

Movie review on constantine

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The 2005 film, Constantine explores the ideas of heaven and hell and their impact on the day to day lives of the people on Earth. In terms of its success, the film was, financially, a big one and took a total of \$230, 884, 728 at the box office. However, it was greeted by a mixed reaction from critics and audiences alike – this was largely due to the film being based on a popular comic book series entitled Hellblazer. The film tells the story of John Constantine, a man who is able to see demons and angels at work on Earth and takes on the mantle of policing their presence – sending them back to hell if they misbehave. Upon meeting Angela Dodson, a detective who is trying to both, investigate and come to terms with her sister’s suicide, he helps her to discover whether her Catholic sister is in hell and how they can get her to heaven. Having attempted to commit suicide some years previously, Constantine is attempting to ‘buy’ his way back to heaven through his work and upon finding out he has terminal cancer, he begins to worry that his time has run out. In this sense, Constantine has a number of narrative layers which are presented through a dark and spooky plot.

Constantine’s story telling revolves around the view point of John Constantine. The audience are immediately placed in his first person narrative view of the world and as such, the audience are expected to be on board with his decisions and actions. However, he is a fundamentally unlikeable character – whether that is Keanu Reeves’ presentation of him or whether he is just generally quite an unsavoury character, it is difficult to warm to Constantine and as a consequence, the film’s plot suffers because the viewer becomes less concerned as to whether he or the other characters prevail or not. The highlight of this film is the hell verses heaven narrative

which brings in a large amount of theological debate – an interesting addition to the already ‘done to death’ plot of demons on Earth. The film reflects an uneasy storytelling technique which reflects the uneasy relationship between heaven, hell and Earth; the plot judders from one thing to another – an exorcism on a demon possessing a little girl to a demon attacking Constantine in the street to John going into hell to find Angela’s twin sister... the plot powers on and rarely stops to allow the viewer a moment to pause or think. The film’s rhythm stems from its high-octane action which is unceasing in its continued plot development. At the start of the film, we are presented with two characters – each with their own problems: Constantine is depressive, chain-smoking man who can see demons and has a death wish, and Angela is a troubled detective whose twin sister has just committed suicide which she feels an enormous guilt for. Through the art of storytelling, the plot brings them together as a solution to each of their problems. This enraptures the audience immediately because the viewer is intrigued by these two characters - how they came to be the troubled souls that they are today and how they will resolve their problems. In reality, the story is about these two characters – the demons and angels are a sub-plot in comparison to these two and their quests for resolution. Constantine’s storytelling rests squarely on the shoulders of its two central protagonists who lurch from one scene to the next, encountering otherworldly beings and terror at every turn.

The film’s acting is fairly described as being average. Keanu Reeves gives a dull performance lacking in lustre and as such, the character of Constantine is not one which will forever be engrained on the public consciousness. Much

like in every role he performs, Reeves gives a stilted performance of a quiet man who is troubled by his past and looking for an answer. From this point of view, it is extremely difficult to warm to his character on any level – particularly since Constantine is impolite, grumpy and lacking in social charm. Rachel Weisz who portrays Angela Dodson gives a warmer performance as a woman who has just lost her twin sister, although even then, it is difficult to become fond of her character as she seems to quickly become more interested in the sexual tension between herself and Constantine than she does mourning her sister. As a pair, they work well together and it means that both male and female audience members get something out of the film but ultimately, I found it difficult to be responsive towards either of them as neither particularly endeared themselves to me. The entire film builds up the idea that the two are attracted to one another – adding another dimension to the plot – but in the final scene, we see them share a potentially tender moment which never really comes to fruition resulting in a tremendous sense of bathos on this count. Other acting turns came from Tilda Swinton who portrayed the Machiavellian angel Gabriel who, upon teaming up with the son of Satan, attempts to take over the world. Swinton presents Gabriel as being a passive aggressive character whose subtle treachery is left as a twist right until the end of the film. This adds an interest to the film but Gabriel is presented as being less than angelic throughout – her words preach the love of God but her cold exterior suggests that they lack any true meaning. The rest of the cast give a fun, if a little ‘hammy’ in places, performance which brings the film to light and helps to make it an enjoyable romp, even if it doesn’t ever quite deliver on the goods.

Constantine's cinematography reflects the film's darkness: it is shot mainly at night and as such, the film's creepiness is reinforced by the shifting of shadows and claustrophobic feeling of its cramped scenes. In one scene, Constantine and Angela are wandering along a main street when the lights suddenly begin to go out – the director, Francis Lawrence, has chosen to show this from a long shot in order to demonstrate that it is the entire street that is affected. As the lights close in on the two characters, the camera angle does too until we are faced with a close up of their faces before the final light goes out. The entire scene is plunged into darkness meaning that the audience is subjected to the same uneasy, uncertain feeling that the characters are. Immediately as soon as Constantine turns on his cigarette lighter, the viewer is thrust into a close up shot of hundreds of demons swarming towards the two characters whose perspective the viewer spectates this from. This adds to claustrophobia-induced fear which resonates throughout the entire film. Another scene shows Constantine's friend and theological consultant, Beeman hidden away in some sort of pumping station. His desk, positioned at the far end of a long corridor which is lined with pumps, means he must sit with his back to the rest of the room. Whilst on the phone to Constantine, he hears a loud bang behind him and immediately swivels around but can see nothing. The audience sees this from his perspective with a long shot. This type of camera angle continues to be used as the pumps slowly begin to kick into life, one by one, seemingly on their own. The scene cuts to a close up of Beeman's panic face before closing in on an extreme close up of a flying insect making its way up under the skin of his face and out from under his eye socket. The effect of this is to show the audience that Beeman's death is by no means normal and adds a

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supernatural element to the scene – once again, highlighting the film's purpose.

Constantine's editing is largely done to demonstrate the different views of the world: the normal view without demons and Constantine's view with them. For example, when he is describing how he became aware of his 'gift' as a child, the film cuts to a retrospective scene of the young Constantine on a bus; he is looking scared and is staring at an old lady. At first view, the woman appears to be perfectly normal and then the scene cuts to her again but this time, we are seeing with the young Constantine is seeing: a grisly demon whose face is half missing. Another scene shows a religious consultant ally of Constantine's, named Father Hennessy, dying in a convenience store. We watch as Balthazar, a demon, walks in and observes whilst a young store clerk looks on. After this death, the scene cuts back to the two men – Constantine's narrative talks over the scene describing how these 'half breeds' live on Earth relatively unnoticed by the rest of the population. This accompanies a new view of the young store clerk who now has a beautiful set of angel wings, watching over the dead man whilst Balthazar is still observing the scene. The editing in these two scenes is designed to present the audience with two, opposing views of the world: the first being our own blinkered view and the second being the enlightened view that Constantine sees. This editing is specifically manipulated to highlight the idea that the heaven verses hell scenario is happening right in front of us but that we are none the wiser – it is 'the big reveal' of the film.

The film's sound lurches from loud to quiet depending on the nature of the scene. The entire cinematographically-based premise of the film is the idea <https://assignbuster.com/movie-review-on-constantine/>

of these two warring sides battling on our streets without our realising. It is uneasy, tense and unpredictable in nature. The sound is clearly designed to reflect this. Whilst, in one moment, the sound can be quiet, in the next it can be loud – depending on the action in the scene. In one scene, we see Constantine trying to open Angela's eyes to the real goings-on around her and he does so by holding her under water, in her bath. The sound in the scene begins very quietly to reflect the gentle nature of the calm bath but as her breath begins to run out and the panic begins to set in, Angela begins to thrash around and the soundtrack draws itself up to a crescendo of noise to reflect the terror that she feels. However, as the effects begin to kick in and time slows down, so does the music – slowing down to a quiet drone before once again kicking up a notch as the bath explodes out with water cascading everywhere the and Angela and Constantine being thrown across the room. Like in any good horror film, the effect of the sound in this film is to draw the viewer in and create or relieve tension where necessary. The effect of the sound editing in the scene described above is to enhance the actor's performance by demonstrating Angela's panic.

The film is styled to reflect its comic book roots: whilst it lacks the stylized format that other comic book films such as 300 or Sin City have, it does demonstrate a link to the comic book format by bringing the demons to life through CGI animation, rather than through costumes and actors, for example. Each scene is punchy and adds to the continuation of the plot – much like the panes of a comic book strip would. Each scene is framed in a very particular way too – the action is always in shot and it is edited as such which adds to the comic book 'feel' of each scene. For example, the scene

in which Father Hennessy dies, the scene is divided up into quick-fire shots of him dying inter-cut with images of Balthazar moving silently through the store, observing and with the image of the store clerk also watching on. This scene would be as effective had it have been a series of comic book panes. Equally, the entire film is styled to be supernatural but with a realistic ‘this could really be happening’ edge to it. In this sense, it is a scary film but it also walks the line between ‘realistic’ and ‘fantasy’ very carefully, meaning that the viewer is not too concerned at any one point.

This is also reflected in its genre: it straddles the horror and fantasy genres whilst setting its action in very realistic, everyday scenarios and places which means that its subtle suggestion that angels and demons could be waging war under our noses and we would never be any the wiser. If this film was to have any real societal impact, this would be it: at worst, the idea that good and evil is as a metaphor for the battle within all of us and at best, a metaphor for the struggle that goes on in the world all-around us such as homelessness, prostitution, exploitation and drugs but that we are too blind to really see it happening. If its genre is horror then it could be arguably representative of the horrors that go on every day in our world but that we are either too blind to see or too afraid to acknowledge. Its genre is demonstrated through the repeated images of heaven and hell: the angels, the demons, the biblical references and the theological myths – each add up to produce a religion-driven horror which presents real concepts such as the Catholic belief that a person who commits suicide will go to hell, to lure the viewer into feeling vaguely concerned that this could all be real. However,

the poorly animated demons can leave no viewer feeling too concerned and ultimately, the film's edge is lost in favour for it being more fun than fearful.

Overall, Constantine is an interesting film which attempts to be more than it actually is. In trying to address religion and theology, it misses some real potential scares. Its plot has so many levels to it that it is easy to become quite indifferent to all of their outcomes – the chemistry between Constantine and Angela, the question of whether Angela's twin did commit suicide or not, the Mexican man with the Spear of Destiny, whether Satan's son will succeed, whether Constantine will die of cancer... it is quite complicated and un-necessarily so. Whilst it is an entertaining movie, it lacks in the acting department and ultimately alienates its viewers through its complicated nature. Its direction and editing hints heavily at its comic book roots which is a nice touch but one cannot help but feel that its plot would have been better suited to the ink-drawn pages of a graphic novel rather than as a Hollywood blockbuster. Although it did well at the box office, there has been no sniff of a sequel being lined up – despite the film's ambiguous ending with regard to the relationship between Constantine and Angela, which suggests that it may have simply just missed its mark.

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