Mastery Of Mark Twain

Mark Twain was an influential American novelist, publisher and comedy writer throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Known affectionately as ‘The American’ twain was beloved by many not only in the USA but also abroad throughout Europe. Twain’s popularity and success as a comedian came from his tendency to comment on and question social issues of his time. His considerable influence and his use of techniques such as satire, irony, sarcasm and ridicule allowed him to effectively engage his readers on issues such as racism, oppression, religion and numerous political issues. Perhaps his most influential and well received novel, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn demonstrates Twain’s considerable expertise as he is able to present a seemingly light-hearted story of an unlikely pair of friends with a scathing review of the racial problems within his own country woven throughout. In A Presidential Candidate Twain aims to mock presidential candidates and their perceived goodness which is almost never a true image. He criticises their heartless brutality in their incessant desire to always win. He is similarly able to, ingrain intense social commentary into The Mysterious Stranger Manuscripts, an anti-religious novel in which Twain denies the existence of a soul, an afterlife and reality itself. Furthermore, in Letters from the Earth, his final works, many of Twain’s qualms with religion and humanity are addressed in the form of letters from the perspective of Satan to the archangels Michael and Gabriel. Many of Twain’s work created a realistic model for which intellectuals in many different fields to conduct their own reviews of society which is still emulated within today’s culture. In today’s day and age, Comedians and writers alike follow the Twain model of careful analysis in most of their works and therein lies his legacy.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is a novel that was popular when first released in 1884, but its significance continued or even increased even after twain died into the 20th and even the 21st centuries. It is arguably considered Twain’s greatest and most influential work due to its intense criticism of the southern states of America and their continued racism and use of slavery. Due to this, the novel has also been somewhat of a controversy, even being banned in some southern states for periods of time due to the opposition towards them. Others have even dismissed The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn as racist and vulgar itself due to the repeated use of the word nigger however looking past the obvious negative associations of the word it is clear that the novels true themes are that of stern anti-slavery. Twain explores these themes using his trademark satire and irony, presenting the relationship of the iconic characters of Huckleberry Finn, a young 13-year-old white boy and Jim, The older but mild mannered slave. This relationship was an unlikely one that extended beyond race, something that was not necessarily commonplace at the time of writing in Americas Deep south. It allowed Twain to explore the ingrained racism and slave trade that existed within this area. Huck and Jims v8essel for their journey is a raft that travels down the Mississippi river. Throughout the journey the raft becomes a safe haven for the pair. “I hadn’t had a bite to eat since yesterday, so Jim he got out some corn-dodgers and buttermilk, and pork and cabbage and greens—there ain’t nothing in the world so good when it’s cooked right—and whilst I eat my supper we talked and had a good time. . .. We said there warn’t no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don’t. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft.” (Chapter 18 Twain, M.). Through this quote we see how the raft becomes an escape for the two to distance themselves from the society that doing everything is its power to drive them apart. They attempt to retain this utopian life of simple companionship however the further

they travel into the south the more outside influences attempt to invade their idyllic situation. Twain uses this romantic relationship between the river and the raft to show how the problems of the world are ever present and it is near impossible to escape them for long. Twain leaves the ending of the novel on an ambiguous note, indicating how the notion of freedom still stands as the defining problem within the united states.

A Presidential Candidate challenges the notion that Politicians are good and honest, outing them as deceitful and power hungry. Twain raises a sarcastic tone, through the use of irony, diction and by revealing specific details that support his position. He writes from the perspective of a candidate running for office and uses this platform to mock real presidential candidates. Twain's careful use of diction when describing how the congressional committee "prowls", allows the readers to visualise them as predators hunting helpless prey. Despite seeming clean, twain eludes to the fact that there are always people waiting to dig dirt up on them. Twain uses irony by then having the candidate reveal his own dirt for him recounting how he killed his own grandfather and did so with "heartless brutality". This further mocks the real politicians as twain implies that even though the candidate killed his own grandfather he was honest and upfront about it, something which twain states other candidates are not willing to do. By doing this, twain further degrades the real candidates by saying they are less trustworthy than a murderer. As a result, Twain also highlights the duplicitous nature of politicians who appear courteous and polite in public but privately have an insatiable desire to win showing their heartless brutality. Twain uses irony as the candidate states that due to him being open and honest about all of the heinous and very unsafe things he did, such as murder and even burying his dead aunt underneath his grapevine, he should be considered a "Safe Man" Twain further insults the politicians saying they fight with a "Napoleonic" grandeur, implying they are bold yet foolish. This is in reference to Napoleon Bonaparte the French military leader, who, as a real man, was violent, proud to a fault and always believed he could win. Twain infers how candidates feel they are invincible in their positions of power however with this resolute attitude they will all eventually face their own Waterloo just as Napoleon did. Twain's accusations of politician cover-ups throughout his piece is even foreshadowing as this sort of thing has become commonplace in elections with many candidates choosing to do the opposite of Twain's candidate and hide the things they did from the public, who often find out anyway. Twain's Archetypal Humour shines throughout this whole work with his repeated use of irony and mocking. Whilst his writing does attempts to mock, ridicule and degrade actual politicians it is first and foremost a very humorous piece that will make his readers laugh. Twain's ability to create humour around real and meaningful events and topics were his real strength and the skill that comedians have attempted to emulate for generations.

In The Mysterious Stranger Manuscripts, which were posthumously compiled and billed at the time as Twain's Final novel by his editor, Mark Twain wrote three separate manuscripts —The Chronicle of Young Satan, Schoolhouse Hill, and No. 44 The Mysterious Stranger all portraying some form of Satan. This mysterious stranger was sometimes Satan, sometimes Satan's nephew and sometimes was simply the mysterious No. 44. He uses the experiences of these figures along with his signature irony to satirise not only organised religion but also humanity as a whole. This is seen as different from Twain's earlier work as he did not censor his harsh reflection on society. This led many early reviews of the novel to focus on the Mysterious Stranger as a refusal to see the good in humanity and only focus on the evil shown by the minority. Twain not only criticises humanity but also questions our reality. When No. 44 tells August, one of the novellas protagonists, that he must leave the boy is saddened prompting forty-four to fill him with disheartening thoughts about the world pronouncing 'Nothing exists; all

is a dream. God-man-the world, —the sun, the moon, the wilderness of stars: a dream, all a dream, they have no existence. Nothing exists save empty space—and you”! (Twain 414) Through this quote we see twain’s use of exclamation at the fact that we know we exist but the world around us may not. There is a sense of hopelessness as the fact that our whole existence could be a fabrication and thus he indirectly asks, what meaning do our lives as humans have? Furthermore, Twain continues to rebuff the notion of god and religion when Forty-Four is speaking to August about creation and the notion of God creating the Human Race out of nothing and states “Your race cannot even conceive of something being made out of nothing—I am aware of it, your learned men and philosophers are always confessing it. They say there had to be something to start with—meaning a solid, a substance—to build the world out of. Man, it is perfectly simple—it was built out of thought. Can't you comprehend that?” (Twain 332) Through this twain ultimately and absolutely rejects God and all religious facets around him. He suggests that humanity are logical and not spiritual and that our reality is that which we have created ourselves. Twain attempts to dissolve all thoughts of heaven, creation and salvation leaving a very meaningless reality of humankind. Whilst this may be seen as pessimistic Twain simply refused to follow the status quo and constantly question the predetermined ideas presented before him.

Letters from the Earth comprises a series of letters and essays written from the perspective of Satan to the archangels Gabriel and Michael, as well as other morality pieces written by Twain. All of these elements that make up Letters from the Earth were written by Twain during a difficult time in his life. The death of his wife and child, his debilitating debt problem due to poor investments and declining heath led to another novel comprised of a sense of anger and resentment towards religion and the world. The novel wasn’t published until the early 1960s due to objections from twain’s daughter, Clara Clemens, as she stated the pieces presented a distorted view of her father and feared the stories would taint his legacy. In 1962 however she changed her tune, agreeing for the novel to be released stating “Mark Twain belonged to the world”. This accompanied with her believing the public would not react so harshly allowed the world to receive what was at the time, perhaps Twain’s latest and last great contribution to the worlds literature. Twain’s signature sarcastic tone remains prevalent throughout as he continues to capture the humour despite the obvious contempt toward religion and humanity as a whole. Twain uses the letters to further mock religion but almost more significantly criticise humanities tendencies to believe in every facet of organised religion when it is in fact a man-made ideology. Twain ridicules the human construct of heaven which he states doesn’t include anything humans actually enjoy and thus would actually be a place they don’t desire. “His heaven is like himself: strange, interesting, astonishing, grotesque. I give you my word, it has not a single feature in it that he actually values.” (Twain, M. P.5) Twain’s Satan bemoans the ideas of everyone singing and playing the harp, things very few men can actually do or even do well. He likens man’s desire of sex in heaven to the desire of water within the desert. He especially finds the idea of all nations and races being mixed together absurd as they all hate each other on earth. Twain uses his satire to express how man don’t even enjoy many of the key practises of religion “more men go to church than want to. To forty-nine men in fifty the Sabbath Day is a dreary, dreary bore. Of all the men in a church on a Sunday, two-thirds are tired when the service is half over, and the rest before it is finished.” (Twain, M. P.6) In this Twain focuses more on the duplicitous nature of man as despite outwardly supporting religion they do not even commit or enjoy the majority of the aspects of it. Furthermore, Twain ponders how Christianity can even consider that, despite the enormity of the universe, our existence is on purpose or even special. We know this is something Twain considered even earlier in his life before writing Letters to the Earth in a letter he wrote to Olivia Langdon in 1970. “Did Christ live

33 years in each of the millions & millions of worlds that hold their majestic course above our heads? Or was our small globe the favored one of all? Does one apple in a vast orchard think as much of itself as we do?-- or one leaf in the forest,-- or one grain of sand on the shore?... Verily, what is man, that he should be considered of God?" (Berkove and Csisila) Whilst a love of this anger and bitterness toward religion did onset toward the end of his life, Twain was always curious and questioning, refusing to simply believe as he was told.

When evaluating Mark Twain's legacy, it is important to understand his profound impact on social issues at the time. Twain was able to effectively use his prominent societal position to actively critique politics, religion, racism and ask question about other important issues of the time as seen through his above works. This has been imitated by high profile satirists and commentators such as Seth Meyers, a prominent humourist and writer, and Trevor Noah, a south African comedian and television host. In today's society, almost anyone with a platform to project onto a large group of people attempts to present their views, whether it be politics or religion, onto their listeners. Writers, musicians, athletes and social media influencers all attempt to sway their audience to their way of thinking. Whilst it may not be intentional or even necessarily obvious this kind of influencing stems from Twain's innate ability to do so. His capacity to use his platform of writing and humour is something that has been imitated throughout history following him.

Mark Twain's style, methods and techniques were revolutionary in his time. His use of satire and irony allowed him to present some of the most humorous and heart-warming pieces of writing in American history whilst also inspiring thought provoking reflection on numerous issues prevalent in his lifetime. His legacy is clear to see due to the continued relevance and reliance on so many of his works over 100 years on. His technique and ability is something that is being emulated time and time again in prominent comedians all throughout the 20h and 21st centuries for comedians, writers and almost all other figures in a position of influence.