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Why has London's "The Minions of Midas" been a disregarded and undervalued story?

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This article explores the reasons why Jack London's story "The Minions of Midas" has been a largely overlooked story in literary criticism. I will argue that this story has a great significance both in terms of its form as well as in terms of the ideas and questions it raises. In order to support such views, I have used various methods in the research, such as: examining critics' views; discussing the results of a questionnaire concerning the story; as well as interpreting the story as an instance of dystopian fiction.

Keywords: London, dystopian fiction, Minions of Midas

1. Introduction

During his lifetime Jack London gained worldwide fame with his stories and some of his novels (above all *The Call of the Wilde*). Many subsequent critics (Pizer, Cain, Ward) have discussed various aspects of his works, analyzing his stories and novels, as well as emphasizing their positive and negative characteristics. London was criticized, among other things, for superficiality, uneven artistry, unrefined style, supporting white superiority. Recently, there have been analyses that foreground other perspectives in the study of his works, so that many of his stories have been discussed in new light, emphasizing his broad range of topics, from alienation in "The Night-Born" to post-colonial concerns and justice in "The Chinago" (Labor and Reesman), and reassessing his novels, such as *The Sea-Wolf* (Baskett) or *Martin Eden* (Spangler). Interestingly, a story which, as I will argue in this essay, is of great significance both in terms of its form as well as in terms of the ideas and questions

it raises, seems to have been almost completely neglected. The story in question is “The Minions of Midas”.

To show the extent to which this story inspires a variety of often incompatible and contradictory interpretations, I have carried out research, which, among other things, includes a questionnaire adjusted for collecting qualitative data among 44 respondents in order to explore how and why this story has caused such conflicting views among its readers. Although the use of questionnaire is not among the common methods used in literary studies, in this research it is very useful as it sheds light on some possible reasons why the story has been neglected by critics, and why critics, literary experts and readers alike (who are not necessarily literary experts) have disregarded or, perhaps, have failed to recognize the social analysis and warning that, I would argue, London has expressed in “The Minions of Midas”.

This article will employ various interpretative methods of the mentioned story in order to show that such approach can contribute to broader understanding of the story than the use of one method only. Giving a brief overview of the critical texts that have tackled “The Minions of Midas”, it will attempt to argue that the story’s potential interpretations are much broader than have hitherto been recognized. The results of the questionnaire composed of questions about the story will be analyzed, the purpose being to demonstrate that the text of the story itself includes a multiplicity of meanings that may, but do not necessarily have to be connected to the political or social views of the author. Finally, the close reading of the story will show that it is not only a socialist piece of writing as it has usually been seen, but that it may be interpreted as both a socialist and a dystopian story, thus resulting in implications different from the ones that come as a consequence of the story’s reading only as a socialist text.

2. “The Minions of Midas” plotline

“The Minions of Midas” is a story in which London seemingly represents the clash between two social classes in the United States at the very beginning of the twentieth century – the wealthy magnates and the proletariat – without imposing his own view in the course of the story. The plot revolves around the street-railway tycoon Eben Hale, who receives letters from an organization that calls itself The Minions of Midas (M. of M.) in which it threatens to kill innocent people unless Eben Hale pays twenty million dollars.

The structure of “The Minions of Midas” is based on a story-within-a-story device, starting with a story told from a first-person point of view, which, then, bifurcates into two parallel viewpoints. The narrator in first person starts his story with a tragedy – the suicide of his close friend Wade Atsheler, which followed soon after the death of his employer, the money baron Hale. The mystery is increasing when the reader finds out that Atsheler was a rich man, content with his life, whose physical and mental state quickly deteriorated all the way to his suicide. The narrator receives a letter from Atsheler, sent just before his death, which contains newspaper clippings and facsimiles of letters. As the narrator starts reading, the secret of Hale’s and Atsheler’s tragedy begins to unravel. The letters sent by an organization calling itself “The Minions of Midas”, and the commentaries of Atsheler on these letters – are the two parallel viewpoints from the story-within-a-story. The fact that the whole story, except for the first three passages, consists of the M. of M.’s letters and Atsheler’s commentaries, enables us to perceive the views of the two sides, without any mediation of the narrator.

3. Research questions

The essay will explore the following questions: Why has this story been largely neglected? Why was it deemed a failure even in the studies where it wasn’t disregarded? Have the actions of the M. of M. been in focus much more than the situation that has led to their appearance in the first place? In regard to the questionnaire, why were most of the respondents convinced that the story expresses sympathy towards Atsheler?

Such questions will be examined, first, examining previous research on the story; second, through the answers given in the questionnaire; and, third, through a close analysis of the story.

4. Previous research on the story

Various critics who have been analyzing London’s stories (Wilcox, Gair, as well as the above-mentioned critics) have not tackled “The Minions of Midas”. The story isn’t mentioned even in the extensive and thorough study of London’s works entitled *Jack London*

by experts such as Labor and Reesman. Among the rare studies where this story is mentioned are Philip S. Foner's *Jack London American Rebel* and James I. McClintock's *Jack London's Strong Truths*.

Foner examines London, above all, as a socialist writer, praising London as a true rebel who was fighting for improving the life of the poor, so London's political engagement is discussed, as well as his works that deal with social changes. Among them, Foner considers "The Minions of Midas" as "anything but "proletarian" in content and orientation and is more revealing of some of London's limitations as a socialist than of his contribution to socialist fiction" (Foner 66). Foner's interpretation of the members of the M. of M. is that "their goal is purely a selfish one" and that "they are not interested in changing society; they merely want to share the spoils with the capitalists and, to achieve this goal, they institute a reign of terror to mulct millionaires of a large portion of their wealth" (67). Foner also points out that the story doesn't give any indication that the money would be used to improve society, which makes him conclude that the organization wants the money "because it needs capital to compete with the great trusts and business combinations of the capitalists" (67).

McClintock also considers the story unsuccessful. He starts the paragraph dedicated to the story by suggesting that it is one of London's socialist fiction that has "little merit" (130), later stating that the story is "preposterous" (130). At the end of the paragraph there is a brief explanation of the reasons for McClintock's disapproval of this story, which is based both on ethical concerns – "this evolutionary principle replaces one inhuman and immoral system with another" – and on the narrative method employed – "the story fails [...] because of the repetitious and trite letter device and the problem of an upper-class point of view" (131).

This essay will attempt to show that, contrary to both Foner's and McClintock's views, the story itself (or, perhaps, the author behind it) does not actually support the views of the Minions of Midas, that the M. of M. *are* interested in changing society, that the story's main merit is in the "letter device", and that it argues very strongly against replacing one human and immoral system with another.

5. Results from the questionnaire

Conducting a questionnaire that requires the respondents to read a story of more than ten pages is certainly very different from conducting a questionnaire where respondents are asked

to give answers based on their opinion without previously being given a task to read something specific. I have, therefore, been able to collect material from respondents who were willing to take the time to read the story or were asked to read it for class (for a course that covers several works by Jack London), and then answer the questions related to it. The questionnaire was composed of 10 questions, which were distributed to two groups of undergraduate students in Macedonia who were part of the course One American Author, and they comprise 37 respondents. Additionally, three professors whose field of research is not literature, and four postgraduate students at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic, have provided answers to the questions.

As the aim of the questionnaire was to collect qualitative data in order to reveal how readers experience the story, it includes questions that ask for views and interpretations, and does not include yes/no questions, or any type of rating-scale. Therefore, no diagram or table is produced from the answers; rather, the answers will be discussed in the form of explanations and interpretations.

5.1. The first question

The first question was: “What is your general impression about the story: is the author more sympathetic to Wade Atsheler / Eben Hale or to the Minions of Midas?” Although Atsheler and Hale are certainly two different characters, the idea here was to differentiate between the ideology of the money barons, on the one hand, regardless of their individual personalities, and the ideology of the Minions of Midas, on the other hand. Many of the respondents, apart from providing a clear and specific answer to the question, additionally gave explanations about their reply. Among the respondents, 23 (52.3%) answered that the author was more sympathetic to Atsheler, 15 (34%) that he was more sympathetic to the Minions of Midas, and 6 (13.7%) thought the author was neutral.

Regarding the explanation, in most cases the sympathy for Atsheler (usually Atsheler was emphasized, and Hale in some cases was not mentioned at all) was supported with the fact that the readers are given more insight into the emotional response and apprehension of Atsheler, while nothing is known about the feelings of the M. of M.; that Atsheler is an honest and virtuous man who feels immense guilt; that there is no hint of justification for the M. of M.; that the narrator is a close friend to Atsheler and since we hear the story from his (the narrator’s) point of view, we know he feels sorry for Atsheler.

When it comes to the answers according to which the author is more sympathetic to the M. of M., the most dominant explanations are: that Hale does not stop the murders even though he is able to; and that the emphasis is on M. of M.'s accusations that they have been victims of oppression.

In the case of the "author is neutral" answers, the following explanations are given: that both sides are presented in negative light; or that the letter device makes it impossible to decide whether the author supports either the Minions or the money barons, that is, the author lets *us* decide, while he remains unbiased in the story by presenting both viewpoints; in one case, the answer was that that it is a class struggle, so it is irrelevant who the author is more sympathetic to.

When it comes to the interpretation of the results from the first question, the questionnaire shows that more than half of the respondents (52.3%) have the impression that the author is more sympathetic to Atsheler (and Hale). This shows that it is wrong to presume that London has written a story in which he, beyond doubt, defends the violent methods of the Minions of Midas. Truly, neither Foner nor McClintock claim explicitly that London defends the M. of M., but it is certainly implicitly present in their claims that this story is a socialist fiction of little merit as it represents replacing of one inhuman system with another, and that it is not a valuable contribution to socialist fiction – both claims seem to presume that socialist fiction usually presents socialists in positive light, as being perhaps somehow more human or more moral than the corrupted tycoons they oppose.

Concerning the impression that the author is more sympathetic to the M. of M., the percentage – 34% – does not entirely reflect the realistic situation. Namely, the most dominant explanation in support of this answer is that that Hale does not stop the murders even though he is able to. In this case, the answers that the author supports the M. of M. are not based on an opinion that he justifies their methods or that he is more sympathetic to them, but rather on the fact that the money barons are presented as corrupted. Thus, the answers are not based on the respondents' impression that sympathy is expressed towards the M. of M. – in fact, the M. of M. are considered evil – but on the fact that the money barons are simply worse than the Minions.

The smallest, third, group of answers – that the author is neutral (13.7%) – includes several explanations, the most frequent being that it is impossible to tell what the author's position is, since the letter device enables the author to objectively present both sides. The explanation of

two respondents – that both sides are presented in negative light – means that even in this case, there is no support for the M. of M.

The high percentage in favor of the assumption that the author is more sympathetic to Atsheler and Hale (and inversely, the small percentage that he is more sympathetic to the Minions of Midas) also shows that critics have based their interpretation not on the story *per se*, but on their knowledge of London's biography and positions, which, of course, is the adequate position of experts, but in this case their knowledge may have hampered the viewing of the story in its own right. Thus, they have foregrounded a fact from London's biography – his socialist inclination – as being unquestionably present in London's story; whereas the story itself – if we employ deconstructive reading and analyze the story without any influence from facts that are outside of the story – very craftily and artistically manages to conceal from the readers London's socialist inclination, as the results from the first question clearly show.

5.2. The second question

This is closely connected to the second question – “What is achieved with the letter-form?” – 40 answers (90.09%) convey the opinion that the M. of M.'s letters and Atsheler's comments enable us to view both sides without any interference of the author. Thus, viewing this story in itself impartially, without imposing on it any information concerning London's life, brings into light its masterful structure, which, in fact, results precisely from the letters; rather than being “trite”, the letters are an effective device as they provide an unbiased perspective. The upper-class point of view, which is also criticized by McClintock, has actually been very fruitful in making the story experimental and one of the early instances of modernism, as it foregrounds significant epistemological questions about how much we can know the truth, with its limited and contrasting points of view. It has also led readers of the story to doubt rather than support the purposes of the Minions, even if we know from London's biography that London was strongly opposed to the upper classes. This makes “The Minions of Midas” a rare case of a story in which the author manages to give a voice to a class he opposes in his real life without imposing his/her opinions.

5.3. Question three to eight

These questions also shed light on certain interesting aspects of how the story can be understood. Yet, they are not directly relevant for the theme discussed in this essay, and may therefore be in focus in another article. They refer to the reasons behind the name Midas that

the M. of M. have taken, to historical events that may bear resemblance to the events described in the story, to how the respondents expect the situation to be resolved, as well as to how the respondents have understood specific passages in the story.

5.4. The ninth and tenth question

The results of question 9 – “Are you personally more sympathetic to Wade Atsheler or to the Minions of Midas? Why?” – are relevant in this context since they reflect the general attitudes towards the story. Among the respondents, 28 (63.6%) answered that personally they are more sympathetic to Atsheler, 6 (13.6%) that they are more sympathetic to the M. of M., and 10 (22.8%) that they support neither. That means that an even greater percentage of the readers are inclined to supporting the money barons rather than the Minions of Midas. In this context, again, the letter device has played the greatest role, as the results make it clear that the author has managed to distance his personal views from the structure of the story, and to avoid imposing his own socialist sympathies towards the M. of M. on the readers. It would not be far-fetched, then, to link his method in this story to the *dramatis personae* employed by Robert Browning, because London also juxtaposes various viewpoints, in this case two social layers, each giving their own perspectives and justifications for their actions.

How much London has succeeded in foregrounding his characters' views and hiding his own can be seen in most of the answers to this question. Those who support Atsheler explain that they do so because Atsheler “fights for ideals that many people would fight for and for freedom”, “is a part of a war where he is powerless”, “seems to be an embodiment of the position of each of us in the society”, is “continuously faithful and loyal” and his “last words promise hope and express genuine suffering”, he “didn't make the capitalist system and doesn't have any personal fault” although he is privileged, “when he writes his letter he confesses everything about himself and how he can't take it anymore and commits suicide”, “is really struggling with the situation that he has found himself in and it is clearly affecting him”; one answer states that the capital made by the money barons “belongs to no one but themselves”. Another frequent reason for sympathizing with Atsheler is not so much the opinion that Atsheler is right as it is the condemnation of the M. of M.'s actions. Thus, some of the answers in this group underline that even though they understand the goals of the Minions, they “disapprove of their methods”, as the Minions show “no remorse for the taking of human life”, and what they do is wrong, illegal and cannot be justified.

Among those who replied that they supported the M. of M., it was their (M. of M.) aims to bring forth changes in society that was underscored, whereas almost all the answers included the comment that the methods of the M. of M. are not justifiable. Some of the reasons stated for supporting the M. of M. are the following: “because they give Wade Atsheler and his boss the opportunity to stop everything even before it happens”, “because they are strong and really determined in order to achieve their goal”, because “they want more equality (as far as I can tell) and they are organized and very smart and prepared, subversive as well” but “their methods, the way they just kill people and the way they fight for power by exerting power” is not appealing.

Those whose answer is that they are not sympathetic to either explain, again, that this is so because they cannot justify the methods of the M. of M., nor can they justify Atsheler for not taking decisive action to stop the murders (two answers suggested that this was cowardly on the part of Atsheler).

The tenth question was the same as the first, except that it additionally included the following instruction: “Answer only if your answer is different from the one you gave to the first question. Otherwise write: Same as the first.” There were four answers that differed from all the others.

Among these four answers, one was: “My answer is not the same but I can’t decide. Perhaps he is equally sympathetic to both. However, it does feel like he is slightly more sympathetic to the Minions of Midas” (This respondent’s answer to the first question was that the author is more sympathetic to Atsheler.) Another explanation is that the opinion is still the same, although thoughts are shared about the reference to the Gracchi brothers – “maybe by calling the sons of Eben Hale that (and also ‘a cleaner, saner, wholesomer progeny of sons and daughters’), the author wants to specify that the social change is inevitable and will happen eventually and naturally, and will begin from the richest. I don’t know, this seems very vague and inconsequential”. The third is that although at first the author seemed more sympathetic to the M. of M., after thinking more thoroughly about the story, the impression of the respondent is that the author is more sympathetic to Atsheler. The fourth states that the author was neutral, which is the same opinion as in the case of the answer to the first question, with the addition that it seems that “it would be easier to defend the Minions of Midas”.

The objective was to see whether, after contemplating various aspects of the story when answering the previous eight questions, the respondents would see the story differently. Except for the four above mentioned answers, all the other answers are: same as the first.

6. Interpreting the story as dystopian fiction

While the interpretation of the story by above-mentioned critics largely differs from the conclusions resulting from the respondents' answers, my own analysis of the story largely differs from the explanations of both the critics and the respondents. Namely, my analysis is closely related to two points I believe are misleading: first, to consider the story only as an instance of socialist fiction; and, second, to consider the Minions of Midas as people who intended to be socialists but have turned into an evil force pursuing selfish gains. I shall argue in this part that while the story is socialist to a certain extent, it is much more an instance of dystopian fiction, and that such interpretation gives rise to completely different implications about the themes and ideas of the story, as well as about the aims of the M. of M. The respondents, both those who condemned and even those who supported the M. of M., as well as critics, do not approve of the Minions' methods. This analysis is based on a belief that the story is a dystopian warning about what will happen if injustice prevails much more than it is an assessment of the Minions' actions. Seen in that way, the whole interpretation would be focused on what has led to the formation of the Minions of Midas in the first place.

Dystopian fiction is often defined as negative utopia, a society which is an expression of fear (Carey, Claeys, Vieira). Although elements of dystopia appeared before the twentieth century, it has been dominant since the twentieth century, as a result of the greatly transformed social circumstances, which gave rise to assumptions that any society of equal people would likely need to be upheld by some kind of dictatorial authority. The two world wars and the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century obliterated the utopian beliefs in a more ideal future. "Enlightenment optimism respecting the progress of reason and science was now displaced by a sense of the incapacity of humanity to restrain its newly created destructive powers" (Claeys 107). These destructive powers that became evident in the course of the twentieth century were felt and predicted by some authors even before, Jack London certainly being one of them, as is visible in his novel *The Iron Heel* as well as in the story in question here. This story includes an aspect frequently discussed in the context of

utopias – that utopias are not just fearful predictions of the future, but rather a warning for readers to do what is in their power to evade such future. This has especially been prominent in regard to the worlds described in E. Zamyatin's *We*, A. Huxley's *Brave New World* and G. Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – while these are worlds that seem plausible, the purpose of the novels describing them is usually said to be to make humankind aware of how important it is to strive to prevent them. Similarly, it can be argued that this is also the purpose of the story "The Minions of Midas": to warn us to strive for a more just society, one which will eliminate the reasons for the appearance of the M. of M in the first place.

The gradual transformation of the downfall of Atsheler's physical appearance in the first passage symbolizes his inner agony and demise of his integrity, which is gradually revealed in the rest of the story, and is a warning that his destiny may have been altered had anyone reacted timely. But his friends, just like Atsheler and Hale later in the story, never intervene since the thought of something being wrong is remote from their thoughts even when they witness his downfall.

From their very first letter, the Minions of Midas use a tone which is calm and composed. This may lead to a conclusion that they are offering a cold and calculating business proposal. However, such a tone may, instead, signal that through reading and experience they have come to the desperate realization that no peaceful attempt to raise the awareness of the oppressors regarding exploitation can ever be successful. Namely, the M. of M. constantly refer to the past, as if they are pleading for readers to judge the situation that led to their formation. "We are members of that intellectual proletariat, the increasing numbers of which mark in red lettering the last days of the nineteenth century. We have, from a profound study of economics, decided to enter upon this business" (45). The red lettering refers to the blood of those workers living in miserable conditions, who have died due to the inhuman conditions in which they worked for the gain of the wealthy. The "profound study" of the economy system prevailing in that time is yet another hint of experience that has made them painfully aware that the system works in favor of the money barons. This awareness is supported with the historical records and principles (that bear resemblance to Marxist principles) that they clearly, though briefly and superficially, explain in the same letter: that the system is, and has been at least since William the Conqueror, founded on property right, and that this property right rests "solely and wholly upon *might*" (45), which in recent times is true of the "captains of industry" whose power is no longer based on physical strength, but on economic forces.

The whole text of this first letter essentially explains what has brought the M. of M. into existence. In that sense, it is not intended to provide explanation about their future crimes, but a plea to change society before any such crimes are committed. The argument for this assumption is that if they only wanted money, then it is difficult, almost impossible, to provide arguments why they would go through such lengthy explanations; a simple blackmail – that they would kill people at random if they are not given twenty million dollars – would be sufficient to try and extract the money. The fact that they are trying to make Eben Hale comprehend their justifications even before they have committed any murder indicates that they have unsuccessfully attempted to change the system, and then given up hope that it can ever be changed, thus they embrace the rules imposed by the money barons: “we have no foolish ethical or social scruples” (45). Seen in such light, this last statement is not a cruel and reckless lack of concern, but an evidence of despair of people who, through experience, have realized that even by “toiling early and late” (45) for decades, they would still barely be able to survive. It is only after they have realized this from their life in agony that they have “entered the arena”. The letter is written at a point when in the story it is already too late for the social situation to be improved, but since this can be read as a dystopian story – one that does not reflect reality, but articulates a *possible grim future* – it does imply that there is still time in the reality (though not in the story) for the rights of workers to be addressed.

The assumption that the M. of M.’s intention is to change the society and system of thinking may also be supported by the fact that they try to convince Hale, and they prove it with their acts, that their aim is not to harm or kill him. Judging from the way they perform the other murders, it can be claimed that had they the intention of destroying Hale, they would have succeeded easily in it. Taking away power from the powerful, therefore, seems to be much closer to their long-term goals than killing a few exploitative businessmen, which would not make any difference in the system. Such a view is supported not only by the letters of the M. of M., but additionally by Atsheler himself in his own letters to the narrator. The change of the system becomes evident in Atsheler’s statements following the letter of the M. of M. of October 21, 1899. After claiming that Mr. Hale was a man of iron, Atsheler gradually plunges into a grim vision of the future in which an infuriated group – the “horrible – this awful something, this blind force in the dark” (49) takes control of society. From that moment on, the captains of industry who have controlled and planned the future can no longer fight or plan, no longer control their own or other people’s destinies, and begins to see

responsibility from a different perspective: the victims seem to be “just as much killed by us as though we had done it with our own hands” (49).

What comes as another result of the M. of M. actions, though it is questionable whether they pursued such a goal, is the fact that Hale’s wealth starts diminishing as it is distributed to thousands of other people who are engaged to capture the members of M. of M., “till a quarter of a million flowed weekly from his coffers” (51).

In the context of years of injustice that the representatives of the working classes have suffered, Atsheler’s statement is strikingly ironic: Hale refuses to give the money and stop the slaughter because he “insisted that the integrity of society was assailed; that he was not sufficiently a coward to desert his post; and that it was manifestly just that a few should be martyred for the ultimate welfare of the many” (51). London here skillfully plays upon the perverted notions in the story about “a few” to be martyred (the victims killed at random) and the “many” to be saved (allegedly the other citizens). It is, therefore, easy to disregard the acrimonious irony contained in these words, for the “many” is in fact only the few wealthy money barons and no other citizens at all, whereas the attitude that it is worth sacrificing “a few” indicates Hale’s complete contempt for the common people – a fact that is also, perhaps, inconspicuous because at the surface Hale seems to be a victim. Hale’s statement that “the integrity of society was assailed” is also ironic, as the society that he has in mind cannot be said to have integrity; as is Atsheler’s last statement: “let society arise in its might and cast out this abomination” (54), since “abomination” is meant by Atsheler to refer to the Minions of Midas, but, in fact, is a fitting description for the corrupted society that Hale and Atsheler represent.

It seems that the critical works by Foner and McClintock have also somewhat neglected the view of the M. of M. as “culmination of industrial and social wrong” (53). Is it considered as an untruthful statement, used only as the Minions’ attempt to justify their hideous crimes? The crimes are certainly hideous, but the responsibility for them is to be shared among all characters in the story, who represent various layers in society. The close attention to various passages in the story, and their interpretation as a kind of a dystopian warning against society taking the direction described in the story, point out that the M. of M.’s description as “culmination of industrial and social wrong” is meant to be taken as a truthful and desperate cry of a long oppressed group that has been prevented from obtaining rights and fair opportunities in all other ways, and so resorted to the worst: killing innocent people. “You have crushed your wage slaves into the dirt and you have survived. The captains of war, at

your behest, have shot down like dogs your employees in a score of bloody strikes. By such means have you endured” (53), the M. of M. accuse in their last letter. After the revealed fact that workers who have attempted to fight for their rights have been “crushed” and “shot down like dogs” (53), it would be inadequate to take literally the statement “we do not grumble at the result” and interpret it as the Minions’ attempt to simply replace one evil system (the one of the money barons) with another (their own). The realization of the Minions that they have to follow “the same natural law” gives the story an utterly pessimistic tone about where society is heading unless it shows more concern for the oppressed.

7. Conclusion

The use of various approaches, such as: experts’ views; a questionnaire that shows results of readers’ understanding of the story; as well as close reading from a personal point of view – may not be the conventional way of interpreting a literary text. Nevertheless, in the case of this story all three approaches together have been valuable for interpreting the story from many angles, which contributes to a much better understanding than the use of one method only. This juxtaposition of the different perspectives does not mean that either critics or readers have misrepresented the story. On the contrary, one perspective supplements the others and *vice versa*. It is not the case that London supported the money barons, as the results of the questionnaire may suggest, thus the critics’ views provide a better supported explanation. On the other hand, the critics’ emphasis on London’s failure to present in positive light the fight for workers’ rights fails to recognize the skillfulness in constructing a narrative structure that has foregrounded the perspectives of the *dramatis personae* without any visible intervention of the author; it is the answers of the readers (who are no experts of London) that have brought this fact to the light.

There is no single straight-forward answer to the question from the title: “Why has London’s “The Minions of Midas” been a disregarded and undervalued story?” Hopefully, however, this essay has shed some light on why “The Minions of Midas” should *not* be a disregarded and undervalued story. It has a skillfully composed letter structure, which has enabled the author to let the characters speak for themselves without imposing his own views; it has provoked contrary opinions and impressions among readers who may or may not be experts in literature or in London’s works, a fact that substantiates its complexity both in terms of

form and in terms of content and ideas; it has foregrounded issues concerning responsibility for social unrest and possible consequences of creating despair among people in societies where authorities are corrupted or exploitative; and it contains not only socialist, but rather social and utopian elements that constitute a plea for a more just society.

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