Every age of re-birth in literature begins with a renovation of style and diction in language. It is then followed by a period of experiment and achievement. This has been true of the various Renaissance movements in Europe and also of the Romantic Revival in England. So it is in the case of the New Age in Malayalam poetry which flourished by imitating the essence of the English Romantic Movement. This similarity is not casual. In the evolution of poetry in various countries, there are certain broad similarities. Poetic art begins with ballads of various kinds, progresses through the epic and the dramatic to narrative and lyric poetry. These stages correspond roughly to the different stages of national growth. Ballads belong to the poetic nation and the national epic to the period when the nation is in the making. The appearance of drama is in the history of poetry a sign of national greatness. The nation has become self-conscious, and poet after poet attempts to arm his individual...
experience to the service of art. Here is the line of
ripe perfection of lyric poetry and of poetry and a
narrative verse. It is in this age that is represented by
English Romantic poetry.

THE TRIUMPH OF ROMANTICISM

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renovation of style and diction in language. It is then
followed by a period of literary experiment and achievement.
This has been true of the various Renaissance movements in
Europe and also of the Romantic Revival in England. So it is
instinctively and stamped. The romantic quest is thus encouraged
in the case of the New Age in Malayalam poetry which flourished
by imbibing the essence of the English Romantic Movement. This
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various countries, there are certain broad similarities.
Poetic art begins with ballads of various kinds, progresses
through the epic and the dramatic to narrative and lyric poetry.

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national growth. Ballads belong to the nomadic habits and the
national epics to the period when the nation is in the history
making. The appearance of drama is in the history of poetry
a sign of national greatness. The nation then becomes self-
conscious, and poet after poet attempts to turn his individual

experience to the service of man-kind. This is the time of ripe perfection of lyric poetry and of reflective and narrative verse. It is this stage that is represented by English Romantic poetry.

Like a poet hidden
In the light of thought,
Singing hymns unbidden,
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not.

These lines of Shelley express the romantic conception of the lyric poet. To him inspiration comes from within, not without. He 'looks in his heart and writes'. He is moved by some power mysterious and original, and sings as the lark sings, instinctively and untaught. The Romantic poet is thus concerned with the inner world of his own soul, rather than the outer-world of society; with the world of wild nature rather than the world of cities; with energy, fervour and the extreme rather than restraint, calm and moderation. Wordsworth's 'Solitary Reaper' is in this sense a 'romantic poem' and so is Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale'.

They are the poets of the 'Romantic Revival' because they revived in their poetry the magic and mystery of the medieval
past. They are the poets of the 'Romantic Revolt' because they rebelled against the formality and restraint of their immediate predecessors. The leaders of this revolt were Wordsworth and Coleridge who jointly published the Lyrical Ballads. For the second edition Wordsworth wrote a preface attacking in particular contemporary views on the vocabulary appropriate for poetry. It was false, he declared to assume that poetry demanded a 'special poetic diction' of its own. Poetry, he said, "should be written in a selection of language really used by men". All the Romantic poets were affected by the new spirit of freedom blowing through the world at that time by the influence of the French Revolution. This spirit is strong in their poetry. Even stronger perhaps is the influence of 'the Return to Nature'. No group of poets ever found more inspiration in 'natural objects'. Most people would agree that these three phrases 'the Romantic Revival', 'the Romantic Revolt' and 'the Return to Nature' sum up what is characteristic of the Romantic poets.

"Romanticism" is rather a spirit", says Walter Pater, "which shows itself at all ages in various degrees than the peculiarity of a time or a school". And so we find the Romantic spirit in the Elizabethans like Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton. They were highly imaginative and loved exuberance and

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2. Walter Horatio Pater; (1839-1894), a great English critic. "Appreciations" contains his judgement of Shakespeare, Wordsworth and other English writers.
excess. In the Victorian Age Tennyson added a further grace of diction, a new sweetness of music, a surpassing loveliness of image and description to a poetry already amazingly rich. But the Victorian industrialism and commercialism provoked many attacks. Fitzgerald's 'Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam' expressed sentiments that ran counter to the stern moral earnestness of the Victorian ethos. Swinburne's was another dissident voice. Rossetti and his friends tried to redeem art from commercialism and vulgarity. The movement started by Rossetti, promoted by Morris and completed by Swinburne invigorated the language of poetry when it was gradually becoming vapid and conventional. This movement of reaction against typical Victorian values amounts to a second wave of Romanticism. The Romantic spirit is seen again in the Georgian poets who wrote about rural England and revealed in their poems the visionary quality of the great Romantics.

The Age which saw the publication of poems like 'Veena-poovu' and 'Viswaroopam' can be considered a major literary epoch in Malayalam poetry. These poems breathe in abundance the romantic spirit. In 'Veena Poovu', the poet has found in the fallen blossom the most poignant representation of all things animate or inanimate. This he implies in the last lines:

What can tears bring in a world,
Where the doom awaits all alike.
The Life alas! is an empty dream.

3. Translation. Cf. the Original Text in the end, No. 62.
The second poem illustrates the poet's meditation which is set against a background of wild landscape. In simpler terms it is the record of a poet watching a sunset from a beach. A mood is evoked; a mood of reality touched with romance. Meditation compels the sense of wonder. Like the poet, the reader is uplifted by something which appeals to his heart as well as his mind. More than the poets of any other age, these poets made their own lives, their fears and their triumphs the subjects of their verse. They were also rebels in one way or another and always aimed at expansion and emancipation. In their quest for a new life and a new interpretation they sought the help of those elements native and alien with which they found affinity. The triumph of the romantic spirit was the result of this quest for novelty.

Recreating poetry. As the leader of this revolution, Kumaran Asan took a leading place. The muse of Malayalam poetry had been dormant for a long period. It began to leap into a new life and activity with the pioneers mentioned in the previous chapter. The advent of the three master spirits, Kumaran Asan, Vallathol Narayana Menon and Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer, into the realm of poetry, was a momentous event. With them the process of renovation gained full momentum. Kumaran Asan was in the vanguard. Poets of identical ideas now dedicated themselves to the promulgation and establishment of the principles initiated by A.R. Rajaraja Varma. The tenets
of the new school drew upon its exponents all the ridicule and hostility the critical world of the time had at its command. But they struggled on bravely achieving positive results. Instead of moving on one and the same flat level, poetry now assumed new colours and moved on fresh lines under their able guidance. In this venture to explore 'fresh woods and pastures new' Kumaran Asan was later joined by Vallathol and Ulloor. The grand trinity by the same noble motive and high resolve contributed in a big way to place and secure Malayalam poetry in its present high position. The English age of gold, according to Peacock, is that of Shakespeare. In Malayalam by all critical standards, the age of gold is undoubtedly the time of the three memorable poets Asan, Vallathol and Ulloor who rendered invaluable service in recreating poetry. As the leader of this revolution, Kumaran Asan has an enviable position and he could justly be considered as the crowning glory of the new poetical era that dawned under English influence. And the secret of his leadership is that unlike other contemporary poets, he had an open mind. With it he tried to assimilate much that

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4. Thomas Love Peacock, English novelist and poet (1785-1866). *The Four Ages of Poetry* is an essay published by him in 1820. The *Age of iron, The Age of gold, The Age of Silver* and *The Age of brass* being the four ages described in the essay.
came his way through the new literature early and without reservation. A brief survey of some biographical details of this master genius undertaken in a later chapter will reveal how he was blessed by circumstances for an earlier and closer contact with English literature.

The Romantic poets went to Nature in the real sense of the word, and not to the bookish nature of the artificial pastoral. They have a strong sense of the individual quality of each moment of experience. "Of all these aspects of the revival, however, the new sensitiveness and accessibility to the influences of external nature was the most pervasive and the most important. Nor does it speak for the love that is in homes where poor men live, the daily teaching that is in the silence that is in the stilly sky."

The trends in the Malayalam poetry of the New Age are broadly comparable with those in English poetry in its transition from the Neo-classic to the Romantic Age. It is worthwhile to place them here side by side.

(1) The English writers of the 18th Century reveal many artificial mannerisms such as extreme regularity in metre and frequent employment of more formal figures of speech such as personification and apostrophe. The poet is tied down by tradition. The 19th Century poet discovers a new poetic territory and maps it out by himself. A revolt against the conventional literary technique like the heroic couplet is started. The general tendency is towards simplicity of diction.

(2) Unlike the prose of the 18th Century, the 19th Century saw external nature not as culminating in its own most exquisite moments but as culminating in Man. Thomson loved external nature. Yet he wrote:

5. James Thomson (1700-1748). His 'Seasons' first challenged the artificiality of English poetry and inaugurated a new era by their sentiment for nature.
romantic spirit of the time in liberal and varied measure. Man superior walks
Amid his glad creation.

The Romantic poets went to Nature in the real sense of
the word, and not to the bookish nature of the artificial
pastoral. They have a strong sense of the individual quality
of each moment of experience. "Of all these aspects of the
revival, however, the new sensitiveness and accessibility to the
influences of external nature was the most pervasive and the
most important. Wordsworth speaks for the love that is in homes
where poor men lie, the daily teaching that is in

"Woods and rills;
The silence that is in the starry sky,
The peace that is among the lonely hills".

Shelley for the wildness of the West Wind, and the ubiquitous
spiritual emotion which speaks equally in the song of skylark
or in a political revolution. Byron for the swing and roar of
savage landscape the sea and the grandeur of savage landscape
Keats for verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways. Scott and
Coleridge, though like Byron they are less with nature than
with romance, share the same communion. 7.

(3) Unlike the prosaic 18th Century the 19th Century
was indeed the golden age of the lyric which reflected the

6. Wordsworth, Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle.
romantic spirit of the time in liberal and varied measure.

It comprised the exalted passion of Shelley, the meditative simplicity of Wordsworth, the sumptuous description of Keats in essays and prefaces, or in passing and cautley flashes of illumination in their correspondence. Wordsworth and Coleridge in his Biographical Literary, in and rhymes. Starting with the Pindarics of Collins and Gray, the lyric spirit struggled with its bonds in the poems of Burns and Blake shaking itself free from its trammels and finally soaring triumph in the Romantic poetry.

(4) Another distinguishing feature of the new literature as different from the 18th Century literature is an enlightened sympathy for the poor and the oppressed. To get at it one has only to go to the works of Cowper, Burns, Crabbe and even the classical-minded Thomas Gray. In the Romantics this went, side by side with the spread of democracy which resulted from the French and American Revolutions. It is reflected in the literature of the Romantic Movements by a growing humanism. Wordsworth is the supreme mystic of Nature. But he is even more the poet of man. According to Stopford Brooke, 'he is the foremost singer of those who throw around the lives of homely men and women the glory and sweetness of song'.

(5) The imaginative sensibility of the Romantics not only deepened their communion with Nature, it brought them into a truer relation with what had before been created in literature and art.
The Romantic revival is the Golden Age of English criticism also. All poets were critics of one sort or another - either formally in essays and prefaces, or in passing and desultory flashes of illumination in their correspondence. Wordsworth in his prefaces; Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria*, in his notes on Shakespeare, in his recorded table talk; Keats in his letters; Shelley in his *Defence of Poetry*; Byron in his satires and journals - they are all to be found turning the new sense of impression which was in the air they breathed, to the study of literature as well as to the study of nature. Romantic critics were concerned with deep-seated qualities and temperamental differences. Their critical work revolved round their conception of the fancy and the imagination, either dealing with nature on the surface and decorating it with imagery or penetrating to its deeper significances. Dr. Johnson and his school on the other hand looked correctness of form, for the subordination of the part to the whole, for the self-restraint and common sense which good manners would demand in society, and for wisdom in practical life. They cared more for large general outlines than for truth in detail. But new modes of poetry in the 19th Century asked of critics new sympathies and a new way of approach.

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9. This notable work is a vindication of the elements of imagination and love in poetry against the structures of his great friend, T.L. Peacock, in 'The Four Ages of Poetry'.
Let us now turn to the main features of Malayalam Romantic poetry.

(1) **Poetic Style and Diction.**

The primary motive of the poets of the A.R. Rajaraja Varma school of thought was to make the purely literary one of getting rid of an unreal and artificial manner of writing. Wordworth called for a selection of 'the language really used by man'. This was a protest against the gaudy and insane phraseology of certain 18th Century writers. Similarly A.R. Rajaraja Varma's protest was against the stereotyped and affected literariness and elegantly exalted attitude which earlier writers substituted for genuine expression of genuine feeling. Thus a visible attempt is seen in the works of almost all poets of the New Age in Malayalam poetry to break away from the prison of Sanskrit metrical moulds of rhetorical style and limited subject matter. Since this transition in Malayalam poetry, the matter imposed by the high pontiffs of the pseudo-classical conviction has gathered strength that content should govern cult.

In the Kerala Varma period of Malayalam literature the 'Mahakavya' style (epic style) was in vogue. This was in imitation of a similar practice in Sanskrit literature.

Ramachandra Vilasam by Azhakathu Padmanabha Kurup and 'Uskeralam' the development of the vernacular literature. They announced...
by Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer are good examples. Translations
of famous books in Sanskrit like Sakuntalam was also attempted
by many. Vallathol Narayana Menon was devoted to this tradition
during the early stages of his poetic career. In the
New Age Mahakavyas gave way to Khande Kavyas (short lyric poems). Similarly the domination of Sanskrit metres was over and
simple Dravidian metres began to prevail. The redeemed
Dravidian metres, became so popular as to eclipse the Sanskrit
metres. All popular poets preferred to use them. New rhymes
were invented and English poetic forms were imitated. A craze
for novelty and variety was discernible everywhere in Malayalam
literature.

Modern Malayalam poets also aimed at simplicity and
sweetness of diction instead of merely relying on rhyme and
rhythm. Since this transition in Malayalam poetry, the
conviction has gathered strength that content should govern
form and that every literary work determines its own shape.

This development in Malayalam poetry is comparable
with an identical movement in English Renaissance poetry. Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey were two important poets
of that period. They were humanists and were interested in
the development of the vernacular literature. They abandoned
the long-winded, late medieval allegories, and introduced a new fashion of writing short poems dealing particularly with love. The pioneer in this field was Wyatt. His visit to Italy in 1527 resulted in the kindling of a new fire in English poetry.

(2) **Lyricism.**

The introduction of the lyric verse in various forms is another landmark of the New Age. This in effect was the emphasis given to the subjective approach in poetry. An earnest effort at individualistic expression, suggestive imagery and introduction of personal symbols are its special features. This is evidently the result of the accent given to emotion in poetry in the place of earlier verbal descriptive-ness. Songs and lyrics in older Malayalam poetry formed only a portion of some larger composition. But it was during this revival that the short lyric became a stock-in-trade of every aspirant after poetic fame. Many Malayalam poets imitated English poetic forms both lyrical and non-lyrical like the Ode, the elegy and the sonnet and the pastoral and the dramatic. Lovely little pieces on everyday common themes were also widely attempted. *Nishkapadathoyodu* (Ode to Innocence) and *Éttukali* (The Spider) by Kumaran Asan,
Mazhathulli (Rain drop) by Ulloor and Manaltheri (A grain of sand) by Nalappat Narayana Menon are good examples that could be mentioned in this connection. This is definitely a new development in Malayalam poetry inspired by similar pieces in English. The vogue that the poets of the Dawn started attained its highest excellence in the hands of the three masters Asan, Vallathol and Ulloor.

(3) Nature

Poets of this period began to treat Nature in a new way. Nature is no longer dealt with a cold and beautiful abstraction, but as a living thing. This remarkable change is seen in Malay Vilasam and Visvardopam.

Great poets of this time like Asan and Vallathol approach Nature like Wordsworth and deduce a philosophy out of it. Like Shelley sometimes they invest it with a mystic meaning. Like Byron they compose passionate rhapsodies on it. Thus Nature is no more a mere background. It can actively help or hinder man; and the spiritual interpretation of Nature is now a familiar approach in Malayalam poetry.

(4) Democratisation.

One of the most radical changes achieved by the
Malayalam Romantic poets is the inheritance of literature by the ordinary man. No doubt, this was in keeping with the time spirit, but it was also to a certain extent reinforced by similar trends seen in English literature. There is also a view that it was the Russian influence that came through the English language that brought about this radical transformation. Before the advent of this new era poetry was confined to the right and the royal; it was a matter of the class. It flourished mainly under the patronage of the rulers and the nobility. To them it was a pastime and an occasion for the parade of learning. Professor Kunhan Raja writes about this change:

"In the period between 1915 and 1930, literature had become the possession of the middle classes, the classes who were educated in English and whose social urges and economic attitudes were those of general self-satisfaction, except as we have noticed, in the case of Kumeran Asan in his revolt against social injustice and of others in favour of political freedom. In the thirties this situation undergoes a radical change. The muse has taken leave of palaces and comfortable middle-class homes and taken her residence with the poor, the lowly and the depressed. Literature has become the inheritance of the people at large...... Today all classes and castes are represented among the younger creative writers............." 10.

(5) sympathy for Womanhood

Women have been invested with a higher personality

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10. C. Kunhan Raja, Contemporary Indian Literature, A Symposium p.13
in the new poetry, than before. This attempt to improve
the status of women in society is seen in the poems of Asan,
Vallathol and Ulloor. Clear examples are Dherevaath, Bharata
Sthreskal Tan Bhavesudhi and Magdalam Mariam. In England
the attempt to raise the position of women in society started
with the social reforms that marked the beginning of the modern
age in Europe. It was our contact with English education
and culture that brought about a liberalisation in our attitude
to women and their status in society.

(6) Humanism.

Formerly Hindu epics and mythology supplied themes to the poets. Poems then abounded in reference to denominational
gods. Individual men always appeared in a world peopled by
deities of different kinds and grades. But the example of
Romantic and Victorian English literature presented new vistas
in history, legend and contemporary life to the Malayalam
poets. Since then a secular note was discernible in poetry.
This was the result of a new consciousness of the importance
of the individual in society with his infinite strength and
capacity. This significant human interest in the individual
and social planes banished the tendency to repeat stale
mythological themes that centred round kings and gods.
The treatment given to 'Matangi' in Chandala Bhikshuki is a
very good illustration of this new trend.
Later Romantic and Victorian periods in English literature laid emphasis on the dignity of man and his infinite potentials. The literature of these periods upheld the essential aspects of Humanism like human values, a human point of view, the perfection of humanity as an ideal consciously and proudly.

(8) The influence of criticism.

(7) Nationalism.

The growth of the freedom movement in the country is closely allied with the enthusiasm for intellectual liberty. It is a commonplace to say that the popular idea of modern representative government in India is the outcome of English education. But the movement received a momentum through the efforts of some generous Britons like Genorge Thompson, Allan O. Hume and Sir William Wedderburn. Thereafter Nationalism became a favourite theme with many poets beginning with Vallathol Narayana Menon. The beautiful poem on the 'tri-colour-flag' stirred up the political consciousness of the entire Malayalam speaking world. G. Sankara Kurup is

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12. Both sponsors of Indian National Congress.
13. In his poem 'Pora Pora!' Vallathol describes the tri-colour flag
another great poet who has written a number of poems on the national struggle. The high sense of patriotism revealed in their poems opened a new phase in Malayalam poetry. Poetry, since their time became also a record of National feeling.

(6) The influence of criticism.

A new critical awareness is seen in many poets of the New Age. This view is supported by published prose works, articles and correspondence. For example Asan has put on record his critical appreciations of poems like Chitrayogam, Rugmangada Charitham and Umakeralam. So have the other poets. Vellathol, Uloor and G. Sankara Kurup have revealed their mind in published critical studies. Some of them have also been benefited by English literary criticism. The poets quoted have admitted this. It must be true in the case of many others as well. They have all enriched contemporary poetry by the new idiom they cultivated.

It shall now be examined how far the definitions of poetry by some English critics are applicable to Malayalam poems of this new era. Wordsworth declared in the Lyrical Ballads that it shall be his aim in poetry 'to make the
familiar appear strange'. It is exactly the same goal that is achieved by the authors of Veena Poovu and Mazhathulli. They reveal the glory of the common place and make the local scene so vivid that it has a strange and universal significance. The poems are also good illustrations of Wordsworth's statement that 'all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'.

Coleridge defined poetry as 'the best words in the best order'. It was the great care that Asan bestowed in the choice of words that partly provoked, Seetharaman 14 to write a parody on a poem like Karuna.

For Matthew Arnold "poetry is at bottom a criticism of life". Duravastha, (Asan) Unnanilla Udukkuni (Vallathol) and Yazhakkula (Changampusha) are poems that suggest criticism of life. These poems rouse in the reader a wonderfully new and intimate sense of the 'situations' in life described therein. Thus they show that the grand power of poetry is its interpretative power.

Only some examples at random have been cited. It is similarly possible to explain any number of poems of this New Age in the light of one or other well-known definition of poetry by English critics known to us.

14: A modern Malayalam Satirist.