

The Irish Gothic classic *Uncle Silas* is revisited with a modern feminist sensibility in *Lies We Tell*, which will have its UK premiere at the Irish Film Festival London.

The original novel was written by Dubliner Sheridan Le

Fanu (1814-1873).

This latest version stars London Irish actress Agnes O'Casey, 28, as Maud Ruthyn who has just inherited her father's estate - but she's a minor and a young woman and legally may not make financial decisions for herself.

She becomes the ward of her uncle Silas who played by David Wilmut, whose screen career dates back to 1987.

Silas makes himself at home, bringing along his son Edward, played by Chris Walley, daughter Emily (Holly Sturton), with Emily's governess Madame (Grainne Keenan).

Before long, Silas's sinister intentions become clear, which include bullying Maud into marrying her cousin Edward.

Director Lisa Mulcahy, who started directing in 1997, told *The Irish World*: "It's set in 1864 but it's an incredibly modern story of a woman trying to find her power and realising that there's nobody who's going to help her, and a story of abuse and how we all have a choice in how we react to abuse whether we comply with it or collaborate or withdraw or resist, so they're very, very modern themes, even though it's a period drama.

"I was working on a series called *Blood* in 2018 and (writer) Elisabeth Gooch contacted me.

"She told me that there was this new scheme that was being run by Screen Ireland, which was to promote women's voices in filmmaking with directing, writing and producing.

"She had this idea, she thought it might suit the scheme really well.

"She sent me a very detailed treatment.

"Elisabeth and I had met a couple of years earlier on a writing course and we just really liked each other.

"Screen Ireland financed it completely.

"I love period drama and loved the idea of this story.

"Elisabeth had read all of (Le Fanu's) books, as well as a huge amount of other Victorian literature and she just really, really wanted to rewrite this book and rewrite the character of Maud and kind of subvert what he had done with that character."

**Q: THERE IS QUITE A DEPARTURE FROM THE SOURCE MATERIAL, ISN'T THERE?**

"There is, in a sense.

"Maud is very different in the book, she's just so aware of her frailties and her fears and seemingly just incapable of action.

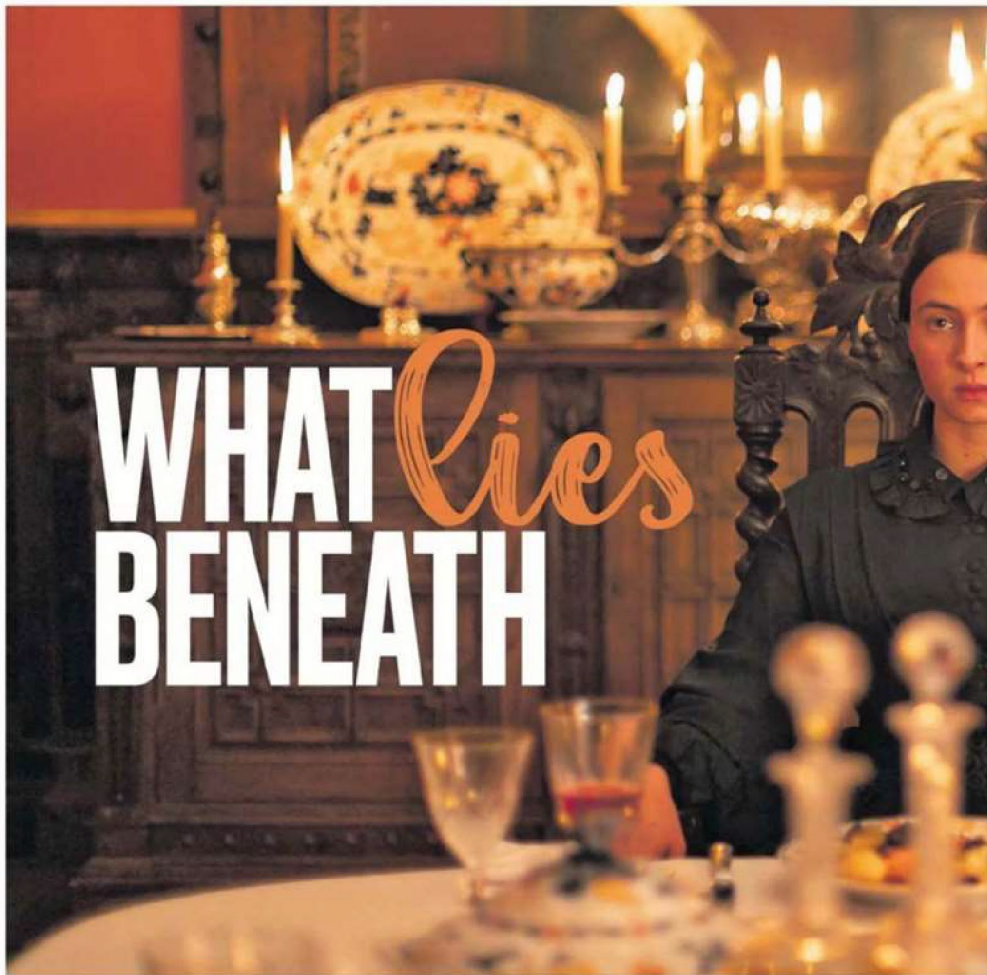
"It's really quite a frustrating book to read.

"It was worth reading.

"The book was written in 1864 so it was just really interesting tonally.

"She just really wanted to rewrite the character of Maud.

"Maud in the book does find her courage but it takes hundreds of pages to get there so it was worth reading - I wouldn't



# WHAT *Lies* BENEATH

re-read it."

"(The film) really ramps up once she refuses Edward's proposal for the first time.

"She's expecting one thing and quite quickly we realise how clever a manipulator Silas is, and that things are not going to be as she hoped they would be."

"She has no help, everybody has chosen for one reason or another not to help her, to either collaborate with Silas or to comply, to not resist him.

"She is on her own and realises that she's going to have to do it on her own with no help.

"She does, at times, refuse help.

"At the very start her trustees advise her against accepting Silas as her guardian, but she does refuse that help.

**Q: IS IT NOT A BIT STRANGE THAT SILAS WANTS MAUD TO MARRY HER OWN COUSIN?**

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It's an incredibly modern story of a woman trying to find her power and realising that there's nobody who's going to help her

"That would have been very normal.

"If you look at the genealogy of the royal family, they all married each other.

"That would be very, very normal and probably isn't still hugely unusual.

"To marry your first cousin would be very normal at that time actually.

"As Silas says, "What could be better than to take your own blood to wed?"

**Q: LEAD ACTRESS AGNES O'CASEY IS THE GREAT GRANDDAUGHTER OF PLAYWRIGHT SEAN O'CASEY. YOU DIRECTED AGNES BEFORE. WAS SHE ALWAYS GOING TO BE YOUR MAUD?**

"I was working in England on a BBC series when COVID struck so we had to pause that.

"I came back to Ireland and I always knew I was going to make this film after that BBC series and so we decided that while

COVID was happening we would cast Maud.

"We always wanted a new actor for this, not somebody established and we very, very quickly realised how good Aggie was, and how perfect she would be for Maud.

"It really didn't take much discussion to decide on that.

"I went back to England in August '20 to resume work on the BBC series and by that stage, we had lost our lead actress because she was committed to something else.

"I spoke to our producers, and I said, 'I think you should see this Irish actress, she's wonderful'.

"The lead in Ridley Road, which was the series, also had this very innocent quality about her but this steely nerve."

"We got Aggie to audition and we went with Aggie for that part.

"(Aggie) was great in *Ridley*

Agnes O'Casey, 28, great-granddaughter of Irish playwright Sean O'Casey, as Maud in *Lies We Tell*, which premieres at the Irish Film Festival London. (INSET) Director Lisa Mulcahy



Director **LISA MULCAHY** tells **David Hennessy** about the new film *Lies We Tell* which is adapted from Sheridan Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas* and has its UK premiere at the Irish Film Festival London

up so eventually they're so familiar with the moves like a dance, you just go at full tilt.

"So, although it's an uncomfortable scene to watch, it wasn't really difficult for us to shoot it."

"I shot it in just one take, just one shot on Aggie, because they knew exactly what they were doing."

"In a scene like that, you have a minimum amount of crew in the room, only people that you need, so there might have been four of us crew in the room."

"Some of the crew who were just listening found it difficult."

"When you don't see something, but you hear it, that can be very difficult because you're using your visual imagination."

"That's why I cut to those couple of shots of the house where we can clearly hear her shouting."

"Then in the next scene then the following day she says, 'And I thank you all for your kind sympathy'. What she's basically saying is, 'You all heard and none of you came.'"

**Q: UNCLE SILAS IS BROUGHT TO LIFE BY DAVID WILMOT**

"Yeah, he's great. I'd worked with David before on *The Clinic*, we had done two seasons of that together."

"I've obviously seen David in lots of things and David has great layers to him, he has this vulnerability and I wanted Silas to have a certain vulnerability."

"He has charm, he has that wonderful voice but he can switch on a penny and so it was really important that the Silas we got did have all of those layers."

"I didn't just want him to be like a characteristic huddle."

"It was just wonderful in it."

**Q: THE FILM WAS RELEASED IN CINEMAS IN IRELAND LAST MONTH, WHAT WAS THE REACTION TO IT?**

"I've had lots and lots of very positive messages from it, so that was great."

"We're going to be screening on the 18th of November at the London Irish Film Festival, I'll be there which I'm really looking forward to."

"It's really interesting to be in the audience with the film outside of Ireland."

"We were at a French film festival, it was screened four times and all the screenings were completely full."

"It's just really interesting to see how the French audience engaged with the film."

"It was just really great how much they engaged with the story."

"I would love the people in London to come to see this film and Irish people in London come to see this film because you don't often get period films that are so modern."

"I just encourage people to come see it and I don't think they'll regret it. They'll have certainly strong feelings about it but as I say the overwhelming response has been hugely positive from people."

*Lies We Tell* will be shown at 8.30pm at *Vue Piccadilly* on 18 November as part of *Irish Film Festival London*. *Irish Film Festival London* runs 15-19 November. See [iftuk.com](http://iftuk.com).

*Road* and she's really terrific in this film.

"She carries the whole film, she's pretty much in every scene."

"I love working with young actors because there's just a sense of excitement and curiosity and hope for what's to come for them and it's just wonderful to be around them."

"Aggie's a lovely person. She's just a really open actress and she is prepared to go to those places that are sometimes quite difficult, so it was really terrific working with her."

"She's just an absolute delight and so talented."

**Q: CHRIS WILLEY, 28, WELL KNOWN FOR *THE YOUNG OFFENDERS*, IS UNRECOGNISABLE AS EDWARD AND COULDN'T BE FURTHER FROM HIS CHARACTER IN THAT, JOCK.**

"Chris is an incredible actor. 'He went to RADA so has had amazing training and he's very, very talented."

"You wouldn't have a clue that it was the same actor playing those two parts."

"He did a beautiful audition, a really quite a wonderful audition, for this part."

"He's so good in it really, because he's caught."

"Edward makes his choice to collaborate with Silas, but he also is in a very difficult situation."

"He could choose not to collaborate, but he would just be chucked out, he would have absolutely nothing."

"He's not portrayed as the sharpest tool in the box, but it's hard not to feel sorry for all of these characters in some way."

**Q: YOU SPEAK ABOUT GOING TO PLACES THAT ARE QUITE DIFFICULT. RAPE SCENES ARE DIFFICULT TO WATCH, ARE THEY DIFFICULT TO FILM AS WELL?**

"These days anything to do with intimacy, we always have an intimacy coordinator on set

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which is great - and is the right thing to do."

"We rehearsed that scene very thoroughly before we even started shooting at all so that when we came to the day that the actors just knew exactly what they were doing."

"I worked with a stunt coordinator and an intimacy coordinator in that scene - it's like a dance or a stunt."

"When you're doing a scene where an actor has physical contact with another of any kind you choreograph every single move and where the hands are going to be."

"Everything that you saw on that scene, the actors knew exactly what was happening."

"Obviously, Chris and Aggie were friends and that helped so that both actors are comfortable with what's happening."

"It's all about consent. 'Once they are familiar with the new moves, you just speed it