The Odyssey’s Three Main Themes

“But the great leveler, Death: not even the gods can defend a man, not even one they love, that day when fate takes hold and lays him out at last.” (Homer, and Robert Fitzgerald. The Odyssey. Harvill P., 1996. book 3) this quote alone shows one of the many themes throughout the odyssey. Fate, loyalty and intelligence.

The Odyssey shows loyalty through Odysseus despite his sometimes-selfish nature, has saved his crew numerous times for example: “I drove all three wailing to the ships tied them down under their row benches.” (Homer, and Robert Fitzgerald. The Odyssey. Harvill P., 1996. line 211 part one continued) Here Odysseus is saving his crew from the lotus while it would have been easier to just leave and continue without them, he stayed loyal to them instead of leaving them selfishly.

In addition, he sacrificed being faithful to his wife to survive: “I have been detained long by calypso… detained me in her hall but my heart never gave consent.”. (Homer, and Robert Fitzgerald. The Odyssey. Harvill P., 1996. line 143 part one continued) he was trapped by her and while she made him fall in love with her it was never true love but rather under calypso’s will.

His loyalty to Penelope is what helps get him through tough times he just wants to get home to her and his son, Telemachus, and his dog. All while saving his crew. If he hadn't been motivated by loyalty, fate would have forced him to carry on with his travels recklessly.

Another key theme is intelligence mind over strength to fight through tough times. For instants to save himself and his crew mates while passing the sirens he put beeswax in his and his crew ears to avoid losing himself and them to the sirens “keep well to seaward; plug your oarsmen’s ears with beeswax kneaded soft; none of the rest should hear that song. But if you wish to listen, let the men tie you in the lugger, hand and foot,” (Homer the odyssey 670 part one continued). Furthermore, when he tells the cyclopes Polyphemus his name is Nohbdy it keeps him and his crew from being food out after stabbing the cyclops “Nohbdy, Nohbdy’s tricked me. Nohbdy’s ruined me!”. (Homer, and Robert Fitzgerald. The Odyssey. Harvill P., 1996. Line 403 part one continued)

The last important theme is fate vs free will; you see this through the story if Odysseus does not follow what the gods want his fate to be, he faces punishments. Like this storm sent by Poseidon for stabbing his sons eye out. “O hear me, lord, blue girdler of the islands, if I am thine indeed, and thou art father: grant that Odysseus, raider of cities, never see his home: Laertes’ son, I mean, who kept his hall on Ithaca. Should destiny intend that he shall see his roof again among his family in his fatherland, far be that day, and dark the years between. Let him lose all companions, and return under strange sail to bitter days at home” (Homer the odyssey 529 book 9)

To summarize the main themes throughout the odyssey is loyalty, intelligence and fate. Loyalty is used to motivate Odysseus and move him throughout the story, intelligence is to get Odysseus and his crew through their journey and home safe lastly fate was used to tell readers

to listen to the gods and follow their customs and throughout the story Odysseus is seen falling to his fate and being punished when he disobeys it.