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Economic Justice in Eliza Fowler Haywood (1693–1756)

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Haywood composes most of her works while England faces a great financial crisis resulting in a substantial crash, the so-called *South Sea Bubble* (1720).

The South Sea Company was founded in 1711, with the primary goal of enhancing trade with Spanish America. Believing that the War of the Spanish Succession would end up producing a treaty authorizing such trade. While this procedure proved to be temporarily successful, it soon collapsed, and England faced one of its most substantial financial and economic crises.

With its theatrical frame, most of Haywood's texts are true to her thespian roots as an actress. In her texts, often masked as amorous fiction, Haywood constructs a socio-economic critique of England in the 18th century. Her critique of economic justice is based on a contradiction that she observes: On one side, England's rich people speculate with non-existent money, on the other side she sees the poor population fighting for their survival. She envisions the systematic failure of a nation inadequately caring for its people, especially in the second part of her *Memoirs*.

The decline of Justice is closely linked with the decline of moral love and of the worship of Cupid, as well as economic decay. Justice is jeopardized by the "new credit-driven and money-obsessed economic order" (King, 35) of the British people. Haywood sees a replacement of genuine love (for people) with the love for money and conspicuous consumption (LINK GEND. JUSTICE).

In the *Memoirs*, Haywood's protagonist is being led, by Cupid, through a utopian land in stark resemblance to England. Cupid shows him an enchanted well, symbolising the South Sea Company, and explains: "whoever would be rich, must repair to this miraculous Spring which tho' in reality never any other than common Waster he had made appear" (*Memoirs* 7).

Haywood presupposes her view on Justices momentary failure, when she compares the criminal ongoings of the British government to one of her work's most corrupt characters,

Romanus: “No, resum’d the Divine Historian, his time of punishment is not yet arriv’d; and tho’ that which I have related (monstrous as it is) is not, the greatest of his Crimes, he is allowed to continue in them - to perpetrate yet more! Not that Justice sleeps, or is remissive in her office, but this Traitor of all honour and fidelity is permitted to triumph for a while.” (*Memoirs* 19) Haywood does two things here: she develops a critique on the current state of the British economy, restating its criminal nature. But she simultaneously makes clear that “Justice [does not] sleep [...]”, which does not necessarily imply hope for the future, but at least some form of fluidity.

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