda enters slowly, carrying her suitcase and briefcase. She is wearing a fur coat. She goes to the stool, puts down her luggage, picks up the exercise book and reads its front cover

Brenda (*cheerfully*) “Brenda Barnes, aged nine, Rosary Convent, Galway, Ireland, Europe, Earth, the World, the Universe . . .” (*She smiles, pages through the book, then stops at an essay*) “The Explorer. This man called Conrad wanted to explore the world to see would he have a more enjoyable life in another place than the place he was in. He got a boat and rowed off. He went very fast in the beginning but then his arms went weak and he had to slow down. When he had seen everything he rowed home and said to his wife in a very annoyed voice: “Dorothy,” he said, “I might as well have stayed where I was, because no matter how far I rowed in the boat, I could not get away from the same old moon.”

The theme music continues. Brenda puts down the essay book and picks up her luggage

Brenda exits slowly as:

The Actors for Scene 1 enter bringing on the furniture for the scene

ACT I

SCENE 1

1980s. The Homecoming Scene. The living room and bedroom of a small, cramped flat in London

When completely set, the living room should feature a two-seater sofa, an easy chair, a small table, a radio. We hear the sound of squabbling birds

In the bedroom section, the dimly lit ghost of Desmond, wearing pyjamas and looking middle-aged, sits up in bed, a folded newspaper to hand. He reacts from time to time but is generally still and inconspicuous

Peace enters, aged sixty-two, waving her arms angrily, as if shooing away the audience. She wears a shabby but clean dressing-gown, with formal court shoes and stockings. She protects her new hairdo with a fine net and wears spectacles throughout the scene

Peace Get away before I poison the lot of you! Filthy vermin! Blast and curse you when I've just cleaned the window sill. **BRIDIE!** The pigeons have done their business again.

Bridie, aged sixty-six, bustles on with the gilded tea trolley. She is similarly dressed to Peace but wears a better-looking dressing-gown underneath the shabby one

Bridie Leave that window shut before the whole flat freezes.

Peace What harm if a bit of fresh air gets in? The heat in this room would have a person suffocated.

Bridie She'll feel the cold here after coming from Australia. Sure it's so hot out there, they're used to walking around in their bare feet.

Peace Why doesn't she come in summer so? What's going on that she has to come to London now, and it nearly Christmas. And without the husband. And why does she have to arrive at this hour?

Bridie Now Peace, don't start all that. She can't help what time the plane gets in.

Peace She's her father's daughter and always has been. Selfish to the core.

Bridie (*sing-song*) That's enough, Peace.

Peace I'm the one who had to move all my stuff so Her Royal Highness can have the room. I'm the one who'll be sleeping in that—that *icebox* at the end of the passage. I'll say what I like and I'll say it to her face too, if I feel like it. It's my room as much as it's hers.

Bridie Don't agitate me, Peace. Cheer yourself up now and get changed. Look at the cut of us and Brenda about to walk in.

Peace exits

(To the audience) She resents it when my daughter comes home, for fear she won't be Queen of the Heap around here. I don't know why I put up with her. I'd him in there *(she indicates Desmond)* bossing me around for donkey's years and now she's taken over. And talk about touchy! The least little thing sets her off. Just like a child.

Peace enters with the chair

Peace When you've finished talking to yourself, your daughter's on the doorstep.

Bridie *(flustered)* Lord save us! *(She pulls off her dressing-gown, revealing a better one underneath. She hastily rolls up the old one and tosses it to Peace)*

Peace exits

Brenda, aged about forty, enters. She is wearing a jacket, skirt and blouse under a fur coat

Brenda *(warmly)* Hi Mum.

Bridie goes to Brenda and leads her to CS. They are a little ill-at-ease with each another, but trying hard. They kiss and hug

Bridie Straight into the front room—into the warm. Well. Are you dead? Not a wink of sleep on the plane, I suppose.

Brenda I slept like a log and I feel terrific

Bridie Kettle's on. Aren't we great to be up so early? You nearly caught the two of us in our old dressing-gowns.

Peace enters. She is also wearing a better gown

Brenda *(moving towards Peace)* Hello Aunty Peace!

Peace *(recoiling)* Don't touch me unless you want chilblains. My hands are like ice from being in that end bedroom.

Peace presents her cheek, Brenda kisses it

Is the kettle on, Bridie?

Bridie You know well it is.

Bridie helps Brenda out of her fur coat. She feels its heft

Oh the weight of this would have you worn out. The fake ones are nice and light. All the rich and famous wear fake ones these days.

Brenda Actually, it's—

Peace The hooligans are pretending to be interested in animal conservation now. A woman on the underground had her fur coat shaved bald and nobody lifted a hand to help her.

Brenda It's fake. A fun fur. Not the real thing. OK?

Bridie *(after a pause)* Well if it looks that real, you might as well wear the real thing instead of going round in a fake. Anyway. Let's look at you: I must say you don't seem a day older.

Brenda Neither do you or Peace. You look really well.

Bridie Oh, now . . .

Bridie exits bashfully

Peace moves to the sofa and sits

Peace Well, I'm glad you think so, because neither of us is at all well. Your mother is in constant discomfort from rheumatism and I've terrible pains in my gums since this cold weather started. We never get out—except to Mass, or when there's nothing in the house to eat. We're like prisoners here, day after day. We might as well be dead. That's how well we are.

Brenda You'll feel better in summer, I'm sure you will. But I wish you hadn't changed rooms, I don't mind where I sleep.

Peace I told your mother that, but she wouldn't listen to me. Anyway, it's done now and as long as it's only temporary . . .

Bridie enters with the milk jug, and puts it on the trolley

Brenda (*uneasily*) Of course it's only temporary . . . New curtains, Mum? They're lovely.

Bridie Thanks, love.

Bridie exits

Peace I was just thinking to myself that if you weren't going to notice them we'd wasted our time making them. I thought you'd say something the minute you came in.

Brenda (*reasonably*) Give us a chance. I mean they don't exactly jump out at a person. They're exactly the same colour as the old ones . . . (*uncertainly*) aren't they?

Bridie enters carrying the sugar bowl

Bridie These are mushroom. The old ones were beige. We might as well have kept them if you can't see the difference. Well, I must say Brenda, I thought you were more observant. Not a word about the new trolley. I bet you think it's common.

Bridie exits huffily

Peace (*calling after her*) It is common. Sure every Tom, Dick and Harry round here has a tea trolley. She didn't mention it because she doesn't like it. Last time she was here she didn't even notice the new bedspread.

Brenda Yes, I did. I distinctly remember admiring it. And I *do* like the new trolley and the . . . the . . . (*She looks around, then triumphantly seizes on the sofa*) the new upholstery!

Bridie enters with the last of the tea things. She puts them down rather firmly

Bridie The upholstery hasn't been changed.

Peace She knows it hasn't. She's just being a smart-alec. I told you now Bridie, not to be spending money to impress people, when it's just the two of us.

Brenda (*trying to keep things light*) Visitors might drop in . . .

Peace What visitors? You're not at home now dear, you're at *home*.

Bridie hands out the cups of tea, first to Peace, then to Brenda

Bridie Here we are now. Sugar's in.

Brenda Sorry to be a pest Mum, but I don't take milk or sugar in mine.

Bridie Oh? Since when?

Brenda About fifteen years.

Bridie Well, that's strange. Because it's the first I've heard of it.

Peace Throw it down the drain so if she doesn't want it.

Bridie Black tea. Out of the blue. You remind me of your father, pretending to like his meat underdone.

The Lights come up on Desmond. He becomes alert and reacts now that he's being discussed

Brenda (*smiling*) Maybe he really *did* like his meat underdone.

Desmond reacts

Bridie Indeed he did not. That was all put on, trying to impress people.

Desmond reacts

Peace It's probably smart, in Australia, but can you imagine what black tea does to the lining of your stomach?

Bridie The tannin, you mean? Sure tannin's more poisonous than nicotine.

Brenda (*showing strain*) I'll *drink* it, OK? No problem at all. (*She drains her cup and slams cup and saucer down on the trolley*)

Bridie (*wounded*) There was no need for that, Brenda. No need at all. How were we supposed to know you suddenly stopped taking milk and sugar? We'll know for the next time.

Brenda That's OK then.

Peace Does "he" take milk in his?

Brenda No, "he" doesn't.

Bridie } (*together, triumphantly*) Aha.

Peace } Bridie and I had a great idea, to simplify our tea drinking. I used to take *two* sugars and Bridie used to take *one*. So we split the difference and now we both take one and a half and it doesn't matter if the cups get mixed up.

Peace and Bridie swap cups, drink and shrug

Aren't we sensible?

Brenda (*smiling*) Very sensible.

Peace (*chidingly but with affection*) I don't suppose *you* had the sense to bring a warm dressing-gown?

Brenda Not very warm, no. I don't seem to need one at home.

Bridie Peace and I have wardrobes full. All warm ones. Quilted. Mohair. Double Flannel. Pure wool with lining. Zipper, button, sash. Mostly Harrods sales, though Marks have new ones in.

Peace (*scornfully*) Sure they look like duvets. Big humpy backs on them.
Bridie I said to your Aunty Peace: Peace, I said, we're always in our gowns, so let's have a selection for fear we'd get sick of the sight of ourselves.
Brenda (*smiling*) Dad wouldn't approve. Remember how he hated to see us in our gowns?

Desmond reacts

Bridie (*ignoring her*) Remember your cousins in Cork and they always in their coats? Sure nothing looks worse than a coat worn over night attire.
Peace Does His Nibs wear a gown?
Brenda (*carefully*) Course he does. A nice towelling one with his initials monogrammed on the pocket.
Peace (*after a pause*) Do you not think that's a bit nancy-boy? We'd say that was nancy-boy, wouldn't we, Bridie?
Bridie I must say, a monogram doesn't seem manly somehow. Could you unpick it?
Brenda (*snapping*) I don't want to unpick it!

Desmond is delighted

Bridie Well, we only asked. I don't know where you get that touchiness. There was never any touchiness in our family.
Peace I suppose I'll get my head bitten off if I ask how long you're staying?
Brenda (*making a big effort to relax*) Ah, well that depends on Bonny, my agent. I'll be seeing her later this morning.
Bridie (*wounded*) On your first day home, is it?
Peace Sure this is just a depot for her. A place to drop off her luggage.
Brenda I'm sorry. But she's terribly busy and she said today. We have so much to discuss. I sent her the final draft of a new play about a month ago. She's a marvellous agent—there's a good chance she's sold it.
Bridie Did you hear about a one called Victoria Wood out there? She won an award. I'd say she's a bit younger than you, Bren. Would you, Peace?
Peace Oh indeed she is—and she's very good.
Brenda (*firmly*) I'm very good too.
Bridie But there's no comparison. She makes everything up. You're inclined to put members of your family into your plays. Victoria Wood makes everything up.
Brenda What makes you think she doesn't use members of *her* family?
Bridie I just know she wouldn't. She seems a nice sort of girl. Family-minded. Anyone could tell that poor creature in your last effort was your Uncle Pat.
Peace (*deadly*) *Our brother!*
Brenda (*digging in her briefcase for press clippings*) Look: All the best writing reflects real life. Ask Victoria Wood if you think she's such an expert.
Bridie I don't need to ask anybody. I just wish you'd write something nice that we could enjoy without feeling embarrassed. Nobody else in the family went.
Brenda Did you tell them it was on?

Bridie } (together) We certainly did not!
Peace }

Brenda Thanks a lot.

Desmond perks up, hoping for a fight

Bridie It would be different if you wrote something with a proper story to it.

A comedy. Victoria Wood writes funny stuff and she won an award.

People don't want to be depressed.

Brenda (handing over two batches of clippings and standing behind the sofa)

Hold everything till you've read these: The reviews of my latest. A comedy!

Bridie Let's have a look.

Peace and Bridie put on specs—Peace adding a second pair. They seem engrossed in Brenda's reviews

Bridie (to Brenda) Oh! I didn't tell you the news. Over the road's daughter went to live in New Zealand and sent back photos of the house if you please. A big blue swimming pool and acres of lawn. Can you imagine, and she a shop assistant when she lived here. Tsk.

Peace (reading) How do we know it's her house? Maybe she was just posing in front of it.

Brenda (to Peace) Not bad, eh?

Peace (to Brenda) Are the papers out there up to date? Did you see where the footballers were killed in France? The President went to the funeral for all the good it did anybody.

Bridie (reflecting) Well. They'd expect him to go. (She pauses) He couldn't very well *not* go. When I think of those young lads, I could just weep.

Brenda (pointing to a cutting in Peace's hand) That's me, at the opening . . .

Peace and Bridie remove their glasses and rub their eyes

Bridie Our eyes get tired. Too much television, I suppose.

Peace It's old age.

Bridie No, it's the telly. They say it's bad to watch too much. The flickering of the picture can bring on fits. Especially if you're a dormant epileptic. A doctor on the radio said that.

Brenda (angrily taking back her clippings) Not remotely interested, are you? If they were Victoria bloody Wood's reviews you'd have them framed.

Desmond perks up

Peace That's a nice way to speak to your mother!

Brenda (putting the clippings back in her briefcase) You mind your own business.

Bridie Leave Peace out of this. You're like a child, expecting praise every two minutes. How can we get excited about a play we haven't seen?

Brenda (angrily) Because it was written by *me*. By your daughter!

Peace (jumping up excitedly) That's it. Screech away. Screech away. (She suddenly freezes in a bent position) Jesus Mary and Joseph, Bridie, my back's gone . . . my back . . . my back.

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Samuel French London



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