



# Corpo Celeste

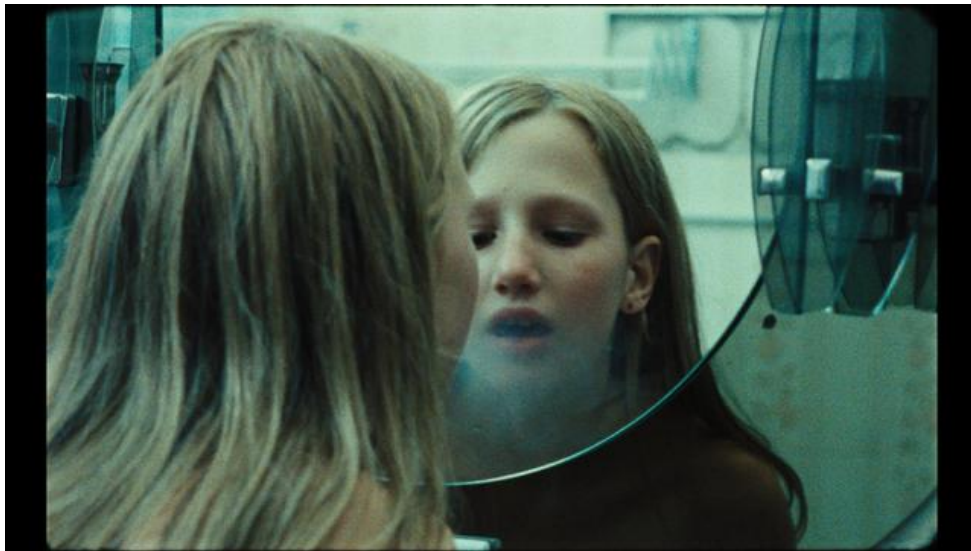
A film by Alice Rohrwacher

**"The big payoffs arrive in a couple of small, understated moments of grace...thanks to Rohrwacher's restrained buildup and direction, they certainly feel well earned."**

– Boyd Van Hoeij, *Variety*

**"A quietly impressive feature debut."**

– Lee Marshall, *Screen Daily*



**Italy, France / 2011 / Drama / In Italian w. English Subtitles / 98 min. / 1.85:1  
/ Dolby SRD**

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## **SYNOPSIS**

Set in Calabria, deep in the south of Italy, Corpo Celeste is the story of 13 year old Marta who is struggling to resettle after ten years growing up in Switzerland. Bright-eyed and restless, she observes the sights, sounds and smells of the city but feels very much an outsider.

Marta is about to undergo the rite of confirmation, and in the convention of the Catholic Church she starts taking catechism, hoping to also make some new friends. However, the doctrines of Roman Catholicism offer little in terms of life lessons or consolation, and she quickly confronts the morality of the local community, as well as the hypocrisy of the priest, who cares more about status than about his constituents.

A series of subtle moments trace her journey as she both connects and conflicts with her mother, sister and the Sunday school teacher Santa. From experiencing her period to making a bold decision to cut her hair, Marta begins to shape her own life for the first time since moving back to Italy.

## **FESTIVALS AND AWARDS**

### **OFFICIAL SELECTION:**

**CANNES** Film Festival, Director's Fortnight

**KARLOVY VARY** Int'l Film Festival

**DUBAI** Int'l Film Festival

**NEW YORK** Film Festival

**MUNICH** Int'l Film Festival

**BFI** London Film Festival

**SUNDANCE** Film Festival

## COMMENTS FROM THE DIRECTOR

... Legends and school books spoke of the blue space and celestial bodies as a world above. To the inhabitants of the Earth they tacitly opened the great maps of dreams, they awoke a confused sense of guilt. We would never have met a celestial body at close quarters! We weren't worthy enough! Yet we too live on a celestial body in space: once the label with the name Planet Earth had been removed, the Earth was also a celestial body, or an object of the world above. We were that world above.

Anna Maria Ortese

### **The way through the world**

One of my first visual impressions of CORPO CELESTE came from my reading of these words by Anna Maria Ortese, even though the film has nothing directly to do with her book. Yet the vertiginous image of the Earth suspended in space showed me a clear way in the research I was doing, wandering among concrete sanctuaries and churches that looked like hospitals. I had already begun to write the screenplay, attending catechism lessons, parish meetings, and reading catechism manuals such as "They Will Be Witnesses" and "Katekismo 2000". But I still didn't know how things would turn out. Those words suddenly appeared as a signal for me, and it was thus that Marta appeared, an adolescent walking through an unknown city, a young girl who has to find her own way through the world as opposed to a way beyond the world.

Until then I had made only a few films—a documentary or two and a three-minute short—but I was clear about a few points. First of all, I was looking for a story to move towards, a story that didn't belong to me, nothing strictly autobiographical. The church seemed the right place to look for it. I didn't have a Catholic education but I'm very interested in what is happening in the church, the place delegated to the administration of souls. Another fundamental point was that the story hadn't to come to a conclusion, but had to arise from a question and provide a way for further inquiry. And the question had to do with what it means to live in our time.

To achieve this, I needed to establish clear limits, to set the rules of the game. The limits were those of a place, Reggio Calabria; those of a time, the contemporary age; those of a world, the life of a church in Italy's periphery. The story of Marta was born from these limits, like a short song.

### **Marta in Reggio Calabria**

Marta has just come back to a place she doesn't know, but to which she somehow belongs: Reggio Calabria, the city in which she was born. The return to the south has become a very common phenomenon recently, so much so that it is possible to speak of a sort of "return emigration". Many families are abandoning the prospect of a better life in the north, where factories are closing down and jobs

are being lost, and prefer to return to the land of their origin, where at least they can be helped and supported by relatives and friends.

Marta doesn't find there the colors and community spirit that populate her family memories, but rather an immense suburb in which her sense of abandonment and solitude are amplified. Reggio Calabria is a city in which the arrival of modernity is still a living, talking wound. Spaces that await eternally to be built over, unfinished houses, huge shopping centres, a great need to show and show off – all speak of a life that, instead of organizing itself, is in a constant rush to accumulate things and add more and more without getting rid of anything. This isn't the south of warm sun and sea and bright colours. Marta sees Reggio Calabria in an urban, wintry, inhospitable dimension. As I wandered round the city, I remember feeling that the streets and buildings were as adolescent as Marta. Here was a baby city made up like an adult woman, a raw young girl already consumed by her own experience.

Under Marta's house is a dried up river bed, or fiumara, that she sees as a scar in the belly of the city. It's here that people dump things they don't need any more to procure others. Many similar river beds criss-cross the city, large spaces, almost always dry, that gape open suddenly among the houses. Looking closer, this no man's land is actually full of life: rubbish, the remains of things, but also gardens, secret allotments, huts. It's a place in which nature appears in all its force and contradiction. I saw it as magnetic, ambiguous and constantly changing. A possible place for a girl like Marta. Some children are playing in the river bed far away, almost dots on the horizon. Yet their microscopic actions fascinate Marta more than the ones that dominate her daily foreground. How can she enter this world, how can she choose who to belong to?

### **The catechism**

When they are 13-14 years old, young Catholics have to go through the bureaucratic rite of confirmation: "the definitive confirmation of Christian choices". This is the moment in which they have to confirm the choice their parents made when they baptised them as new-born babies. It is the first spiritual stand a young person has to take in life. I was keen to speak about this moment because it often refers to a choice that depends on very disparate factors such as friendship and kinship, and has little to do with acquired spiritual maturity. The aunts and uncles who welcome Marta on her arrival in Reggio Calabria see confirmation not so much as a rite of passage as an excellent way of making friends, and also of getting a weight off your back; you've got to get confirmed, otherwise you can't get married!

Marta starts attending the confirmation course. She meets other youngsters like herself and teachers who, with the best of intentions, inundate the students with games, activities and multiple choice quizzes. There's Santa, for example, a kind but inadequate lady, a prey to her own emotions, who performs her religious exercises by the book. The students are told of a good Jesus, whose body is spiritual and holy, the Jesus who smiles down from the classroom wall, fair-haired with blue eyes with lots of children around him. It's the Jesus who appears in the chorus of the song "I'm in tune with God/That's the right frequency". But Marta

feels something of a sacred unrest inside herself and it finds no peace in the classroom. It is tied to her age, the alienation of her return and also to her character. She observes everything, but she doesn't know how to choose or understand.

### **The priest**

During early research on the film, I found myself in Reggio Calabria at election time. There were posters everywhere, loudspeakers, propaganda. It was then that I had the idea for a scene in the film: a priest, a "prime elector", gathering the signatures of people who pledge to vote for a certain candidate. In exchange the politician, once elected, will "help the neighbourhood a lot". The priest I saw was important, an owner of property, restaurants and old people's homes. But what struck me was the void I saw round him, his anxiety and his boredom. It seemed like the right cue to work on the second main character in the film. I went to see this priest and discovered that in the morning he recited the rosary on a treadmill to keep fit. I realized how difficult it is to keep a spiritual quest alive within an organizational routine, without any direction, lost in a network of relations and hierarchies.

Don Mario has become a priest without a calling, who judges the world exclusively through the order of his caste, but in his solitude he is somehow similar to Marta. He'd like to get away. He imagines one day having a large church to manage, becoming important, maybe, who knows, becoming a bishop. To achieve this, he wants to show he's good at his job, to help the politician who, in turn, will help him, to organize a new, spectacular confirmation, the like of which has never been seen before, thanks to the arrival of the "figurative crucifix"!

This story really did happen and it struck me a lot when I read about it in a newspaper. In a village in southern Italy, the faithful had collected signatures to demand the substitution of crucifix that was too "modern" with a normal one in which Christ's body was visible—a figurative crucifix. What confusion! My immediate thought was that here was a great story that encapsulated the huge desolation of the contemporary church. On the one hand, we see a rather awkward effort to imitate modernity, to appear up to date, to bring more young people to church. Hence neon crucifixes, rap hymns, and quizzes with prizes entitled "Who wants to be confirmed?" after the famous TV show. But, at the same time, together with this wave of modernity, there's a call for a return to the old ways and tradition, even though the latter now seems like a ceremony deprived of all meaning.

### **The abandoned village**

Don Mario has reason to be sure of himself because no one watches him carefully. He is expected to be a good manager of a business of the sacred, using his small power to distribute sacraments, lenitive consolations, protections and favours. But Marta's alienation disturbs him and causes him to take a totally unexpected decision. When he comes across her, lost on the road, as he is about to set out on a journey, instead of addressing the situation rationally as we would expect him to do, taking her home and delegating the problem to others, he decides to take her with him. Don Mario and Marta find themselves crossing a part of Calabria

together towards the abandoned village of Roghudi. They get to know each other and for a moment become vertiginously close, but then reject each other and separate altogether on the way home.

Roghudi belongs to the constellation of villages inland from Calabria's Ionian coast that were suddenly abandoned in the building fever and reconstruction racket that lasted from the 1950s to the 1970s. There is nothing reassuring about this village, hemmed in between the rocks, neither old nor new, abandoned. But it is here that a solitary old priest reads the Gospel to Marta and opens up a new space of reflection for her. The old man describes Jesus not so much as a gentle, good saint, but as lonely, furious man, closer to the wound of her own adolescence than the syrupy image that appears in the illustrations of the catechism. Marta decides that it isn't necessary to go very far, because as Anna Maria Ortese says, the Celestial Body, the world above is already where we are.

Alice Rohrwacher, February 2011

## **BIOGRAPHIES and FILMOGRAPHIES**

### **Alice Rohrwacher - Director**

Born in Tuscany, Alice Rohrwacher graduated from Torino University in Literature and Philosophy. She directed a segment in the collective feature film *Cecosamanca*.

At 27 years old, *CORPO CELESTE* is her feature length writing and directing debut.

### **Carlo Cresto-Dina – Producer**

Carlo Cresto-Dina is a film producer based between Italy and the UK. In 1999 he started the Documentary and Short Film section of Fandango Films in Rome, under which he produced a number of feature documentaries and debut films including *I For India* (2004) by Sandhya Suri, which launched at Sundance and was listed in the New York Times "10 Best film of the year". Other titles include *Calle 54* (2001), by Academy Award Winner Fernando Trueba; *Super 8 Stories* (2002), by Emir Kusturica, and the international hit *Tickets* (2005), directed by Ken Loach, Abbas Kiarostami and Ermanno Olmi.

In Italy, he conceived and managed 'Real Cinema', an innovative distribution concept which published more than 80 titles and sold almost 1M copies through the prestigious label of Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore.

In 2008 Carlo Cresto-Dina founded Tempesta srl, a new film production company based in London and Bologna. The company's first film, *CORPO CELESTE*, the

debut feature by Alice Rohrwacher, premiered in Cannes 2011. Tempesta's new feature, *L'intervallo*, by Leonardo Di Costanzo, an Italy,-Hungary-Switzerland-Germany co-production, started principal photography in July 2011. In London, Tempesta is current developing two features by first time directors.

Carlo Cresto-Dina is currently a member of the European Film Academy (EFA), Ateliers du Cinema Europeen (ACE) and a voting member at David di Donatello Academy in Italy. He has been a visiting professor of film production at Princeton University, NYU, University of Pennsylvania, and at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan.

### **Salvatore Cantaloupe – Actor**

A brilliant middle aged Italian stage actor, he is now well know internationally for heading one of the five story strands in Matteo Garrone's magnificent crime thriller *Gomorrah*.

#### Selected Filmography:

*Corpo Celeste* - 2011  
*Qualunque* - 2011  
*Esterno Sera* - 2011  
*Tris di donne & abiti nuziali* – 2009  
*Lo spazio bianco* – 2009  
*Fortapàsc* – 2009  
*Gomorrah* – 2008  
*Rosatigre* – 2000  
*Appassionata* – 1999  
*Rehearsals for War* - 1998

# CREDITS

## CREW

<b>Director</b>	ALICE ROHRWACHER
<b>Producers</b>	CARLO CRESTO-DINA, JACQUES BIDOU, MARIANNE DUMOULIN and TIZIANA SOUDANI
<b>Script</b>	ALICE ROHRWACHER
<b>Costumes</b>	LOREDANA BUSCEMI
<b>Production Manager</b>	GIORGIO GASPARINI
<b>Editor</b>	MARCO SPOLETINI (AMC)
<b>Director of Photography</b>	HÉLÈNE LOUVART (AFC)
<b>Sound Editors</b>	DANIELA BASSANI AND MARZIA CORDÒ
<b>Designer</b>	LUCA SERVINO

## CAST

<b>Marta</b>	YLE VIANELLO
<b>Don Mario</b>	SALVATORE CANTALOUPO
<b>Santa</b>	PASQUALINA SCUNCIA
<b>Rita</b>	ANOTA CAPRIOLI
<b>Don Lorenzo</b>	RENATO CARPENTIERI