

Mbuyiseni Oswald Mtshali's Citation on his receipt of an Honorary Doctoral Degree at the

North-West University, Mahikeng Campus on 9th May 2013.

Mbuyiseni Oswald Mtshali is one of the four members of what Michael Chapman has called Soweto poets, the others being Sipho Siphamla, Mongane Serote, and Mafika Gwala. He received a Bachelor of Arts in English and African Literature at New School University, New York, in 1975; a Masters Degree in Poetry in Columbia University in 1977; another Masters in Teaching English as a Second Language at the same Institution in 1979; and a Ph. D in English in 1998, also at Columbia University. Before going to exile, Mtshali wrote a weekly column in The Rand Daily Mail and later in The Star, having left the Rand Daily Mail. In the USA, where he had found refuge, he taught at several institutions of Higher Education, including New York University where he rubbed shoulders with acclaimed writers like the Father of African Literature in English and author of the classic, *Things Fall Apart*, who recently passed away. On his return home, he became a founder member and Deputy Head of Pace Commercial College in Soweto.

His publications have appeared in many books and journals nationally and internationally. His first volume of poetry, *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*, is about life in South Africa's townships, and its Foreword has been written by none other than the renowned Nobel Prize winner, Nadine Gordimer. Published in 1971, the *Sounds* "...was widely acclaimed, and triggered an explosion in black poetry during the 1970s: it was that rare thing in South Africa – a poetry best seller. His profound insight into, and empathy with, the plight of blacks in South Africa is reflected in this poetry" (Andersen et al., 1993). In "Walls", one of the poems in the anthology, Mtshali write: "Man is/ a great wall builder – the most impregnable [wall he's built]/ has a moat /flowing with fright/around his heart./ A wall without windows/for the spirit to breeze through./ A wall without a door for love to walk in".

In a different vein, in "An Abandoned Bundle", the poet's spirit lifts the human soul high above all the dismal surroundings, "enabling a mother to melt into the rays of the rising sun, her face glittering with innocence/her heart as pure as untrampled dew". Only a great poet like Mtshali could have expressed these observations as vividly as has been done above. No wonder he has won the numerous awards and prizes he has. In 1982 Michael Chapman noted, "beneath the poetry of the Soweto Poets, there is hope of a future in a new South Africa". That dream has been realized. Hopefully, hope will be even more apparent in his current magnum opus Mtshali is currently writing, "The Black Trinity: an epic on Nelson Mandela, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr."