

Emily Envisions an Iconic Author's World



Emily director Frances O'Connor wanted her debut feature to depict a world that was both poetic and familiar, full of beauty and emotion, and at times gothic. The speculative drama imagines how Emily Brontë (Emma Mackey) was inspired to write her classic 1847 novel *Wuthering Heights*, whose focus on primal passion was controversial in its day — and surprising subject matter for a young woman who lived a fairly cloistered life with her family in

a parsonage on the Yorkshire moors.

Faces and Landscapes

O'Connor's brief for cinematographer Nanu Segal, BSC was to "approach the lighting and camerawork from a subjective and emotional perspective, even though we were making a period film," Segal says. "We wanted to reflect the internal state of our characters with our technical and artistic choices. What is Emily

thinking? What is Emily feeling? On the one hand, we aimed to be very naturalistic, but on the other, we were also trying to create something very subjective that lent itself to some of the story's more supernatural elements."

O'Connor tapped Segal because of the cinematographer's handheld work in the 2016 feature *The Levelling* — a film, like *Emily*, that is heavy on landscapes and faces. She sent Segal the script, along with a director's statement.

"I loved the script straight away," Segal says. "Frances' depiction of a young person searching for her place in the world was incredibly moving, and also beautifully visual."

Heightened Realism

The filmmakers' inspiration came not from other period pieces, but from two quite different contemporary dramas: Jacques Audiard's *A Prophet* (shot by Stéphane Fontaine, AFC; AC March '10) and

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Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Biutiful* (shot by Rodrigo Prieto, ASC, AMC; AC Jan. '11). "Both films have quite a lot of handheld work, and the camerawork has the essence of documentary, where the camera feels like it's catching moments," Segal observes. "There's a naturalism to the camerawork in both films, but there are also moments of heightened realism."

O'Connor wanted a similar aesthetic, and for the camera to stick close to Mackey. "We have these very centralized close-ups with Emily, when she's in the middle of the frame looking out at the audience," the director says. "She's in the middle of an experience, whether that's just after she's made love for the first time, or when she dies. She's sharing that with the audience so that we always feel we're on her side."

Segal says O'Connor's desire to make a film that was "very

cinematic, with a large canvas," led to shooting with older anamorphic Hawk C-Series lenses. "We felt they would give the film scale and a cinematic atmosphere. Also key was that the lenses handled the flames and candles really well; with a lot of other anamorphic lenses, you get horizontal anamorphic flares when you have naked sources in shot. I didn't want flare going through the actors' faces or creating a distraction."

Operating with a Sony Venice in Rialto mode to keep the camera's footprint and weight at a minimum, Segal maintained a T4 stop and an ISO of 2,500. She wore an Easyrig throughout the six-week shoot. "When I have an Easyrig on, I feel completely at one with the camera, and I can hold the camera for ages and ages," she says. "I've been using it for more than 10 years."



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Opposite: Author Emily Brontë (Emma Mackey) writes by candlelight. This page, top: Emily shares a moment with curate William Weightman (Oliver Jackson-Cohen). Bottom: Director Frances O'Connor and Mackey discuss a scene.



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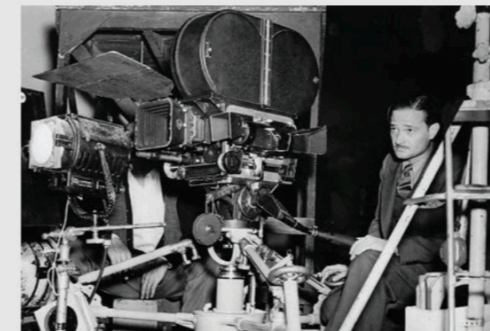
On Location

O'Connor originally thought to shoot on practical locations around Haworth, where the Brontës grew up, but the moors there were trampled and had too many telephone wires in view. Instead, the production went north to Dent and Kirkby Lonsdale, where the moors are relatively untouched.

To stand in for the parsonage where the Brontës lived, the filmmakers found a manor house that had recently been sold and was not yet occupied by its new owners. “They really hadn't

done that much to modernize it,” O'Connor notes. “It was like a mini studio because we could shoot inside and outside.” Other location work required trekking deep into the moors. “It was hard on the crew,” the director says. “We had the lights [mounted] on machines called Spiders, which are machines that can deal with uneven terrain, and rolling them across fields was really difficult. They are very slow to move, so it took a long time to get lamps into position.”

A Dark Turn
One of Segal's favorite scenes



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This page: Prepping an eerie scene in which Emily dons a mask while playing a guessing game with friends and her siblings. Opposite: Segal responded to the film's script immediately.



“The mask scene was really fun to shoot because the performances are so amazing, and it’s got all these different stages.”

has supernatural elements. A group that includes Emily and her siblings takes turns donning a white mask and asking the others to guess who they are. Emily reluctantly takes part, and the merriment stops when she announces she is her dead mother. Her siblings start to believe they're in their mother's presence. Suddenly, they hear the sound of

knocking. “They’ve come to take me back,” Emily whispers. The windows blow open and wind gusts through the room, causing an overhead oil lamp to swing wildly.

“The mask scene was really fun to shoot because the performances are so amazing, and it’s got all these different stages,” Segal says. “It was a scene that

Frances had visualized very specifically, so we were able to plan it and break it down precisely, in terms of shots and lighting cues.”

O’Connor explains, “We wanted to progress from feeling something very natural and everyday into something darker. The sequence is broken into three sections. The first is just the normal world; the second bit shows a progression of time, and that the boys are a bit tipsy; and the third scene is moving from what feels like a game into something more.”

Emily is shot more

naturalistically until she dons the mask, then she becomes central in the frame and disconnected from the group. “As the scene progresses,” O’Connor says, “we start splitting [shots] into the boys and the girls and then just the family members. Everyone becomes isolated and emotional.”

Segal adds, “A lot of work went into getting the mask itself right. The other thing we spent a lot of time prepping was the overhead oil light; the practical lamp in shot is an original oil lamp, which we modified to be

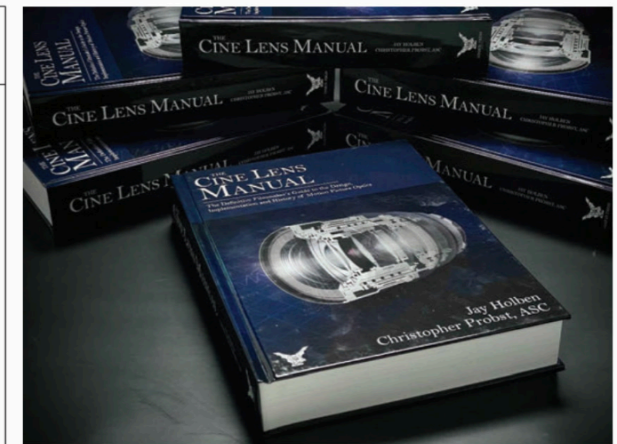


powered electrically. When the wind picks up, it has to move and swing. With gaffer Gary Davies, we made a simple rig that could swing: a 2K springball on a mega-boom that could be swung from the middle of the table. Getting that shot exactly how Frances had imagined it involved a real collaboration between the gaffer, the art department and me. It’s a more expressionistic kind of lighting, but it still goes back to a naturalistic source.”

Contemplating the enduring appeal of *Wuthering Heights*

and the turbulent relationship at its center, O’Connor observes, “There’s something in the rebellious nature of Heathcliff and Catherine. They’re pure id, really, and that’s what I loved while reading the book as a 15-year-old. These two characters just really didn’t care what anybody thought about them, apart from each other.”

“I read it as a young teenager, so it’s been a while,” Segal says with a laugh. “But it was really great to revisit Emily Brontë’s world as an adult.”



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