

Stephen Robertson

## January Nineteen Hundred and One

The century turns.  
Right on cue, Queen Victoria dies.

(Next time around, in the digital era  
we will take the turn on the zero, not the one  
making the twentieth century only  
ninety-nine years long.)

Béla Bartók and Frank Bridge  
are still at college  
Sergei Prokofiev and Carl Orf  
still at school  
Aaron Copland and Kurt Weill  
in their cots  
William Walton not yet born.  
But Maurice Ravel has just joined  
the Société des Apaches  
(or Bunch of Hooligans)  
later to enrol, when they come to Paris  
Manuel de Falla and Igor Stravinsky.

A turn, a period of change?  
Well, yes. In all the arts  
currents criss-cross, revolutions  
blossom and fade, movements  
are born, copulate and die.

But for the real turn, the cataclysm  
which will both inspire and destroy  
so many poets and other artists  
which will drag us  
kicking and screaming of course  
but maybe also wailing and gnashing our teeth  
into the maelstrom, the fire and brimstone  
that will be the twentieth century—  
for this we have to wait  
another thirteen and a half years.

