

Exploring Existential Humanism in Tennyson's "Ulysses"

Saumya Srivastava

Assistant Professor
Amity School of Languages
Amity University, Lucknow, India
Email – saumya.sri16gmail.com

Abstract: *This paper aims to depict the Sartrean existential ethics in Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem "Ulysses". The purpose of this paper is to philosophize Tennyson's "Ulysses" as a character with existential approach. The existential leanings are clearly visible in the character of "Ulysses". This paper indicates how the protagonist in the poem "Ulysses" turns out to be an ideal existential humanist. Sartrean philosophy of existentialism, focuses on the continuous making of the man through actions.*

Key Words: *Existentialism, Subjectivism, Forlornness, Stoicism.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

As a movement in literature, existentialism laid emphasis on individual existence, freedom and choice. This movement emerged as an after-effect of wars. The moment at which an individual questions his very origin; meaning in life and his purpose, is referred to as the moment of "Existential Crisis". Existentialism (or Existenzphilosophie) in philosophy comes from the root word "Exist" or "existence". It denotes something in an active state, rather than the passive state. Latin root "ex" stands for 'out' and "istere" stands for 'to stand'. Hence, the term means, "pertaining to existence". "Philosophically, it now applies to a vision of the condition and existence of man, his place and function in the world, and his relationship, or lack of with God" (Cuddon 259).

Existentialism is believed to have emerged from the thinking of Soren Kierkegaard. His famous works *Fear and Trembling*, *The Concept of Dread* and *Sickness Unto Death*, state his belief that, in God one may find spiritual serenity, peace and freedom from the discontent or anxiety. This is the doctrine followed by the Christian, therefore, Soren Kierkegaard, is regarded as the pioneer of the Modern Christian Existentialism, but the main exponent of Christian Existentialism is Gabriel Marcel.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, this thought was expanded by Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, in whose works we find the traces of aesthetic existentialism, but the exponents of aesthetic existentialism are Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, Merleau Ponty and Jean Wahl. Jean Paul Sartre is the hierophant of aesthetic existentialism. His novels, plays and philosophical writings have been widely influential. Sartrean philosophy of Existentialism suited the demands of modern conscience. His basic premise is that though we are born as a biological being, but by fulfilling our obligations, we must strive to evolve as an existential being. Existentialism believes in 'individuality' and 'authenticity'. Authenticity is achieved when one realizes his individuality.

The premise of Sartre's philosophy is expressed in surprisingly medieval terms, as the proposition that 'existence precedes essence'. There is no human nature, since there is no God to have a conception of it. Essences, as intellectual constructions, vanish with the mind that would conceive them. For us, therefore, our existence- which is to say, that unconceptualized individuality which was celebrated (but not described) by Kierkegaard- is the premise of all inquiry. This existence is determined by no universal idea, and has no prefigure destiny such as might be contained in a vision of human nature. Man must make his own essence, and even his existence is, in a sense, an achievement. He exists fully only when he is what he purposes to be (Scruton 275-276).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

The concept of existentialism is said to have derived from the prehistoric times. During the times of Socrates, the philosophy 'care of the self' was followed, whose main focus rests on acting, rather than on abstract theoretical truths. This concept of philosophy was very popular among the stoics and Epicurean philosophers of the Hellenist period. Stoicism is a school of Hellenist philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium in the third century B.C. in Athens. The best presentation of stoicism was given by Epictetus. Epictetus was born in c. 55 A.D. in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. Epictetus is the one who established an influential school of stoic philosophy. Epictetus in his *The Art*

of Living gives ninety-three instructions on how to attain happiness and a sense of fulfillment in life. His philosophy helped people to overcome their disappointments of life.

Those who seek wisdom come to understand that even though the world may reward us for wrong or superficial reasons, such as our physical appearance, the family we come from, and so on, what really matters is who we are inside and who we are becoming (Epictetus 68).

Stoics believed that it is not the words that denote the man, but the actions. Existentialists were preoccupied by the same thought. They proclaim that the ethics or morality can be defined, only when it is manifested in actions. Epicurus was another philosopher, who helped people to lose their fear of God. He believes that God exists, but is indifferent to the plight of human beings. He asserts that philosophy has the power to liberate us from the fear of death. "The Gods are not to be feared; death cannot be felt; the good can be won; all that we dread can be conquered" (Epicurus). Stoics believe that one should not lay emphasis only on the outer fabric, instead human endeavor should be in the refinement of the soul or in building the inner self. The same thought is reflected by existentialists. Existentialists also believe in the inner growth and development of the individuals. Jean Paul Sartre, in his seminal essay "Existentialism and Human Emotions", proclaims that if God would have existed, nothing would have changed. Everything is bound to fall in its own place. The philosophy proposed by Jean Paul Sartre dominated the intellectual and cultural life of the period from 1940s to the 1960s. Jean Paul Sartre established himself as the leading philosopher of the generation with the publication of *Being and Nothingness*. His name became synonymous to the philosophy of Existentialism.

In *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* (1946) Sartre expressed the belief that man can emerge from his passive and indeterminate condition and, by an act of will, become engaged; whereupon he is committed (through engagement) to some action and part in social and political life. Through commitment man provides a reason and structure for his existence and thus helps to integrate society. (Cuddon 260)

Alfred Lord Tennyson, the representative poet of the Victorian era, presents his age in all its manifold variety and complexity. His work depicts the temper of his age. Tennyson's dexterity of thought in portraying the sense of loss is all pervasive in his poems like "Crossing the Bar"; "Break Break Break"; "Maud"; "In Memoriam"; "Marina"; "Lotus Eaters"; "A Dream of Fair Woman"; "Ulysses" etc.

Tennyson's proclamation of the loss of faith in religion and God is evident in his poem, "Ulysses". Through his character Ulysses, Tennyson pronounced that human beings possess such powers that they can even defeat Gods. This reflects the temper of his age. Tennyson here, adopting the humanistic approach, announces the loss of faith in God in the Victorian era. Charles Darwin's theory *The Origin of Species*, declared that man has evolved through amoeba. This theory appears as a sharp contrast to the religious beliefs of Christians, who considered that God has made Man in six days and took rest on the seventh day. Thus, the whole era was in doubt and disbelief. Tennyson's "Ulysses", preoccupied with the same tendency believes in the existential theory of action. The loss of faith in God results in the utter disillusionment of mankind. The only hope is in acting. Every individual is now responsible for his own actions. Ulysses arrives at his identity by following the Sartrean notion that 'Man is an isolated being', with no God to help in reality.

Odyssey is the central figure of Homer's epic *The Odyssey*. Tennyson draws the idea from this Homeric figure. Homer's Odyssey employs guile and courage to return to Ithaca. Thereby, he resumes his proper place as the king of Ithaca. Odyssey in Homer's epic, struggles for ten years after the Trojan War to get back to his kingdom in Ithaca. Odyssey on his way back to Ithaca faces the wrath of gods and battles with mystical creatures. The setting of Homer's epic is on the sea of Ithaca. Tennyson's poem "Ulysses" is also set on the sea of Ithaca. Ulysses embarks upon the sea voyage to gain knowledge and experience. Ulysses, like Odyssey comes across many troubles on his voyage. He faces the deadening weather and stormy waves which form the dreadful atmosphere of the sea. Homer's reference to the image of "sea", speaks of the physical adventure but the image of "sea", in Tennyson's "Ulysses" refers to the sea of knowledge and experience. Homer's *Odyssey*, stands for the unquenchable thirst for physical adventure whereas, Tennyson's "Ulysses", stands for the intellectual adventure, who takes a series of voyages to gain experience and knowledge. Ulysses cannot lead an idle life as life without adventure is synonymous to death. Jean Paul Sartre, in his essay "Existentialism and Human Emotions" asserts that, "Man exists, turns up, appears on the scene and only afterwards, defines himself" (Sartre). The thought of Sartre is analogous to the thought of Ulysses in Tennyson's poem "Ulysses". By taking part in the famous war of Troy, Ulysses, defines himself by his fearless actions and arrives at an identity. The dramatic monologue by Ulysses exhibits the same thought: "I cannot rest from travel: I will drink / Life to the lees..." (Tennyson 58). Metaphorically, this suggests the determination of Ulysses to live a life of ceaseless activity.

Sartrean philosophy of existentialism proclaims that Man is not just responsible for himself but, for the whole world. Sartre gives the example of the commanding officer, on whose action rests the responsibility of all the people of the army. Tennyson's Ulysses also commands his comrades to embark upon the voyage and by doing so, he becomes responsible, not only for himself but for all his comrades.

3. ANALYSIS:

Sartre, gives the notion of “Subjectivism”, which means that individual by making choices in turn make himself. Ulysses, by choosing to fight in the Trojan War, makes himself a real fighter. His, continuous wandering in search of knowledge, establishes his identity as a real explorer. Ulysses creates a certain image of Man, by choosing for himself. He admires his fellow fighters who are akin to him in fighting spirit. He disapproves the passivity ingrained in the minds of the people of Ithaca. His admiration for the Men of action is visible here: “Old age hath yet his honour and his toil; / Death closes all: but something ere the end, / Some work of noble note, may yet be done, / Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods” (Tennyson 59). Sartre believes that we are the result of our choices. We become what we choose. This notion of Sartre is akin to the Baconian view. Francis Bacon in his seminal essay “Of Studies” proclaims “Abeunt Studia in Mores” which is a Latin expression for studies pass into character. Hence, our manners are guided by whatever we study or choose to study. Sartre asserts, that “Man is anguish” (Sartre), which means that man is always in a constant dilemma as to what, to opt for and what to leave. Sartre in the essay “Existentialism and human emotions” gives an example of a military officer to prove his point. He says that a military officer goes through the same anguish when he takes the decision to attack, because he knows that on his decision lies the responsibility of the lives of the number of people. Sartre proclaims that this anguish does not forbid action. An action has to be taken by the commander. This is the same anguish, which Ulysses faced, while he was leaving the kingdom of Ithaca and was handling the responsibility of his kingdom to his son Telemachus. On his decision, lies the responsibility of the people of Ithaca. In spite of the anguish, Ulysses takes the decision to transfer his powers and authority to his son Telemachus. “This is my son, mine own Telemachus, / To whom I leave the sceptre...” (Tennyson 59). Sartre asserts that whether the act turns out to be good or bad, it is always the matter of Interpretation. We can interpret it, in whatever way we want. For one person, a particular act may be fruitful or enriching, while the same act can be irrelevant and painful for the other. It is for us, to interpret our actions and give meaning to it. For Ulysses, the life of action and adventure possess great worth. For him, it is an honour to be drowned in the sea, while exploring the new arenas of knowledge. Life devoid of adventure, for Ulysses is meaningless and worthless. Sartre considers man as a “Lawmaker”, who by choosing for himself ‘the ethics of action’, chooses for all mankind, the same ‘law of action’. Every person has the right to articulate his own existential choice. Ulysses acts as a lawmaker, when he proclaims that any hour devoid of action is analogous to death and any act involved in action is saved from death. He asserts that: “Little remains: but every hour is saved / From that eternal silence” (Tennyson 58). This indicates that the only meaning Ulysses sees in life is in the involvement in ceaseless activities. Hence, Ulysses seems to frame a law, which asserts that inactivity is akin to death. He frames this law not only for himself but for the whole mankind.

Sartre says, though anguish is inevitable, but it can never lead to inaction. We are bound to choose, and once we choose, we realize that “...it has value only because it is chosen” (Sartre). This anguish can be traced in the character of Ulysses in Tennyson’s poem “Ulysses”. Ulysses exhibits his anguish in the form of a dramatic monologue: “It may be that the gulfs will wash us down: / It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles” (Tennyson 59). The anguish of Ulysses is obvious here, where after asking his comrades to embark upon a voyage, he knows not, what might be the consequence of his decision. Whether they will land in the land of experience or will become the victim of a sea storm. Though Ulysses is uncertain about his decision but he does not forbid action. He stays determined and does not give up his desire for adventure and action, in spite of knowing the fact that this journey may result in total catastrophe. This anguish reminds us of the character in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Under the influence of anguish, Hamlet remains indecisive of whether to kill Claudius at a particular moment or not. This anguish forbids Hamlet to act. Sartre termed it as the “existential anguish”. Sartre believes that this anguish does not forbid action for long. Eventually one has to act and that action consequently defines a person. Hamlet also acts in the end, although for long he was under the spell of anguish.

Tennyson, through his character Ulysses says that, it is really dull to pause and lead a life devoid of adventure, as action, change and movement are the signs of life. To pause from adventure is no better than death. Sartrean philosophy of Existentialism too proclaims that existentialism is the theory of action and not the theory of quietism. Life itself means “action” for both Sartre and Ulysses. Any moment devoid of action is devoid of life itself. A person ceases to exist, the moment he separates himself from action.

Sartre adopts a humanistic approach in this essay. He discards the notion of God, because he believes that if we adopt this notion, then we will find someone to blame, for our own folly. We will easily find excuses in the name of destiny and fate. He believes that the notion of God will not allow Man to acknowledge his full potentialities. Ulysses humanistic view of life is witnessed, when he proclaims that he and his comrades being mortal human beings possessed such potential that they even defeated gods in the Trojan war. The zealous struggle by his mortal comrades has been honoured by Ulysses in this dramatic monologue: “Old age hath yet his honour and his toil; / Death closes all: but something ere the end, / Some work of noble note, may yet be done, / Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods” (Tennyson 59). Driven by the power of humanism, Ulysses exclaims that he and his comrades fought with the gods in the Trojan war and even defeated them.

Sartre gave another notion of “forlornness”. He says that having discarded the notion of God, people now do not

have anything to cling to. There seems no point of convergence. Sartre gives an example of his student, to explore “forlornness”. The father of the student was a collaborationist. His brother had been killed in the German attack of 1940 and he, being a young man, with generous feelings wants to avenge his brother. His mother is now his responsibility. His mother’s only hope is now with him. Now, the boy has to choose between his personal feelings, attached to his mother or the feelings attached to his brother, whom he wants to avenge by taking part in the war. This dilemma to choose between the two ethics is what is called “forlornness”. This forlornness was faced by Ulysses, when he had to choose between his kingdom, with which the ethics of responsibility of the large number of ignorant people is attached and his own personal hunger to explore regions. Which of the two will do greater good : the act of ruling the ignorant people of Ithaca and working for their betterment or the act of seeking knowledge by taking a series of voyages. No books of ethics can ever answer this question. It is for us to interpret and choose between the ethics.

Sartre proclaims in his essay “Existentialism and Human Emotions”, that the only way to determine the value of any affection towards anything is precisely by viewing its manifestation into the actions. It is only the action that confirms and defines that emotion. Ulysses’ love for knowledge is visible in the poem as he leaves his kingdom, his home and family for the pursuit of knowledge. He risks his life by undertaking a series of voyages, which conveys his passion to acquire the vast seas of knowledge. Hence, by “forlornness”, Sartre implies that we ourselves choose our being. If Ulysses’ love for knowledge is not enough to sacrifice his home and kingdom then he would have never sacrificed his leisurely life of grace and comfort. His unquenchable thirst for knowledge and experience is manifested in his act, when he embarks upon the voyage, in pursuit of knowledge. Ulysses’ love for knowledge is visible here:

I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: all times I have enjoy’d
Greatly, have suffer’d greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
Thro’ scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart. (Tennyson 58)

Ulysses remained determined to embark upon the terrible voyage, amidst the dark threatening waves of the sea. Hence, Sartre believes that “anguish” and “forlornness” go together. Man continuously finds himself in dilemma of choosing between the two. His choice of ethics consequently defines him.

Jean Paul Sartre gives another concept of “despair” in his essay “Existentialism and Human Emotions”. By this term, he means that one should be open for possibilities. “When we want something, we always have to reckon with possibilities” (Sartre). Ulysses experiences the same despair, when he asks his comrades to row the ship, as he knows the possibilities that lie forward. They may either get drowned in the hollows of the waters or may land up on an island. Sartre in his essay refers to Rene Descartes’ belief, which is “Conquer yourself rather than the world”. Sartre rightly asserts that one cannot control his future. Ulysses too is very uncertain about his future. He knows not, what may happen during the course of his voyage. “It may be that the gulfs will wash us down: / It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles” (Tennyson 59). Hence, according to Rene Descartes, it is better to conquer ourselves rather than the world, which is beyond our control. Sartre in this essay asserts that “Actually, things will be as man will have decided they are to be.” (Sartre). He proclaims that one should remain persistent in his efforts but beyond that one does not have control over the situation. It is possible that in spite of the best effort by someone, the things may turn out to be shallow and meaningless. This may happen, to Ulysses and his comrades. In spite of their best efforts, they know not what lies beyond that.

Jean Paul Sartre declares in his classic essay “Existentialism and Human Emotions” that “There is no reality except in action” (Sartre). Ulysses in Tennyson’s poem asserts his views regarding the theory of action in the following lines: “Little remains: but every hour is saved / From that eternal silence, something more, / A bringer of new things” (Tennyson 58). Inactivity is synonymous to death for Sartre and as well as Ulysses. Life for them is akin to ceaseless activity until death. One should devote their entire life in action.

Sartre also asserts that “man is nothing else than his plan; he exists only to the extent that he fulfils himself; he is therefore nothing else than the ensemble of his acts, nothing else than his life”. (Sartre). Ulysses plans to seek the limitless knowledge and experience. To fulfill his plan he embarks upon the voyage. Actions involved in the pursuit of knowledge define his ‘being’. Sartre believes that man can define himself only by his actions and undertakings. Like the sum total of the works of Proust frames his identity or the sum of all the tragedies of Racine defines his being. Similarly, the sum total of all the voyages, discoveries and adventures of the Trojan war defines Ulysses as a person.

Sartre rightly asserts that “Man is the future of Man”. Every individual is responsible for his own future. Man’s continuous effort is directed towards making his future. Ulysses’ unquenchable thirst for knowledge cannot be satiated as knowledge is very vast. He says: “Gleams that untravell’d world, whose margin fades / For ever and for ever when I move” (Tennyson 58). Each time he explores a region, the horizon seems to fade away and he witnesses a new region, which allures him to explore more. Ulysses persistently works towards the attainment of knowledge, which

further frames his future.

Sartrean existentialism proclaims that a coward is responsible for his cowardice. He is not a coward by birth. A hero forms his identity as a hero because of his heroic acts. Tennyson's protagonist, Ulysses, attains an identity of a hero by fighting fearlessly in the Trojan War. He himself talks of his heroism in the following lines: "Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are: / One equal temper of heroic hearts" (Tennyson 59). The heroism of Ulysses and his comrades is evident in their fearless struggle with the stormy waves and frightening weather. The heavy rain has made the sea confused and it seems as if the path, they chose is leading them to Hyades. But, the intensity of their heroic spirit was enough to overcome the devastating terror of the sea.

Sartre gives a great deal of importance to the "total involvement". The total involvement of Ulysses in the heroic deeds of adventure and war; in fearless struggle; in the dangerous voyages and in his persistent efforts of attaining more and more knowledge- frames his identity as a whole. Sartrean existentialism defines man in terms of actions and also believes that Man's destiny is within himself. Man's only hope lies in action.

4. FINDINGS:

Existentialists believe that there is no truth which is not concretized in actions. They do not value emotions or feelings which are not manifested in actions. For them, there is no truth other than this "I think; therefore, I exist".(Sartre). Ulysses thinks that he is a fighter, therefore through all his adventurous and fearless actions, he evolves as a real fighter. The existentialism is the only theory that gives dignity to Man. The aim of existentialism is to treat human being as a subject and not as an object. Existentialism defines Man in terms of values, which is distinct from the material realm. Ulysses ethics of action and endless adventures are the values which imparts dignity to his disposition.

Sartre announces the discovery of the world as "intersubjectivity". By intersubjectivity Sartre means that an individual's identity is formed when he acknowledges his own values and also the values of others. Ulysses recognizes the values of his comrades and calls them 'fighters' in the poem. Sartre gives the concept of "Universal Essence" in his classic essay "Existentialism and Human Emotions". "Universal Essence" refers to the human nature, which is static and constitutes the core of every being. Sartre further says that "a priori", outlines the man's fundamental situation in the universe. "Universal essence" of a man remains constant and is unchangeable but it is "a priori", which is always in a dynamic state. Ulysses' "universal essence" is his fighting spirit. Though he finds himself in different priori, at different times but his fighting spirit remains with him, wherever he goes. For Ulysses the priori of the war was entirely different from the leisurely comfortable life of Ithaca. Hence, a priori are bound to change. What never changes is the "universal essence".

"At heart, what existentialism shows is the connection between the absolute character and free involvement".(Sartre). Sartrean philosophy tells us that we are bound to choose. Even if we are not choosing, then also we are choosing in some way or the other. If Ulysses does not choose to embark upon the voyage, then also he is in a way choosing to lead a leisurely comfortable life of a king. There can always be incongruity between the intentions of the artist and the result obtained. Artist is never sure of his portrait. He can never tell what will be the final product of his efforts. Man is also never certain about his future. He can only create his present but remain completely unaware of his future. Ulysses, being in a creative state, involves himself in a series of undertakings, but he knows not what will be the result of his exploration. He can be judged only after the concrete discovery of land which will add a feather in his cap. Sartre establishes a comparison between "Arts" and "Ethics". He says that both creates and invents. One cannot create 'a priori'. Arts and ethics are based on inventions and discoveries through experience. Sartre says that man is bound to make a choice and the circumstances always force him to choose between the ethics. One cannot lead a life without choosing. One has to choose between the ethics and by doing so, he defines himself. Ulysses, by choosing his ethics of action, makes himself. The circumstances or "a priori" forced him to choose either of the two ethics: ethics of action and activity or the ethics of inactivity and leisure. By choosing his ethics he defines himself. The great marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, vehemently asserts that this world is the product of 'false consciousness'. In his seminal essay "Ideology and the State", he proclaims that there can never be an absolute Truth. The world is made up of multiple truths. In whichever truth, one believes that constitutes his ideology and which consequently gives way to the formation of his ethic. Behind every ethic, there is a role of ideology. One has full freedom to choose between the ethics.

Sartre believes that "whenever a man sanely and sincerely involves himself and chooses his configuration, it is impossible for him to prefer another configuration."(Sartre). Ulysses is the man of action and he approves of his comrades as they are akin to Ulysses in fighting spirit and zealous struggle. His approval to this particular kind of configuration leads to the condemnation of the passive configuration which is ingrained in the people of Ithaca.

Sartre has defined the situation of man in terms of "free choice". With regard to freedom, Sartre says that "man is condemned to be free" (Sartre). Man is responsible for his own actions, once he enters the world. He has all the rights to freely involve himself in the situations. Ulysses also says that it is his and his mariner's inner desire which lead them to embark upon the dangerous voyage. They freely involve themselves in this zealous adventure.

Ulysses says: "...my mariners, / Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me- / That ever with a frolic welcome took / The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed / Free hearts, free foreheads" (Tennyson 59). Hence, Sartre imparts freedom to man, by considering the man as a free being. Man has all the authority to involve freely in the circumstances and situation and arrives at an identity consequently. Ulysses involves himself freely in the adventures of the sea voyage and also in the Trojan War and eventually he is recognized as a fighter and an adventurer. Sartre rejects the Freudian notion of unconsciousness as he believes that Freudian unconscious drives deprive us of our responsibilities and freedom. According to Sartre, man is nothing at the start, what he becomes is the result of his choices and actions. Sartre also asserts that, one has full freedom to follow any morality. Ulysses, by discarding his homely duties and heading forward in pursuit of knowledge is following one of the moralities.

5. RESULT:

Ulysses never cease to act, therefore he consequently achieves what Sartre calls 'existential individuality'. His unending urge to acquire knowledge makes him a real existentialist. Sartre in his novel *Nausea*, proclaimed that there are two types of Humanism. He discards the first type of humanism, which puts the whole mankind on a higher pedestal, because of the deeds of a few great men. Sartre says that there is another type of humanism, which he termed as "Existential Humanism". According to this philosophy of humanism, Sartre says that Man is always persistent in his efforts to project himself outside. Man's pursuits of transcendent goals impart existence to his being. Ulysses projects himself outside through his ceaseless actions and adventures. He builds his identity by constantly pursuing his goals. Jean Paul Sartre, himself proclaims that "Existentialism is optimistic, a doctrine of action", where "existence precedes essence". Sartrean aesthetics, values 'individual' in its entirety. "...Sartrean humanism is that you can always make something out of what you've been made into because you always transcend your facticity" (Flynn 67).

6. CONCLUSION:

The major themes on which the philosophy of existentialism rests are: existence precedes essence; time is of the essence; humanism; freedom and responsibility and ethical considerations. The character of Ulysses is driven by these metaphors of existential humanism. Ulysses, in Tennyson's poem "Ulysses", emerges as a person, who exists by his actions and who is recognized by his actions. His whole identity encompasses the ensemble of his undertakings. Ulysses turns out to be a real existentialist, whose disposition has evolved through the elements drawn from the experiences in wars and voyages. He believes that a person ceases to exist, the moment he separates himself from action. His preference to deal with the ethics of action and involvement, builds his identity as a hero. Ulysses fits completely well into the existential frame of Sartrean philosophy. He is a character with a marked sense of existential approach. Hence, he can rightly be called an existential humanist.

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