Celebrating World Poetry Day with Rob Macfarlane’s ‘Riversong’

Author : Molly Allen

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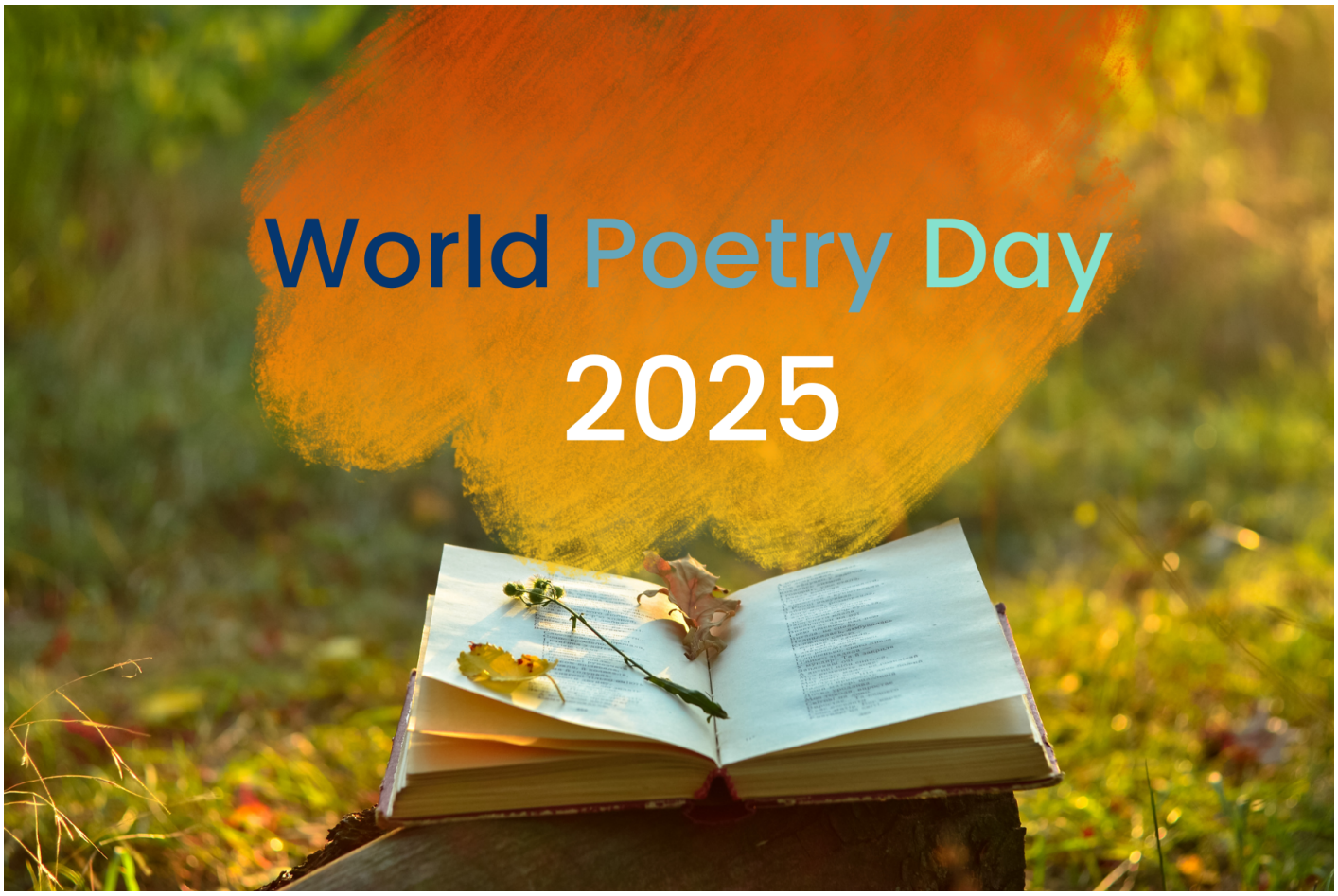
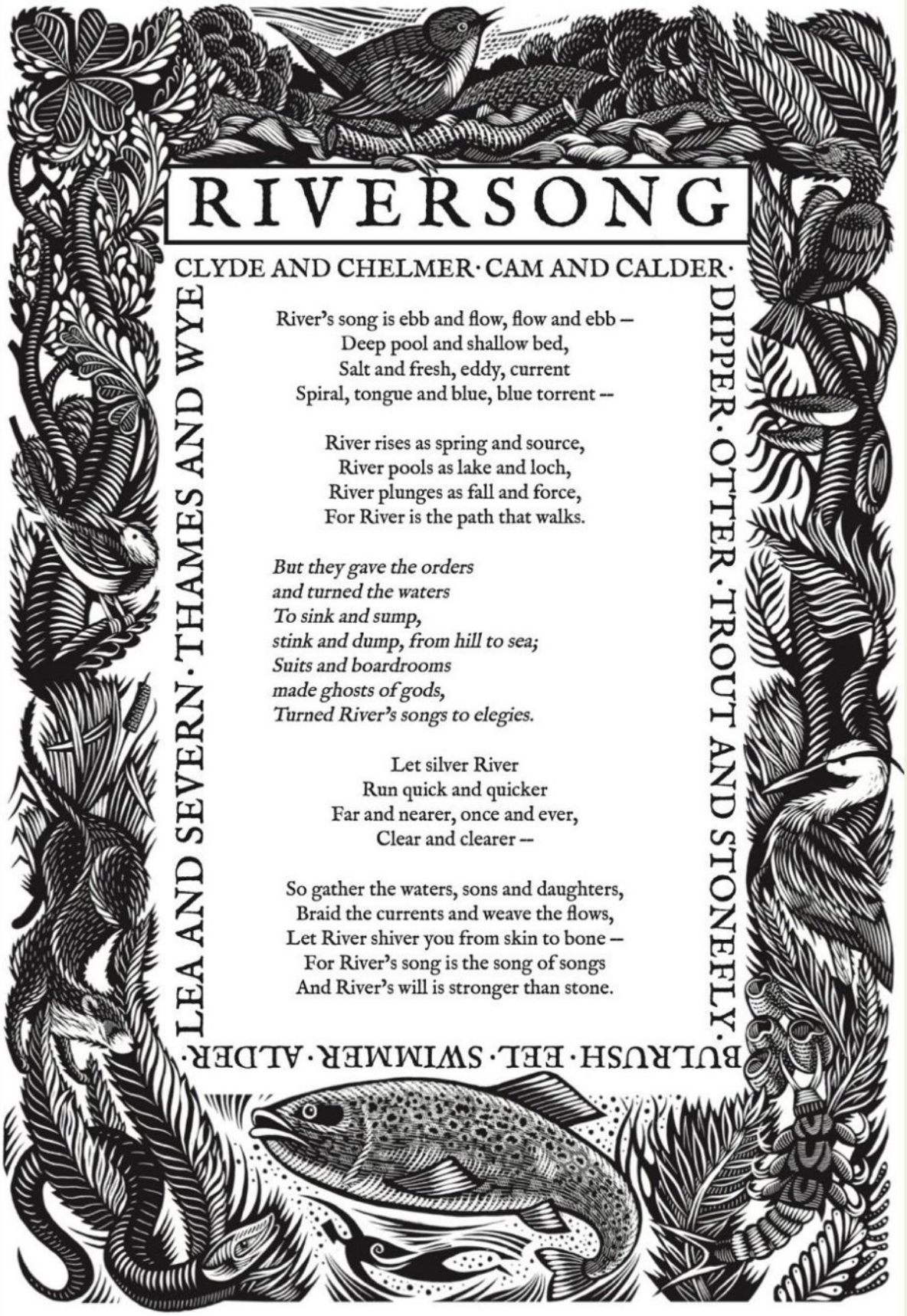


Celebrating World Poetry Day with Rob Macfarlane’s ‘Riversong’

On **World Poetry Day**, we’re celebrating the power of verse to inspire, move, and mobilise, and what better way than with **Rob Macfarlane’s stirring poem ‘Riversong’**. This evocative piece, created in collaboration with artist **Nick Hayes**, is more than just a poem – it’s a **call to arms for river protection**, capturing both the beauty of our waterways and the tragic reality of their decline.


RIVERSONG
CLYDE AND CHELMER · CAM AND CALDER ·
DIPPER · OTTER · TROUT AND STONEFLY ·
BULRUSH · EEL · SWIMMER · ALDER ·
LEA AND SEVERN · THAMES AND WYE
River's song is ebb and flow, flow and ebb –
Deep pool and shallow bed,
Salt and fresh, eddy, current
Spiral, tongue and blue, blue torrent –
River rises as spring and source,
River pools as lake and loch,
River plunges as fall and force,
For River is the path that walks.
But they gave the orders
and turned the waters
To sink and sump,
stink and dump, from hill to sea;
Suits and boardrooms
made ghosts of gods,
Turned River's songs to elegies.
Let silver River
Run quick and quicker
Far and nearer, once and ever,
Clear and clearer –
So gather the waters, sons and daughters,
Braid the currents and weave the flows,
Let River shiver you from skin to bone –
For River's song is the song of songs
And River's will is stronger than stone.

‘Riversong’ by Rob MacFarlane

A Poem That Speaks for Our Rivers

‘Riversong’ flows with lyrical beauty, painting vivid images of **rivers in their natural glory,** rising from source, tumbling as falls, and winding their way to the sea. Yet, the tone darkens as it reflects on the devastating impact of human greed:

> *“But they gave the orders, and turned the waters / To sink and sump, stink and dump, from hill to sea;*
> *Suits and boardrooms made ghosts of gods, / Turned River’s songs to elegies.”*

With these haunting lines, Macfarlane masterfully channels the outrage at private water companies and **against pollution and exploitation**, transforming the river’s voice into a lament for what has been lost. But it’s also a poem of hope and resistance, urging us to **gather, rise, and restore our rivers**:

> *“So gather the waters, sons and daughters, / Braid the currents and weave the flows,*
> *Let River shiver you from skin to bone — / For River’s song is the song of songs, And River’s will is stronger than stone.”*

From Page to Protest: ‘Riversong’ at the March for Clean Waters

‘Riversong’ is more than just words on a page, it became a **rallying cry** during the **March for Clean Waters 2024**. As thousands of passionate activists, river guardians, and environmental advocates gathered, the poem was performed live, its powerful verses echoing through the crowd. The reading added a **poignant and unifying voice** to the demonstration, urging collective action against river pollution.

Poetry as Protest

Poetry has long been a tool for social and environmental change, and ‘Riversong’ is a shining

example of how **art can inspire activism**. It reminds us that our rivers, once vibrant and free-flowing, are now too often choked by pollution and neglect. Yet, through creativity, unity, and defiance, we can **give them their song back**.

Together, we can turn elegies into anthems for action.