

Policeman with a poetic sense

Omadang Yowasi's poems take visceral themes ranging from African identity, existential pessimism, empowerment and African pride weaved with humour in everyday speeches to carry big ideas.

BY PHILIP MATOGO

After the Irish poet Oscar Wilde met the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow during Wilde's year-long lecture tour of the United States, which began in late 1881, he was asked about his impressions on the great man.

Wilde replied, "Longfellow is a great poet only for those who never read poetry."

In these words, we realize that the best poetry is poetry that transcends poetry.

We find such transcendence in the poetry career of a policeman in a field that loathes to be policed. Omadang Yowasi is a police officer attached to Ibaare Police station in Bushenyi. He is also the author of *War Ulcers*, a collection of contemporary poems published in 2024.

Omadang Yowasi was born in Tororo District and he belongs to the Iteso tribe. His life has been more of a nomad right from childhood to the present. His parents were travelling every school holiday from their places of work to the village.

This teaching background of his parents played a very important role when he got introduced to books like *The Adventures of Ali Baba*, *The Nile English Course* and *Rhymes and Reason* at an early age.

Omadang started his education in Mukono for his primary education before going to Kisiki College, Namutumba for O-Level and Nkuutu Memorial Secondary school currently in Bugweri District for A-Levels.

He encountered what he calls "true literature" and art in high school when the director of studies advised him to pursue Literature in English as a subject and this paved way for his natural urge to write his own work, having been introduced literarily to great writers like Maya Angelou, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Kofi Awoonor, Okot p'Bitek and Western poets, like Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Emily Dickinson among others.

"The flame to write wasn't fully ignited until I joined the Uganda Police Force in 2014. The Force has exposed me to harsh realities I had never faced and it has become a strong

Omadang.

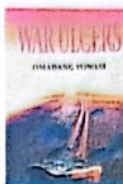
"As a police officer, I merge my creative influences with police experiences to write sensual and instinctual poetry that almost speaks of myself. It was not until 2015 after I passed out from training school that the chords of poetry struck again. From that point, I always felt that a world without poetry is like a song without lyrics."

This has opened his creative eyes to see poetry in everything around him including his work of policing. He never had any of his poems published until 2018 in the November edition of *Writers Space Africa* (WSA) an online literary magazine dedicated to promote African literature.

In the preceding years he saw a number of poems being published elsewhere, particularly in anthologies like *Best New African Poet's Anthology 2019*, *Corpses Of Unity: The International Bilingual Anthology on the War In Cameroon*, *Writing Robotics: Africa Vs Asia Vol 2*, 2020, and magazines like *The Nalubaale Review*, *Writer's Global Movement*, *Ghana Writes (AFCON Series 2019)* etc. He was hosted by Richard Ali of Konya Shamsrumi Poets Talk: 5 Questions with Omadang Yowasi in 2020.

"I believe the spirit of the good Lord has descended on me to break barriers in Uganda's literary landscapes where cops are not associated with writing books but administering tear gas with a fair share of batons. This has not stopped me from exporting poetry into the police force as I write in the police's *Habari* magazine," he asserts.

Omadang has co-edited poetry anthologies like *Storms Don't Last Forever*, published in The Gambia, *Dead Manners*, published in Uganda by Read Us Africa and a collection of poems titled *If We Must Kiss* by Jainaba Danso, a Gambian poet. To his literary



Title: War Ulcers

Author: Omadanga Yowasi

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credit, he has two titles, *War Ulcers* published in 2024 which is his debut collection of contemporary poems. He says, this book has potential to be a set book in lower secondary schools given his sensual poetry that aligns with the Competence Based Curriculum (CBC). His second book is *Tour Of Duty: A Handbook Of Modern Policing* published in February 2026 but waiting for its official release from Police headquarters, which he sees as a game changer to re-write perspectives about cops and the supposedly tainted image of the force.

His poems take visceral themes ranging from African identity, existential pessimism, empowerment and African pride weaved with humour in everyday speeches to carry big ideas. His careful playfulness with words to stitch poignant poems makes his poetry raw with emotions and the same time offering the much needed comfort, for example the poem *Rebellions* published by shamsrumi.org

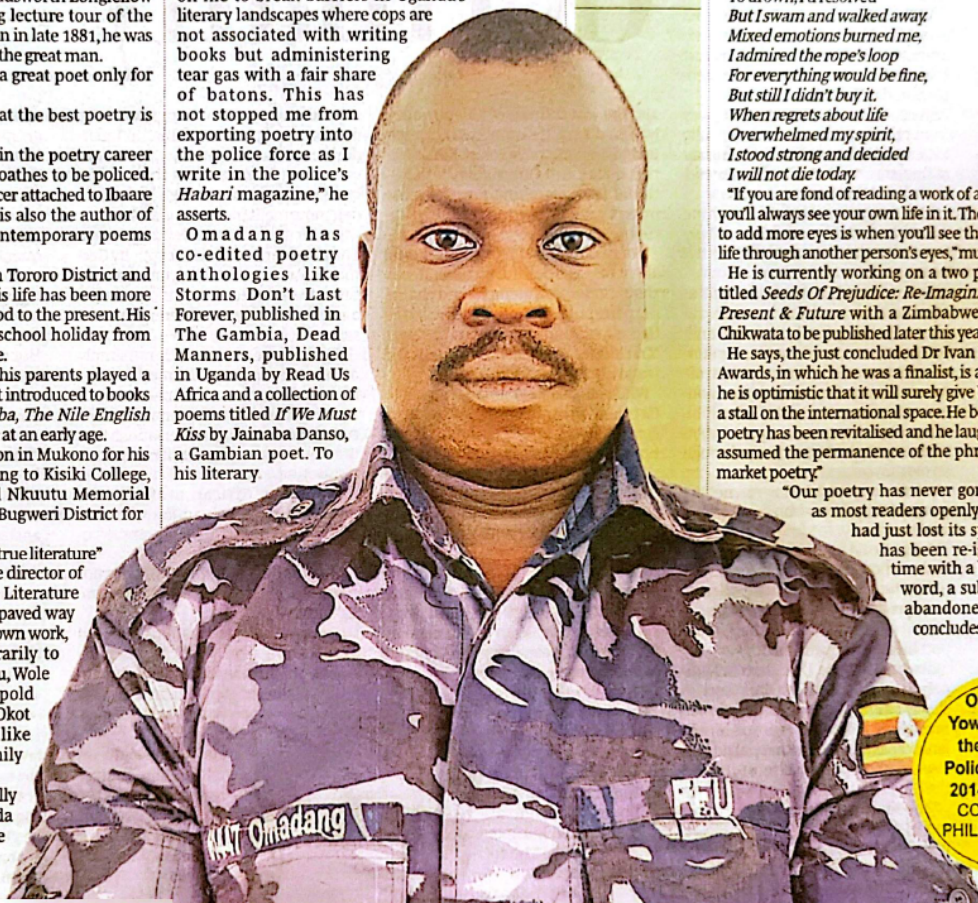
REBELLIONS
When anger tried me,
Death settled in my mind
Roaring and teasing,
I did not succumb to him.
When pity sat down on me,
I wandered off to the lake.
To drown, I'd resolved
But I swam and walked away.
Mixed emotions burned me,
I admired the rope's loop
For everything would be fine,
But still I didn't buy it.
When regrets about life
Overwhelmed my spirit,
I stood strong and decided
I will not die today.

"If you are fond of reading a work of art with two eyes, you'll always see your own life in it. The day you'll learn to add more eyes is when you'll see the beauty of your life through another person's eyes," muses Omadang.

He is currently working on a two poets' anthology titled *Seeds Of Prejudice: Re-Imagining Africa's Past, Present & Future* with a Zimbabwean poet, Calvin Chikwata to be published later this year.

He says, the just concluded Dr Ivan Edwards Poetry Awards, in which he was a finalist, is a revolution and he is optimistic that it will surely give Ugandan poetry a stall on the international space. He believes Ugandan poetry has been revitalised and he laughs at those who assumed the permanence of the phrase, "it's hard to market poetry."

"Our poetry has never gone to the 'dogs' as most readers openly assumed but it had just lost its spark. The spark has been re-ignited and this time with a blend of spoken word, a sub-genre we had abandoned to music," he concludes.



Omadang Yowasi joined the Uganda Police Force in 2014. PHOTO/ COURTESY/ PHILIP MATOGO

“Multitasking I believe the spirit of the good Lord has descended on me to break barriers in Uganda's literary landscapes where cops are not associated with writing books but administering tear gas with a fair share of batons. This has not stopped me from exporting poetry into the police force as I write in the police's *Habari* magazine.”