HC to host Symposium on post-Soul literature

By Kevin Bogardus
Crusader Features Staff

A two-day symposium on the current emerging literature of African-American writers, such as Paul Beatty, Trey Ellis and Darius James, will be held here at the College of the Holy Cross today and tomorrow. April 6 and 7. Critics from around the United States will attend and participate in several panels that will discuss the novels, essays, and poems produced by these authors. Sponsored by the African-American Studies concentration, the event deals with the recent movement of "post-Soul" writing.

"Post-Soul" literature has just taken hold in the past decade. The new style primarily emphasizes the present day African-American experience and what it means to be Black today. American society is now supposedly clean of all racism and entirely integrated. Reflected in their fiction, the authors are ambiguous on whether they are approaching our subtly hypocritical society via satire or not. There is no outright call for freedom as there was during the Civil Rights movement – the political edge has certainly been dulled. Whatever was created by an African-American writer during the 1950s and 1960s was viewed in the context as a search for justice or truth. This is not necessarily so today. Professor Herrett Ashe writes, "Black artists and writers are no longer uniformly adopting an emancipatory—or "protest"—perspective."

When analyzing the "post-Soul" era, one must also consider the "Soul" movement of literature African-American fiction created throughout this period mirrored its time of birth: Black power, the Black aesthetic, and the civil rights movement. It was a distinctly political time in America that presented a clear answer for blacks as to the necessity to liberate oneself from racist oppression. With the dense of intense popular action, literature has begun to recover the pieces and understand fully what happened. Paralleling to the more widely known postmodernist literature, the current African-American fiction has become disorientated and jumbled through the process of time and history, as well as the countless possibilities of perspective. "Post-Soul" fiction must be taken in context to its "Soul" predecessor; critic Lisa Jones even states it must "pry it apart."

The three writers who are visiting Holy Cross this weekend are critically acclaimed and published several times over. Trey Ellis, author of the significant essay "The New Black Aesthetic," is a founding father of the post-Soul movement with his fictional work as well. Paul Beatty is actually returning to Mount St. James for the second time this semester to discuss his novels: "The White Boy Shuffle" and "Ful". Beatty is the best known of the three writers. Darius James is the originator of the dark, disturbing novel "Negrophobia." Each author uses satire to communicate to their audience, through several cultural allusions and concrete references to civil rights politics.

Panel discussions about the work of Ellis, Beatty, and James will be held today and tomorrow at 10 to 12 p.m. as well as 2 to 4 p.m. in the Dinand Library reading room. James will read his work at 7:30 p.m. in Hogan 519 today while the other readings by both Ellis and the Holy Cross' Jenks Chair Danzy Senna, at the same time and place tomorrow. Attend as many discussions and panels as possible to learn more about this current existing literary movement.

April is National Poetry Month

By Erin Koelling
Crusader Features Staff

I bet you didn't know that Worcester is a literal poetry haven. But after doing a bit of research for this article to celebrate April as National Poetry Month, I have discovered that some of the most active poetry circles and open mic events in the nation are right here in our fair city.

To start closest to home, the Poetry Circle is celebrating the month with a student and faculty reading Wednesday, April 28 in Crossroads at 8 p.m. It is the last reading of the year, and according to executive board member Sara Sullivan '01, "it is going to be a huge party." The group also hopes to publish a magazine of student poetry before the reading, which will be edited by Jen Harvey, '02. Getting involved in the group is easy according to Sullivan and Tricia Maguire '01; anyone can participate in the readings by just showing up. Sullivan says that all forms of creative expression are welcome: "we invite all kinds of performances, from music to poetry to rapping." If you are shy and would rather support the Circle in other ways, the group appreciates helps with planning or advertising events. Contact Sullivan, Maguire, or Colleen Schmitt for more information and to be included on the group email list.

As for events in Worcester, there are plenty of opportunities this month, but also all-year round, to hear local and national poets perform, and also to contribute your poetic talent to a non-HC audience. Cool Beans (yes, there really is another one), located at 99 Green Street in Worcester, every first Friday of the month features a special guest reader and an open-mic session open to the public. The event is hosted by Lex and Eric Thomas, who also host events at the Barnes and Noble in Leominster every third Friday of the month.

To start with two Friday poetry nights. This Friday features Tommy Mendez, a Boston poet who has performed all over the country and whose poetry "features vivid language and imagery culled from his Mexican-American heritage." The following Friday will be a competitive performance between two renowned New England slam poets, Jack McCarthy and Adam Stone. For those not in the know, slam poetry is an enthusiastic form of expression that turns poetry into theatrical expression. Slam poets are exciting to watch and they often hone their intriguing expression and delivery through national competitions. One of the more famous and renowned slam poets, Stacey Ann Chin, rocked Crossroads when she performed her poetry during a Poetry Circle-sponsored event in November.

Another coffee house with regular open-mic and slam events is Java Hut. Events this month are on Friday, April 6 at 7:30 p.m., and Thursday, April 12 at 8 p.m. The group is easy according to Sullivan and Tricia Maguire to join, "we invite all kinds of performers and expressions that date back to the early decades of the 20th century. These have been darkened with age and layers of varnish. In more recent times people have resorted to the black marker and have left phrases such as "Who's Your Daddy?" and "3:16 rocks." While the mystique of the words of the old-timers remain, we are convinced much of the up and coming youths are morons.

Some hours are busier than others, but there is always a constant stream of people coming and going from this fine establishment. The food is good and cheap. How can one go wrong? Coney Island is a part of Worcester and Worcester is a part of Coney Island. How can you not try this place, after all, as they say, "You know it's good if they made of don't you..." OK, forget I said that. Go, eat some hot dogs, carve some initials, and count the Woorats.

Wendy's. Soda comes in cans, and there is Snapple and beer to choose from. Chips, candy, and ice cream are all offered at reasonable prices.

One of the most obvious things about Coney Island is its creation of a sense of this aforementioned tradition. As you drive at the large neon sign on the building, you can see that it is reminiscent of years past. The name George hangs under the enormous hot dog, but to most his identity is a mystery. This place has been open since Jesus was a boy, and it is one of the last old-fashioned wooden booths, maximizing space and separating the customers. When you sit down you see that the tables are well worn and the redness has faded. The seats have been recarpeted once or twice, but still serve their purpose. One of my favorite things are the carvings on the wooden walls and booths. I don't know when this began or if any measure was ever taken to stop it, but the graffiti is here to stay. There are initials and messages that date back to the early decades of the 20th century. These have been darkened with age and layers of varnish. In more recent times people have resorted to the black marker and have left phrases such as "Who's Your Daddy?" and "3:16 rocks." While the mystique of the words of the old-timers remain, we are convinced much of the up and coming youths are morons.

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Hours: Sun-Thurs 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. (closed Tuesdays), Fri. and Sat. 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Directions: From campus take a right onto Shannonridge St. and follow the signs to the Coney Island building, here the road becomes one way. There will be an opportunity to bear left, so bear left and then go to the right. The parking spots have parking meters so bring change.