

# GENTE PERRA

## DOG PEOPLE

It was a fortunate coincidence that, at the moment when we decided to make a film with the material that we had gathered the last couple of years in Colombia and Germany<sup>1</sup>, we stumbled upon the life and work of the Colombian writer, Gomati D. Wahn (1923-1993). In a small multilingual bookstore in the neighborhood of Schöneberg in Berlin we found a book with a selection of his stories. It was published, faithful to the stylistic idiosyncrasies of the original manuscript, under the title *The Dog People and Other Stories* by a small Italian publisher in an edition of 1000. In his extensive footnotes, the editor, Francesco Francesconi<sup>2</sup>, evincing a deep fascination not just with the work but also with the conditions under which it was made, presents us with a detailed image of the life of this peculiar author. As an introduction, and to clarify the origin of the text we've used as the basis for our film, we present the following selection of the editor's footnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> In the order in which they appear, the images we have used in the film were captured in the following places:

- Nuquí, Colombia (municipality on the Pacific coast of Colombia in the state of Chocó)
- Parque Temático Hacienda Nápoles, Puerto Triunfo, Colombia (located in the former estate of drug lord Pablo Escobar, the park has hotels, a water park, a dinosaur park, a museum-memorial to the drug lord's victims, and wild animals from what used to be his private zoo)
- Zwergen Park, Trusetal, Germany (Gnome park located in the state of Thuringia, it has 2500 gnomes in a 5000 m<sup>2</sup> garden)
- The garden of Georg Dornieden (Anja Dornieden's paternal grandfather and casual collector of garden gnomes)
- The apartment of Edelmira Angel de Monroy (Juan David Gonzalez Monroy's maternal grandmother)
- The filmmakers' apartment (specifically: in front of a computer screen from which footage of a pornographic actress with artificial breasts was photographed and, in a bathroom, where the developed images were contact printed with a lighter)

<sup>2</sup> Our own research led us to find that Francesconi, besides being the publishing house's founder was also its only employee.

\* Gomati D. Wahn grew to be only 3 feet 9 inches tall. Even though he did not show the physical traits typical of a person with the genetic defect of dwarfism, at a very young age he was given the nickname of "Dwarf". At the same time (and for reasons that a more cynical person than him would characterize as one of destiny's cruel jokes) his voice never obtained the deep tones typical of an adult, which again contributed to him being categorized as an unfortunate victim of that strange disease of dwarfism. With time and due to his dark skin, most people in his life (which in the end weren't that many) came to know him as "The Brown Dwarf". Gomati, who spent most of his life immersed in the world of his imagination, decided early on that this name did not suit him and, inspired by Germanic legends he found in the books his father left him, decided to call himself The Brown Gnome.

† The Brown Gnome did not receive a traditional education. In addition to his limited height, he had the misfortune of being born left-handed, which led to a number of difficulties in his early school years and an additional stigma to contend with in a society where given characteristic was seen as the mark of the devil. Because of this, and other prejudices typical of his time, his academic career ended at the age of nine when after refusing to write with his right hand, he was expelled from school.

‡ The Brown Gnome's mother became famous in the neighborhood for the size of her chest and the lack of modesty that she showed in her dress considering such natural gifts. It is possible that in turn these attributes contributed to her early entry into a career of prostitution. Surely they explain her success in this field and likewise its short duration since she died of syphilis at the age of 29.

§ The Brown Gnome's father was known as The Sailor, a nickname he received without having ever seen the inside of a boat. It was nonetheless a nickname he was enormously proud of. An inveterate drunk and petty criminal, he never got tired of reminding anybody that would listen (specially Gomati in the few moments they spent together) of the great feats that he was destined to realize and the glory that awaited him.

Meanwhile, he devoted his time to drinking and, in moments of inspiration, to cheating and stealing with a group of cronies that resembled him in their lack of talent if not in the size of their ambitions. It was the alluring glow of this ambition what attracted The Brown Gnome's mother and what led her to decide to continue with a pregnancy that had been obviously unplanned.

\*\* The Brown Gnome was 10 years old the last time he saw The Sailor, who, chasing that elusive glory, left for the coast to join the budding business of drug smuggling. And while he did not achieve glory, at least he was able, in some small manner, to justify his nickname, seeing as, in the process of trying to escape the authorities, he drowned in the coast of Panama with 11 bottles, each containing 25 grams of cocaine, hidden in a satchel around his waist.

†† On several occasions, as payment for the nights they spent together, The Sailor brought The Brown Gnome's mother antique books. Most likely stolen, they eventually helped to compensate for The Brown Gnome's lack of a formal education and formed in him his love of fables, legends, superstitions and chimeras.

‡‡ At the age of 17 The Brown Gnome escaped from the state orphanage. His activities are then unknown until five years later, when he acquired what would be his first and only job, cleaning the hallways and bathrooms of several government buildings in downtown Bogotá. At night he dedicated himself to writing his mayor work, a monstrous, fantastic history of America. It begins 2000 years in the future, when humans have been replaced by various species of sentient beings. Through his tales of these beings' encounters, adventures, discoveries and misfortunes, he traces a future history of the continent that spans thousands of years. His ambition for this project was so great that it should not surprise us to know that it was left unfinished. Nevertheless, by the time of his death, he had already created an outline for the entirety of the events he wanted to depict. A few days before he died he had been taking notes for a story about the last inhabitants of earth and their attempts to escape before the sun swallows the planet.

§§ The works of The Brown Gnome, handwritten in more than 1200 notebooks, consist of a series of appropriations of multiples and diverse sources<sup>3</sup>. Owing to his particular idiosyncrasy, he unscrupulously modified and adapted<sup>4</sup> all kinds of previously published material, creating a literary work that is hard to classify according to traditional standards. Clearly these appropriations did not preoccupy him since he made no efforts to quote the original authors. Nor was there ever any controversy about his methods seeing as he never made any attempts to publish his work.

\*\*\* The Brown Gnome passed away in the afternoon of January 5th, 1993 in his one-bedroom apartment in the south part of Bogotá. He had no known relatives and left no descendants. His landlady, who lived below him, said he was mostly a quiet man, except for certain nights when she could hear him talking in his room, and it always sounded like he was arguing with someone, although she was certain there was never anybody there with him.

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<sup>3</sup> According to Francesconi the following are the sources used by Wahn in the story *The Dog People*, verified at the time of his edition:

Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*

Bartolomé de las Casas, *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*

Cristóbal Colón, *Diario del primer viaje*

Hernando Colón, *Historia del Almirante don Cristóbal Colon*

Martín Fernández de Enciso, *Suma de geografía*

Lucas Fernández de Piedrahita, *Historia general de las conquistas del Nuevo Reino de Granada*

Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *Historia General y Natural de las Indias*

Francisco López de Gómara, *Historia de las Indias*

Wilhelm Dilthey, *Works of Dilthey VI. Psychology and Theory of Knowledge*

Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Book of Images*

Fray Pedro Simón, *Noticias Historiales*

Fray Alonso de Zamora, *Historia de la Provincia de San Antonio del Nuevo Reino de Granada*

<sup>4</sup> Due to our limited budget and to the structural demands inherent to the editing process we have been forced to condense and sometimes modify Wahn's original text. Awareness of the author's own methods of appropriation has helped us temper our sense of guilt for having to take such liberties.