



The fourth and final film in our “Feast for the Eyes” Season.

**Behemoth.** (France/The Netherlands/Hong Kong/South Korea 2015)

Directed by **Zhao Liang.** (95 minutes)

Playhouse Cinema, Eden Court: 5 March, 7:15pm.



Director Zhao Liang talks about *Behemoth*.

While I was making *Behemoth*, the production team had very limited resources. Basically there was me; an assistant cameraman, due to the technical difficulties of operating the professional camera I chose to use; a soundman; and sometimes a field producer. In general, I'd say that it is less stressful for me to shoot alone, because when I am alone I am less distracted. Also, the people I film are less distracted, so their behaviour in front of the camera will be more spontaneous, more natural.



I don't make friends through the camera. The camera is my gun for hunting. When I take the camera in my hands, I am a hunter ready to shoot. I make friends when I put down the camera and hold a drink instead.

I don't know which group I belong to, in China or in the international scene. For me, it's not good news if I'm told that I belong to this or that group. I think the essence of art is to create something personal, so I hope I will never belong to any group. I belong to my own.

In *Behemoth*, I used a Red Scarlet camera to record in 4K. This machine is the smallest of all professional cameras, and has the best quality for a relatively low price. Although it is not as easy to operate alone as other cameras, the difficulties inspired me a lot. For example, sometimes during the shooting of *Behemoth* I could only use one 50mm lens. The fixed focal length is a limitation, but at the same time this limitation forced me to seek new aesthetic possibilities, and you can see the results on the screen. Limitations force me to do things in ways other than I originally planned and to overcome my old mode of thinking. They push me to be innovative. For me, the aesthetic meaning of images is more important than their journalistic value, which is why I always avoid "playing it safe" and using wide-angle shooting and automatic camera settings.

For me, filmmaking is not about the technology. The camera is just a tool that I use for my research. What really drives me is my "sense of art," which is something personal and very difficult for me to put into words, I am afraid.



We don't only watch film, we also listen to them. What you hear in *Behemoth* was extremely important to me. I worked hard on sound effects: I enhanced the contrast between the sounds and carefully associated them with the images to produce affinities and oppositions. Sometimes I even "played games" with my audience's ears, as you can clearly hear over the course of the film. The main problem, in terms of sound design, was that I couldn't really hire professionals due to budget reasons. However, I think that my collaborators and I managed to create something that is very close to my original idea of what the movie should sound like.

It is my voice you hear in the voiceover. About 75 percent of these poems are from Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. The rest of them are adapted by me to fit the narrative I created. In my opinion, the three worlds imagined by Dante 700 years ago are maybe a prediction of us today.

The sound you hear made by the callous hands of a factory worker is a poetic moment too. The original sound is from the field recording. I looked at the hands of the workers and saw their skin hardened from their daily labour. So I decided to film a pair of these hands, and I told the soundman to put the microphone closer to them in order to enhance whatever sound might come from them. Thus magnified, the sound produced by the friction of the skin is meant to unsettle, to trouble you. I wanted the sound to go beyond its physical, "natural" characteristics and affect the audience on the psychological level. Moreover, the brief scene of the worker's hands echoes what I say at the beginning of the movie: "He, one of the workers, does not know how to write poetry, yet the eloquence his heart exhales is no less powerful than *The Divine Comedy*."

There are hundreds of ghost cities like the huge Paradise City, built with the steel from the factory in China. In contrast with Dante's Paradise no one inhabits the Chinese version of heaven in my film. Cities like the one in the film are nearly everywhere: in "tier 1" cities (metropolises), in "tier 2" cities (provincial capitals), and "tier 3" cities (cities of smaller dimensions and secondary economic importance). There is a ghost city in my hometown as well. The ghost city is caused by the blind

development, by the unplanned expansion. It is a consequence of the economic model with Chinese characteristics, which is not following the economic laws, namely the regulation of price driven by the supply-demand system. As a matter of fact, the ghost city is the result of one of the many economic bubbles artificially created by the Chinese political system. In China, the price of property is manipulated to allow investors to make huge profits. The possibility of speculation nurtures a fever of real-estate investments, hence the flow of “hot money” in the sector over the past few years. Local governments actively encourage property developers to construct more and more new cities by offering them preferential policies. This way, the government can boast its land-developing achievements and Gross Domestic Product figures, and more plots of land and buildings can be sold under these circumstances. However, the bubble doesn't last in the long run. These days, making money in real estate has become very hard in China because of oversupply.

I think it still takes time for the class of Chinese workers and peasants to become educated and have a clear understanding of society as a whole. The awakening takes time, so it might be a while before the Chinese working class can get into the Heaven. Otherwise, they can only be buried in the Hell they are helping to construct.

**Our next screening is the first of six (in two parts) in our “Desert Island Movies” Season, chosen by our InFiFa members.**

**Playhouse Cinema, Eden Court: 19 March, 7:15pm.**

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