FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Blankety Blank: A Memoir of Vulgaria
D. Harlan Wilson
Raw Dog Screaming Press
978-1-933293-57-8
(January 15, 2009)

Vulgaria is an upscale suburban sprawl of McMansions and drunken backyard barbecues outside the monocultural metropolis that is Grand Rapids, Michigan. The hometown of President Gerald Ford and Amway is the largest city in the country to roll up the sidewalks at five p.m. each afternoon. *Blankety Blank*'s alleged protagonist Rutger Van Trout is a figure of marrow-deep malaise who enjoys quoting the unofficial town motto, still the same in the 2030s: "You ain't much if you ain't Dutch."

Van Trout's powerlessness at home and his irrational excess as a weapon against ennui makes an amusing farce, however his central role is overshadowed by a scene-stealing chiropractor with superhero fantasies. The chiropractor's alter ego, "The Gamehater," dresses in cheesy costumes such as "…a skintight polyester getup covered in images of burnt Scrabble letters and Monopoly cards." When losing control of situations, this guy reminds himself, "Don't hate the player." He wrongly believes the neighbors haven't recognized him.

The nihilistic Mr. Blankety Blank is an acknowledged serial killer who introduces himself from door to door as a registered sex offender might have to murder on return visits. He's a television ratings darling, as the line between drama and life itself has long been erased. The bursts of utterly visceral gore he delivers are under-reacted to by profoundly desensitized, convenience-weary Vulgarians.

Community socialization and the sad state of entertainment reflect a metastasizing entropy picking up momentum. One eerie episode commences with a character turning off an unappealing show, which prompts a worried call from someone who wants to know why. The dissatisfied viewer incredulously asks, "'Are you watching me watch TV?' The caller responds, "'Of course, sir. Somebody's watching me watch you, too. And somebody's watching him. And so on.'"

This book caters to short attention spans, broken as it is into Vonnegutian sections of a few lines to a couple pages, including a proliferation of tangential "Short History of" interludes. They educate more than advance the story—that is, when the information isn't pure foolishness.

The narrative takes recognizable form, evaporates again…the author is unconcerned about it hanging together; he's trying to accomplish other things instead.

This is the fifth work of fiction from Wilson, a nearly unclassifiable Fabulist/Satirist/Bizarro/Post-Postmodern/Speculative writer and literature professor whose titles include *The Kafka Effekt* and *Dr. Identity, or Farewell to Plaquedemia*. Take an existential dive into the near-future's "irreality" before the author sells out to Hollywood over a seemingly inevitable Gamehater movie.

Todd Mercer