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Cheap print, crime and information in early modern London: *The Life and Death of Griffin Flood*

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ABSTRACT

This article centres on the pamphlet *The Life and Death of Griffin Flood informer* (1623), which tells the career and execution through pressing of an informer and murderer working in early modern London. It outlines what archival research reveals about this figure, and thereby re-examines how far crime pamphlets were rooted in social actuality. Secondly, it shows that *The Life and Death* does not follow what historians have identified as the conventions of rogue literature and murder pamphlets, and that scholars' treatment of cheap print has often overlooked its generic instability and inconsistency of tone. Finally, it highlights how the representation of Flood's career as an informer casts new light on attitudes towards non-citizens within early modern London. The article concludes by arguing that *The Life and Death* (and many similar pamphlets) invoked communitarian understandings of justice, and emphasized neighbourliness, social peace, and charity, rather than the themes of redemption and divine retribution.

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The introduction to *Measure for Measure* in the *Riverside Shakespeare* reproduces a gruesome image of a man being pressed to death.¹ It was taken from the title-page of *The Life and Death of Griffin Flood Informer*, published two decades after *Measure for Measure* was first performed (Figure 1).² The *Riverside* shows no interest in the individual undergoing this ordeal or the pamphlet from which the scene is extracted. Instead, we are assured that having viewed the woodcut, 'we can better understand the full force of Lucio's anguished protest when he is ordered . . . to marry a prostitute that he has got with child: "Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death, whipping, and hanging"'.³ This article, by contrast, focuses on this little studied text and its subject and shows how *The Life and Death* illuminates cheap print's representation of law enforcement and social relations in early modern London.

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¹Evans, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 549.

²*The Life and Death of Griffin Flood Informer* (London, 1623). All quotations from this pamphlet will be given in the text. As the year conventionally started in March 25 and Flood was pressed in January, he was almost certainly executed and the pamphlet published in 1624. Two copies survive: B[ritish] L[ibrary] 1132 a.45; Folger Shakespeare Library 11090. ESTC lists a third copy in Norwich Cathedral Library. This is a ghost, email from Cathedral Librarian, Gudrun Warren to Mark Jenner, 20 Apr 2017. It has been edited with negligible annotation and no contextual research in MacMillan ed., *Stories of True Crime*.

³*Riverside Shakespeare*, 549.

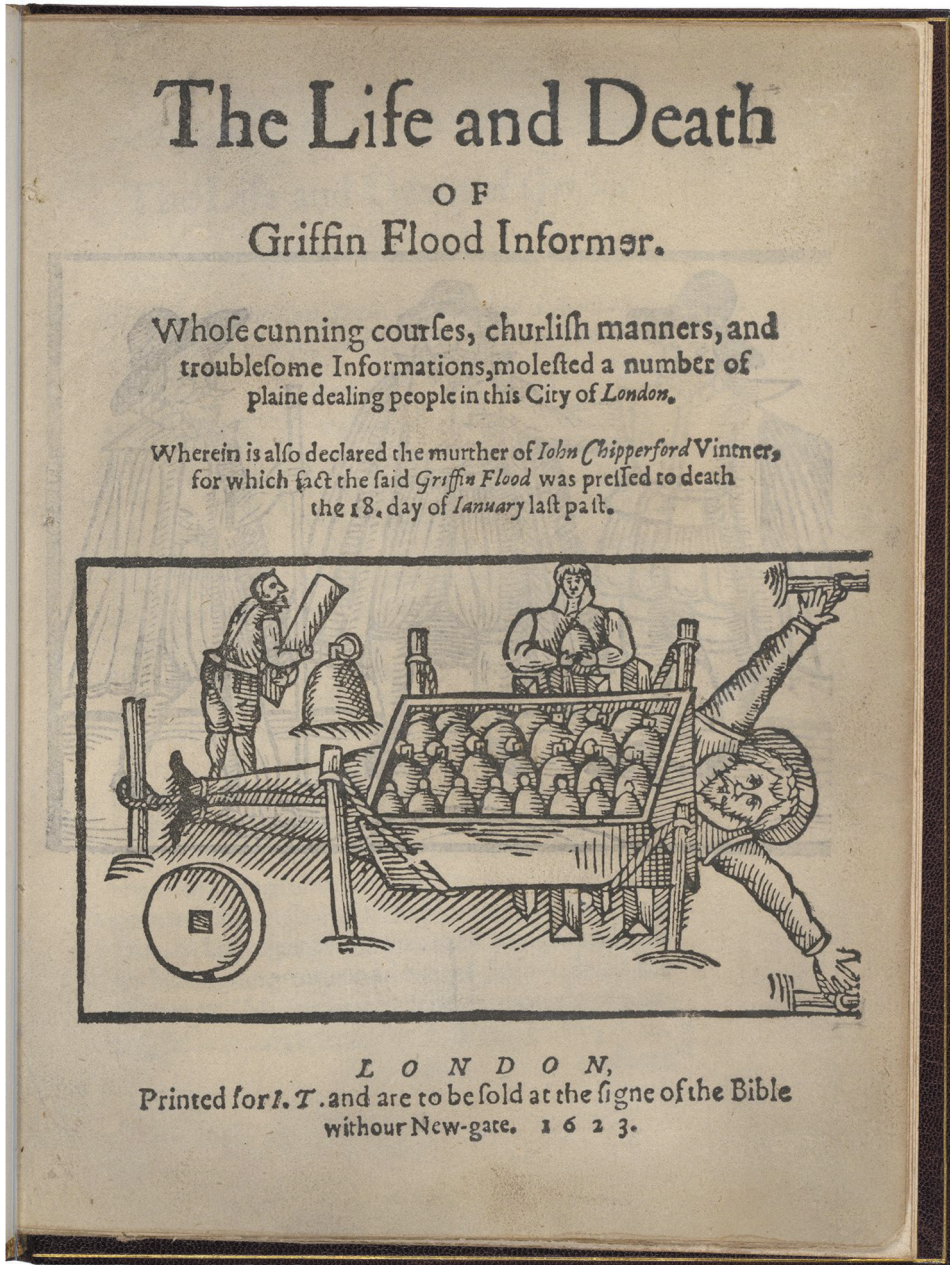


Figure 1. *The life and death of Griffin Flood informer.* (1623), Folger Shakespeare Library 155966, reproduced with thanks under a CC BY-SA license.

The quarto pamphlet is made up of a series of brief sections recounting Flood's 'cunning courses, churlish manners, and troublesome Informations' and the murder for which he ended up being pressed to death (Titlepage). From the outset, Flood is presented as thoroughly anti-social. When he was apprenticed to a currier, he intimidated other members of the household with 'shameless lies'; he then extracted money

from apprentices and servants by threatening to inform on them for frequenting taverns or playhouses in time of divine service (Sig. A3). Eleven vignettes follow, describing how Flood, having gained his citizenship and become an informer, clashed with fellow Londoners, extorted money from people who infringed the City's regulations, and generally oppressed them. The pamphlet then sketches Flood's work as a keeper in Moorfields and recalls how he boasted 'in the middle of Guild-hall' that he reckoned himself 'the veriest knave in all England', predicting that his epitaph would be

Here lyeth Griffin Flood full low in his grave,

Which lived a Rascall and died a Knave. (Sig. C2v)

Two subsequent episodes detail his final imprisonment in Newgate for having stabbed a constable and a vintner, causing the latter's death, telling how he ended his days 'in great discontent' amid the derision of his enemies. A one-paragraph concluding section states that he refused to plead, and so on 18 January suffered 'a most fearfull death' crushed under heavy weights. (Sigs. C3-[4])

The Life and Death is one of the many short accounts of crime and roguery published in Elizabethan and early Stuart London. Scholars' understanding and treatment of this material has changed considerably over the last century and a half. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century editors and researchers reckoned that such works were based on 'close observation' of the metropolitan underworld, delineating its guild-like organization, and providing reliable contextual information with which to understand more canonical texts.⁴ In 1926 F. L. Lucas used *The Life and Death* to determine when John Webster, William Rowley and Thomas Heywood composed their play, *A Cure for a Cuckold*, and to make sense of the passage in which a character encounters an informer and exclaims 'Will not the Ballad of *Flood* that was prest, make them leave their knavery?' Lucas explained that although the ballad had not survived, the pamphlet explicated this reference.⁵ He showed sufficient confidence in the veracity of this and similar works to declare that 'Flood certainly seems to have been an unpleasant person'.⁶

In the 1970s and 1980s a new generation of social historians concluded, by contrast, that archival evidence showed this kind of literature to be misleading, even fantastical. The 'literary image of the Elizabethan vagrant', wrote Jim Sharpe, 'evaporates as soon as court records are examined'.⁷ Paul Slack described rogue pamphlets as 'the result of contemporary desires to . . . provide stereotypes'.⁸ In the era of new historicism, literary critics read them as 'misrepresentation', rhetorical scapegoating which registered the fears and assumptions of the respectable, not the experience of the indigent.⁹ Endorsing this scepticism, in 2004 Michael Long classified *The Life and Death* as 'pseudo-biographical'.¹⁰ By then, however, less dichotomous approaches were emerging. Many of the lives of notorious sixteenth- and seventeenth-century criminals in the new 2004 *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* decried the fabrications of

⁴Judges, *The Elizabethan Underworld*, xiii; Kinney, *Rogues, Vagabonds*, 11.

⁵Lucas, 'An Unexplained Allusion', 283; Grunby, Carnegie, MacDonald, *A Cure for a Cuckold*, 350–52 & 423–24. No copy of the ballad has surfaced in the subsequent 95 years.

⁶Lucas, *The Complete Works of John Webster*, iii 108.

⁷Sharpe, *Crime in early modern England*, 101. Compare Beier, *Masterless men*, 144. See also Wiltenburg, 'True Crime'.

⁸Slack, 'Vagrants and Vagrancy', 360–79.

⁹Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 50–52; Carroll, *Fat king, lean beggar*; Woodbridge, 'Jest Books', 201–210; Fumerton, 'Making Vagrancy (In)Visible'.

¹⁰M. Long, 'Rogues, Counterfeiters, and Forgers', 263. See also, Fuller, *Turned to Account*, 215.

the early modern popular press but also unveiled previously unknown documentary traces of their subjects.¹¹ These complemented historical reconstructions of ‘criminal communities’ in Tudor and Stuart London and the discovery of links between them and pamphlet culture.¹² Scholars’ sense of the latter was enhanced by an increasingly discriminating understanding of early modern print and by a new appreciation of how such texts inculcated moral, religious and political lessons.¹³ Sharpe demonstrated how execution ballads and broadsides promoted obedience and asserted the legitimacy of the law; Alexandra Walsham and Malcolm Gaskill revealed that some pamphleteers used these demotic forms to explain the workings of Providence¹⁴; Peter Lake showed how in reporting cases of murder and infanticide, Puritan and Arminian authors scored polemical points and fomented religious and political divisions.¹⁵

Our article extends and revises this scholarship, moving beyond the unsubtle antithesis between fact and fiction still found in debates about whether the reader can ‘trust’ accounts of early modern roguery and criminality. It makes three historiographical interventions. First, by outlining what archival research reveals about Griffin Flood, it suggests that to view all such works as purely fictional is misguided. Secondly, it examines how the pamphlet’s form and language fashioned and framed Flood’s life. It shows that *The Life and Death* does not follow what historians have identified as the conventions of rogue literature and the murder pamphlet, and that scholars’ treatment of cheap print has often overlooked its generic instability and inconsistency of tone. Finally, it highlights how the representation of Flood’s career as an informer casts new light on attitudes to the foreigner and the stranger within early modern London, and how the depiction of Flood’s imprisonment and execution signals the informer’s malign rejection of reciprocity. The article concludes by arguing that *The Life and Death* (and many similar pamphlets) invoked communitarian understandings of justice, and emphasized neighbourliness, social peace, and charity, rather than redemption and divine retribution – the themes emphasized in recent studies of cheap print.¹⁶

An archival Flood

Scholars who regard such works as pseudo-biographical can find many reasons to be sceptical about *The Life and Death*. Although it gives the exact date on which Flood was pressed to death and identifies his victim as John Chipperford, Vintner,¹⁷ most episodes

¹¹Eg., Cathy Shrank, ‘Luke Hutton’; Pamela Allen Brown, ‘Phillips [other married name Pope], Judith [alias Doll]’; P. Sugden, ‘Gamaliel Ratsey’; Paul Griffiths, ‘Frith [married name Markham], Mary [known as Moll Cutpurse]’; Tim Wales, ‘John [William] Nevison [Nevinson]’, *ODNB*.

¹²Capp, ‘Long Meg of Westminster’; Ungerer, ‘Mary Frith’; Griffiths, ‘Overlapping circles’; Tittler, ‘Swaddon the Swindler’; Jenner, ‘London’; Ward, *Print Culture, Crime and Justice*.

¹³The most comprehensive account of rogue pamphlets within late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century print culture is Liapi, *Roguery in Print*, chapter 1.

¹⁴Sharpe, ‘“Last Dying Speeches”’; Walsham, ‘“A Glose of Godlines”’; eadem., *Providence in early modern England*; Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*, chapter 6.

¹⁵Peter Lake, ‘Puritanism, Arminianism, and a Shropshire Axe-murder’, 37–64; Lake and Questier, *The Anti-Christ’s Lewd Hat*.

¹⁶This has become increasingly the case – compare Lake and Questier, *Anti-Christ’s Lewd Hat* with Lake and Stephens, *Scandal and Religious Identity*.

¹⁷Chipperford was probably John Chipperfield who was apprenticed to George Robins, vintner, on 1 March 1607/8, and made free of the Vintners’ Company in December 1616, GL MS 15211/2 pp. 64 & 139. Four apprentices were enrolled to him between 1618 and 1622, but none between 1622 and 1635, which suggests he had died, though when Simon Browne was made free in 1629 he was noted as having been apprenticed to John Chipperfield, *ibid.*, pp. 147, 149, 157, 169 & 241.

lack the authenticating detail favoured by pamphlets reporting news.¹⁸ Moreover, its publisher was John Trundle, 'a byword for unreliable and exploitative publication'.¹⁹ One contemporary complained of 'Spuriall Pamphlets, which the Presse hath of late already spewed out, . . . and *Trundled* . . . vp and downe . . . the Streets'; another denounced the 'monstrous newes . . . Trundling in my way'.²⁰ Trundle's sensational accounts of miracles, disasters and crimes included such implausibly extravagant titles as *Fire from heauen. Burning the body of one Iohn Hittchell of Holne-hurst, . . . consumed to ashes, and no fire seene, lying therein smoaking and smothering three daye and three nights, not to bequenched by water, nor the help of mans hand and True and wonderfull. A discourse relating to a strange and monstrous serpent (or dragon) lately discovered, and yet liuing . . . in Sussex*.²¹ It is tempting, therefore, to assume that *The Life and Death* is a fabrication.

However, a courier called Griffin (or Griffith) Flood (or Fludd or Floyd or Lloyd) did work as an informer in early seventeenth-century London.²² He received official encouragement. In January and February 1612 the minutes of the court of aldermen refer to his prosecution of two foreign textile workers in the Mayor's court.²³ In July of the same year the court approved Flood's proposal to prosecute the 'hucksters higlers and fforestallers frequenting' London markets 'to the great hurt of the comon wealth and especially . . . the inhabitants w[i]thin this City'.²⁴ That winter he petitioned it about the prosecutions of a foreigner trading despite 'being not free' and a tapster allegedly overcharging for beer.²⁵ In March 1613 the aldermen remitted the City's portion of a fine which the Mayor's Court had imposed on John Dixon for trading without a freedom after he had been prosecuted by Flood. Two weeks later they ordered the Chamberlain to pay Flood his share of the fine imposed on William Nicholls, tailor, for the same offence.²⁶ In September 1616 they curbed Flood's activities, withdrawing his right to exhibit informations to the Mayor's Court in the name of the Chamberlain except with special permission.²⁷ They were probably trying to minimize their liabilities. Two years previously, the aldermen had ordered that no informer should start actions against unfree traders unless he had given sureties to protect the City from costs and damages if the prosecution failed.²⁸ Such cases often dragged on for months or years because the accused removed them to other courts such as King's Bench. Moreover, even if the City won, it often did not get its money because the fines were paid so slowly or remitted entirely.²⁹ However, in November 1620 Flood approached them again with a petition setting out that 'a great companie of forreyners . . . buy and retaile beere within this cittie . . . contrarie to the Act of Common Counsell . . . to the utter undoing of manie

¹⁸Randall, 'Epistolary Rhetoric', 3–32; Martin, 'Taking a Walk on the Wild Side'; Dolan, 'Mopsa's Method'.

¹⁹Hadfield, 'News of the Sussex Dragon', 87. See also Johnson, 'John Trundle and the Book-Trade'.

²⁰*Lachrymae Londinenses*, sigs. B2-2 v; *Taylor's Motto*, sig. E2 v.

²¹Hadfield, 'News of the Sussex Dragon'.

²²These variations in the spelling of these names are common at the time. He may also have gone by the name William. An early MS annotation on the BL copy entitles the work 'William Flood the Informer'.

²³Rep. 30 fos. 257v, 238v-39, 270 & 271v. We sampled the records of the Mayor's Court from this period looking for Flood with no success; they are in any case far from complete. See also n. 79 below.

²⁴Rep. 30 fo. 354.

²⁵Rep. 31 (1) fos. 19 & 52. See also Rep. 31 (2) fo. 342.

²⁶Rep. 31 (1) fos. 59 & 70v.

²⁷Rep. 32 fo. 351v.

²⁸Rep. 31(1) fo. 77. See also Rep. 38 fo. 92. Scholars have identified no professional female informers in early modern England.

²⁹Eg., Rep. 30 fos. 351 & 362v; Rep 31(1) fo. 59.

freemen'. The court once again gave him the right to prosecute them in the name of the Chamberlain.³⁰ He started work promptly: within a fortnight the aldermen were considering the case of a dice maker whom he had prosecuted in the Mayor's Court for working while not free.³¹

Court of aldermen records also reveal that in the years when he could not act in the Chamberlain's name, Flood turned to salaried work. In October 1616, just one month after the aldermen withdrew their support, he was appointed a keeper of Moorfields, being paid £15 p.a. At this time this area of open ground just north of the City was dramatically changing its character. Long a place for exercise and recreation, Moorfields also served all kinds of other uses. Women dried laundry there; homeless people sheltered on it; rubbish and nightsoil were dumped in its ditches.³² Spurred in part by James I's vociferous concern about the condition of his capital, in 1605 the City fathers began to drain, level and grass over the fields, to plant trees, lay out gravel walks and to rail off the verdate.³³ Richard Johnson celebrated the 'pleasant walkes of Moore fields' as 'the chiefest' of metropolitan pleasures as early as 1607, but the improvement was a prolonged and costly process.³⁴ Many people opposed its transformation into an exclusively recreational space. In 1608 the aldermen, complaining that the City had been 'at great charges . . . levelling walling and rayling' Moorfields, appointed two keepers to maintain the fields and walks, and to stop anyone from hanging clothes on the rails, tying clothes lines to the trees, bleaching linen on the grass, or engaging in disorderly conduct.³⁵ They failed to bring order. In 1616 the rails were broken down amid disputes over access. In October the aldermen dismissed the keepers, and ordered the Deputy of Bishopsgate to nominate two replacements. One was Flood.³⁶ However, he did not retain this post for long. In June 1617 the aldermen found Flood had taken money from someone 'to execute the . . . Place in his steed' and sacked him.³⁷ This hurt him financially. Within months he petitioned the aldermen from the Hole, the fetid ward in the Poultry Compter inhabited by the desperately indigent. Despite his less than conscientious service, they granted him 40s. to cover a quarter's rent on his house and to relieve him.³⁸

The Corporation was not Flood's only source of income. He was also employed by St. Stephen Coleman Street, the parish where he lived, where he married 'Dorothy Baly', widow, in October 1605, and where their son and daughter were baptised in April 1607 and November 1608.³⁹ It was a comparatively large parish in the north of the City adjoining Moorfields. In the early seventeenth century its population increased

³⁰Rep. 35 fo. 19v.

³¹Rep. 35 fo. 31.

³²Levy, 'Moorfields, Finsbury and the City of London', 78–96; P. Hunting et al., *Broadgate and Liverpool Street Station*, chs. 2–4; LMA P69/STE1/A/2/MS4449 fo. 164.

³³Brett-James, *The Growth of Stuart London*, 452–57; Overall, *Analytical Index*, 45–46; Rep. 26(1) fos. 158v, 182; Rep. 26(2) fos. 378v, 467v; Rep. 27 fos. 13, 135v, 141–2, 171, 258, 259v, 262, 279; Rep. 28 fo. 70.

³⁴Johnson, *The Pleasant Walkes of Moore-fields* (1607), sig. A3; Brett-James, *Growth of Stuart London*. Rep. 29 fo. 127v; Rep. 32 fos. 271 & 291v. For the ongoing costs, see, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Rawlinson MS B 385, fo. 135; LMA City Cash 1/1 fo. 140.

³⁵Rep. 29 fos. 13v–14. These two were gardeners who had earlier contracted to plant the trees and level the ground, Brett-James, *Growth of Stuart London*, 454; Rep. 27 fos. 142 & 167. There had been warders there before, who, though not tasked with such onerous tasks or given such good salaries, had also been assaulted, Overall, *Analytical Index*, 451.

³⁶Rep. 29 fo. 225; Rep. 32 fos. 329v & 367v–68. The Moorfields rails were targeted by thieves and vandals for many years, Bridewell Hospital Courtbooks 6 fos. 314 & 408.

³⁷Rep. 32 fo. 367v; Rep. 33 fo. 121.

³⁸Rep. 33 fos. 174 & 183 v. On the Hole, McGovern, 'The Compters at Poultry and Wood Street'.

³⁹LMA P69/STE1/A/2/MS04449 fos. 85, 45v & 46v.

significantly. At least 102 new tenements were created there between 1603 and 1637. Many of these were thrown up in alleys or made by subdividing houses and then let out to the poor. In addition, as its baptismal register records, indigent women gave birth on Moorfields and in the parish cage (lock-up), and infants were left on the doorsteps of the wealthy. All swelled the charge on the rates.⁴⁰ St. Stephen therefore turned to Flood to help expel newcomers. Between 1615 and 1622 they paid him £1 a year for his ‘pains about inmates’, detecting and driving out lodgers.⁴¹ They evidently felt some obligation towards him. They gave small sums of money for Flood’s son, including four shillings when he was sick, and contributed five shillings towards the costs of burying his wife in 1619.⁴²

This aldermanic and parochial support shows that he was embedded within local social networks and governmental structures. So too does the way in which he acted as surety for a fellow leatherworker in August 1610.⁴³ However, Flood also had a succession of serious altercations with neighbours and local officers. ‘Griffin Lloyd currier’ was brought before the aldermen in March 1609 for having got drunk and beaten his wife ‘in very inhumane and monstrous manner . . . to the greate disquietnes and troble’ of his neighbours. (He was committed to a City compter until he found sureties for future good behaviour).⁴⁴ In 1616 he was bound to appear at Middlesex sessions, charged with having resisted and abused the constable of the liberty of Norton Folgate in what may have been a dispute about a drinking establishment.⁴⁵ In June of the same year two aldermen were sent to view a watercourse which Flood had stopped, presumably because his action had caused annoyance to other residents.⁴⁶ In April 1617 ‘Griffin Flood’ citizen and currier was bound to appear at City sessions to answer complaints from Dorothy, his wife.⁴⁷ The fatal fight with the vintner Chipperford and the constable clearly had precedents.

‘Gryffen lloyde’ was bound apprentice to Thomas Peare, currier in 1591–1592, and so was probably born in the early to mid-1570s.⁴⁸ (It is unclear whether he was, as the pamphlet claimed, ‘of meane birth’ (Sig. A3)). Peare became a Master of the Company that year, but Flood did not accumulate much wealth or status during his career, even though successful individual prosecutions would have earned him sizeable sums of money (one netted him more than £2 4s).⁴⁹ Sampling relevant sources has not revealed Flood presenting informations to the Exchequer or working for livery companies in the

⁴⁰Kirby, ‘The Radicals of St. Stephen’s’, 98–99; TNA SP16/377/93; LMA P69/STE1/A/2/MS04449 fos. 45v, 46v, 164.

⁴¹LMA P69/STE1/B/012/MS04457/2, fos. 153v, 155, 161v, 169, 212 & 212v. The policy continued after Flood’s death, P69/STE1/B/012/MS04458/1 p. 63–68; similar campaigns occurred in other City wards and parishes during the 1610s and 1620s, LMA CLA/47/LJ/1/79(18); CLC/W/FA/008/MS01502; CLC/W/HF/001/MS04069/001 fos. 134v, 138, 147v–48, 160, 176; P69/JNB/B/006/MS00577/1 fos. 39–39v, 52, 54 & 56; P69/ALB/B/003/MS07673/1 fo. 89; P69/ANL/B/004/MS01046/1 fo. 165; P69/BOT4/B/008/MS04524/1 fo. 158v; Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, p. 53.

⁴²LMA P69/STE1/B/012/MS04457/2 fos. 177v & 189. The parish register does not record her burial, LMA P69/STE1/A/2/MS04449.

⁴³LMA MJ/SR/492/19. He was identified as a currier of St Stephen Coleman Street.

⁴⁴Rep. 35 fo. 31.

⁴⁵LMA MJ/SR/555/132; MJ/SBR/2/367. He is styled ‘Griffin Lloid’ of Coleman Street, currier. The circumstances of this case are obscure, but one of the people informing against Flood acted as surety for a woman who was alleged to have kept an unlicensed ale-house, Le Hardy, *Middlesex Sessions Records*, iv 51.

⁴⁶Rep. 32 fo. 300. On the way blocked gutters generated disputes, Hubbard, *City Women*, 181–82.

⁴⁷LMA CLA/47/LJ/1/77(29). Arthur Milton, candle-maker or chandler, and Peter Stockle, currier, both of St Stephen Coleman Street, were Flood’s guarantors.

⁴⁸GL MS 14346/1 fo. 224. Steve Rappaport showed that at this time, most Londoners began their apprenticeship when aged between 17 and 20, *Worlds within Worlds*, 295–97.

⁴⁹GL MS 14346/1 fo. 225; Rep. 31 (1) fo. 59. Cf. Davies, *Enforcement*, 47.

way that the late Elizabethan informer and market overseer, Hugh Alley, had done.⁵⁰ He was not one of the eighty-nine men listed as present at the St. Stephen Coleman Street vestry in December 1622.⁵¹ Indeed the assistance which he received from that parish suggests that he was poor. The aldermen granted him 30s to cover a quarter's rent for his house, and £6p.a. was well below the median rent in early seventeenth-century London.⁵²

The coincidence between the pamphlet Flood and his archival namesake is substantial.⁵³ Both are carriers; both operate around Cripplegate; both have confrontations with law officers, harass tapsters and tailors, and prosecute poor non-free workers; both serve as keeper of Moorfields. The account which Trundle published was clearly composed by someone who knew a good deal about the informer's career but did not aim to write a meticulously documented biography, preferring instead to tell of his 'pranks'.

A Pinder and his pranks

Its gory titlepage notwithstanding, *The Life and Death*, like many Elizabethan and early Stuart accounts of crime, has humorous elements.⁵⁴ The pamphlet is set out in short chapters with titles such as 'How Flood churlishly handled two Informers, and of his hatred against all Firken-men' (Sigs. Bv-2). Contemporary readers would have associated this format with jest-books. Works like *Merie tales newly imprinted [and] made by Master Skelton Poet Laureat, Pasquils iestes, or Tarltons jests* were essentially strings of comic episodes such as 'How Skelton handled the Fryer that would needs lye with him in his Inne', 'How a madde man in Gloucestershire answered a Gentleman' and 'How Tarlton deceived the Watch in Fleetstreet'.⁵⁵ So too were ludic criminal biographies such as *The Madde pranckes of mery Mall of the banckside* and *The life of long Meg of Westminster, containing the mad merry pranks shée played*.⁵⁶ These told of their protagonists' witty wordplay and detailed merry pranks 'in which a man is deceived wittily'.⁵⁷ *The Life and Death* similarly styled some of Flood's escapades 'pranckes' (Sig. C2 r) and regaled readers with his verbal triumphs.

'How Flood out-braved a Citizen with a red nose' recounts how when the informer was 'railing and roring' in Guildhall, 'a very substantial' citizen rebuked him, 'calling him a brazen-fac'd fellow to be so audacious in so reverent a place'. This citizen happened to have 'a red nose', and Flood promptly turned the tables. 'Brazen fac'd fellow', he exclaimed, 'if your copper nose Sir were set on my brazen face it would make a very rich show'. His riposte 'daunted the Citizen' and 'made him silently passe away much abashed' (Sig. Cv). It is unlikely that Flood coined this witticism – the same exchange can

⁵⁰Archer, Barron and Harding, *Hugh Alley's Caveat*, 20–22. An extended examination of the Exchequer memoranda rolls, TNA E159, would be required to establish this, not least because many informers entered only a few cases, Davies, *Enforcement*, 48. We have sampled the records of the Apothecaries, the Brewers, the Carpenters, the Carriers, the Founders, the Ironmongers, the Merchant Taylors, the Salters, the Stationers, the Turners, the Vintners, and the Weavers, and found no mentions of Flood.

⁵¹LMA P69/STE1/B/012/MS04558/1 fo. 1.

⁵²Rep. 33 fo. 121; Baer, 'Stuart London's standard of living', 630 & 633–34.

⁵³No record survives of Flood's final trial and sentencing, nor was his pressing mentioned in contemporary newsletters, McClure, *The Letters of John Chamberlain*; BL MS Harley 839.

⁵⁴See, however, McKenzie, 'Biting the Biter', 235–256; Liapi, *Roguary*.

⁵⁵*Merie tales newly imprinted*, sig. B3 v; Pasquill, *Pasquils iestes*, sig. E2; Tarlton, *Tarltons Jests*, sig. A2.

⁵⁶Stationers' Register Online, <https://stationersregister.online/entry/SRO5772> (16 April 2021); Mish, *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster*, 79–114.

⁵⁷Thomas, 'The place of laughter', 77. On 'pranks' in rogue narratives, see Liapi, *Roguary*, 51–88.

be found in a contemporary jest-book, suggesting that the figure of the informer had been inserted into a stock story.⁵⁸

Another occasion of merriment arose when Flood caught out a City officer. He told him that he had a writ to serve on a freeman for employing a foreigner. The officer, who had often earned fees by working with Flood, gladly went with him to a gentleman's house where a foreign painter was 'new colouring' the walls.⁵⁹ The 'Worshipfull Knight' came out and politely asked them 'what newes?' Whereupon Flood announced, 'here is a Writ . . . for maintaining forraigners', thereby compelling the mortified official to serve it on the man who turned out to be his own master. Not only did the gentleman have to compound with the informer, but Flood made 'himselpe merry at the Officer' (Sig. [B4]).

Several episodes feature comic reversals, some full of rumbustious, laughter-provoking violence, and using an exuberant vocabulary, which, like that of the pamphlets of John Taylor, the water poet and pamphleteer, draws attention to its own hyperbolic ingenuity.⁶⁰ For instance, one gleefully describes 'How he troubled an honest Ale-wife not farre from Cripplegate' and how she was revenged. Flood had brought the alewife and her husband to court for employing a 'forraigne Tailor', costing them forty shillings. When he returned to her house he spotted her 'run downe into the Cellar with a blacke Pot or two, (measures contrary to the Cities custome)'. He followed her, 'thinking to attache them' and gain 'another . . . Prize'. But she, 'having a ready wit, and thinking . . . to be reveng'd, caught up a Pewter quart Pot, and lustily laid it upon floods pate, and most grievously broke . . . his head and face', crying out 'Oh help, murther, murther'. When people came running, she cried out 'with fained tears' that he had tried to rape her. Flood was hauled before a Justice and committed to prison till he had paid her 'a good summe of money in composition for the supposed wrong he had done her' (Sigs. [A4 v]-B).

Another tells how Flood had offered a widow who kept a cook-shop his protection from other informers and was enjoying a free breakfast at her expense when two of them turned up. '[B]eing a little Pot-shaken', Flood 'tooke up a broome-staffe and fell a bumbasting them'. They all ended up tussling in the gutter, whereupon Flood 'like a cunning knave all . . . bedurtied his . . . face' and cried out that 'they would murder him'. His adversaries were thus carried off to the Counter, while he 'escaped imprisonment'. 'But now marke the jest', the pamphlet notes: 'as they were going to Prison', 'a lusty lubberly Firkenman' [someone who buys small beer from a brewer to serve his customers] who was a friend of one of the imprisoned informers came along. He, 'hearing of these wrongs', fell upon Flood and 'most bravely bebangs him' before managing to slip away (Sigs. B1 v-2). A third describes how Flood was worsted by a Vintner's 'ready wit' and 'cunning . . . trick'. The informer had grown 'malicious against' this 'Taverne-keeper' and brought the churchwardens to his premises one Sabbath during service time where they found 'certaine good fellows' having 'their mornings draught'. As Flood 'sought to have him presented', the tavern-keeper prayed them to be good to him, and 'in kindnesse [to] take a cup of wine'. They all accepted, breakfasting on roast beef which the vintner

⁵⁸A new booke of mistakes, 219.

⁵⁹On foreigners, freemen and aliens doing such work, Town, 'A Biographical Dictionary of London Painters'; Gapper, *British Renaissance Plasterwork*. In 1586 Plasterers apprentices agitated against French and Dutch strangers, Yungblut, *Strangers Settled Here Amongst Us*, 41.

⁶⁰*The Life and Death* contains a number of unusual words such as 'lubberly', 'pot-shaken' and 'bumbasting', which are all to be found in Taylor's oeuvre.

brought in. Having eaten, Flood remained implacable, declaring, 'I must have money from you, and it is not your bribing breakfast shall satisfie my turne'. But the tavern-keeper regained the upper hand. Having 'eaten and drunke . . . in service time', they were, he replied, all 'as deepe in the fault' as him and his customers. Flood had therefore to let him go and the churchwardens 'much favoured' the tavern thereafter.

These stories served up forms of rough justice or requital. The informer is said to have been 'finely . . . requited' by the vintner; the narrator relishes 'how finely' the alewife 'requited him' (Sigs. [A4 v]-B). They epitomize the topos of the biter bit, which structures numerous incidents in jest collections and rogue pamphlets. The trickster attempts to outwit his victim, but the intended victim manages unexpectedly to turn the tables, making the trickster the butt of the joke. Paradoxically such tales often end up endorsing notions of reciprocity and mutual regard because the criminal, once worsted, takes his discomfiture in good part. For example, one account of the life and pranks of Gamaliel Ratsey, a highwayman hanged in 1605, describes '[a] pretie conceit past upon Ratsey by a fellow that he rob'd of ten pound'. The latter managed through cunning and daring to steal Ratsey's horse and the hundred marks it was carrying. The highwayman, rather than being angry, is full of admiration, declaring, 'if I could see the man . . . I would give him a gallon of wine; there is all the ill I owe him, for in my life I never had a prancke passt upon me, nor did I ever receive such foile at mine owne weapon before'.⁶¹

Flood is shown to have had none of Ratsey's generosity of spirit. He is represented as consistently rejecting opportunities to participate in the give and take of London life. *The Life and Death* gives a humorously bathetic inflection to its description of Flood's conduct when 'chosen . . . to oversee the walkes in Moore-fields', but it also underlines how his selfish and 'churlish' behaviour was at odds with reciprocity and justice. It observes that this 'office' required the informer 'like the Pinder of *Wakefield* to prevent the intercourse of people over the grasse and not to suffer them to make other paths besides the walkes' (Sigs. C1 v-2). The comparison stripped Flood's work of gravitas (Pinders rounded up errant swine), and of seriousness – the Pinder was a folkloric figure who fought Robin Hood.⁶² In deflating, mock-chivalric language the pamphlet tells us that he intercepted 'all inrodes over the Field' 'like a valiant champion'. Armed with 'a sturdy browne bill', (a weapon of humble civic office and undistinguished plebeian masculinity), he apparently engaged in indiscriminate 'roaring combats', 'favouring neyther old nor young, rich nor poore, Gentleman or other'. '[M]uch mischiefe was done by his harsh behaviour': he 'brake many a mans pate', 'set tenterhookes under the Railes, wherby sundry people (stooping under the Railes) tore their cloakes, bands and apparel, and so spoiled their cloathes', and 'caused sundry of the ruder & unrulier sort of people to sit in the stockes, for their stubbornesse in crossing the Walkes'. These 'pranckes' were anything but merry,⁶³ and the pamphleteer explained that 'modesty forbids me to relate' the remainder, for Flood 'shewed himself rather a beast then a man, so farre he forgat Christianity and honestlie [sic], that he lost all humanitie'.

⁶¹ Anonymous, *Ratseis Ghost*, sigs. B3v-4v. On Ratsey, see Charlton, *Introduction to Ratseis Ghost*; Liapi, *Roguary*, 85–6. Compare Greene, *The Blacke Bookes Messenger*, sigs. D2v-3.

⁶² *A pleasant conceyted comedie of George a Greene*; Davenport, 'The representation of Robin Hood'.

⁶³ The oldest meaning of 'Prank' is simply a 'wicked deed', OED online, s. v. 'Prank' n.2.1; Knights and Morton, 'Introduction', 9.

(Sig. C2 r) This inhuman spirit is shown to have run through Flood's informing, which often had deeply unfunny consequences.

Watching the informers?

Early modern governance depended upon private individuals volunteering information of wrongdoing or initiating prosecutions. In order to incentivize the enforcement of social, religious, and particularly economic regulations, statutes and local laws stipulated that part of the fine be paid to whomever brought an offence to court.⁶⁴ Some people made a living from this; informers were consequently ambiguous figures. Between 1538 and 1543, for instance, one London haberdasher entered informations about offences in coastal counties from Norfolk to Somerset. Certain Elizabethan informers were wealthy enough to be assessed for the subsidy.⁶⁵ Informers enforcing laws against Dissenters in the 1670s and 1680s and working for the Societies for the Reformation of Manners in the 1690s became so notorious that they were compared with Henry VII's grasping ministers and financial agents, Empson and Dudley, and even with Judas Iscariot.⁶⁶ Many commentators agreed with Edward Coke, who reckoned that they 'vex and pauperise the subject and the community of the poorer sort, for malice or private ends and never for love of justice'.⁶⁷ Some developed dubious lines of business recovering stolen goods, liaising between victims and thieves, and collaborating with the latter.⁶⁸ Many compounded with the people whom they threatened to take to court, effectively running protection rackets. In 1613, for instance, one common informer of St Giles-in-the-Fields was prosecuted for making private compositions with offenders against three different statutes; two years later another was alleged 'to be a common bribe-taker' 'under colour of informing against victuallers'.⁶⁹ An informer, concluded John Stephens, 'is a protected Cheater . . . licensed by authority', who 'meetes none so intricately vitious, but he can match the patterne'.⁷⁰

The Life and Death shows Flood extorting money with intricate falsehoods and verbal aggression. He went after an 'honest man' of Blackwall Hall with whom he had a disagreement, claiming that the 'little shop' which the latter kept 'to sell flaxe in' was not 'sufficiently plastered' and so contravened the City's 'Statute for building'. The informer's 'harsh roring language, and foule words' were enough to browbeat his victim into giving him 'satisfaction' 'for quietnesse sake' (Sigs. B3 v-[4]). Flood is depicted as preying particularly on the poor (this adjective is used eleven times in the descriptions of his victims). Early in his career, we are told, he haunted 'Alehouses, Innes, Hosteries,

⁶⁴Beresford, 'The Common Informer'; Gay Davies, *The Enforcement of English Apprenticeship*, esp. ch. 2. Some informers were effectively agents of authority, retained on parochial payrolls and moving into official posts, Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, 53 & 310; Sharpe, *Crime in Seventeenth-Century England*, 47.

⁶⁵Elton, 'Informing for Profit'; idem, *Star Chamber Stories*, 78–113; Archer, Barron and Harding, *Hugh Alley's Caveat*.

⁶⁶Goldie, 'The Hilton Gang'; Dabhoiwala, 'Sex and Societies for Moral Reform', esp. 303–08; *The Informers Answer to the late Character* (London, 1675), 5; Hinds, *The Horrid Popish Plot*, 33.

⁶⁷Beresford, 'Common Informer', 221; Baker, *English Law*, 75. Coke was quoted in *The English Guzman*, 1.

⁶⁸Johnston & Tittler, 'To Catch a Thief in Jacobean London'; Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*, 167; Tim Wales, 'Thief-takers and their Clients', 70–71 & 75–6.

⁶⁹Le Hardy ed., *Middlesex Sessions Records* i, 246–7; ii 308. For other such examples, Cockburn ed., *Calendar of Assize Records: Surrey Indictments James I* (London, 1982), # 953; idem. ed., *Calendar of Assize Records: Essex Indictments James I* (London, 1982), # 527; C. J. Kesselring ed., *Star Chamber Reports: BL HARLEY MS 2143 List and Index Soc. Special Series* 57 (2018), #403.

⁷⁰Stephens, *Satirical essayes, characters, and others*, 285. See also, Taylor, *The Praise of Hemp-seed*, sig. Ggg2.

Cellars and such like'. Whenever he saw a non-freeman employed there, he warned them that informations were about to be laid against them for working without having served an apprenticeship. Protesting that his conscience prompted him to defend 'honest meaning men', he offered to protect them. He then proceeded to bleed each 'poor country fellow' until they could afford it no longer, whereupon he hounded them until, after spending even more money, they were 'forced to forsake his service, and to leave the City'. Their masters were 'likewise brought to composition to be rid of this crafty Informer' (Sig. A3 v-[4]). In another protection racket Flood persuaded foreigners that they would be safe if they let him bring an action against them for working in the City and then paid him a 'monethly stipend' to ensure he let it lie (Sigs. [A4 r-v]). (No other informer could initiate proceedings against them while a suit was pending.) Moreover, he is shown to be happy to drive people into beggary. When hounding firkenmen, 'hee with his cunning-fram'd Actions affrighted from London' some 'of the poorer sort, . . . where they lived as before in much Poverty' (Sig. B2 r).

The pamphlet also emphasizes how he exploited technicalities. Thus, for example, Flood informed against the previously mentioned 'honest Ale-wife not farre from Cripplegate' for employing 'a foreign tailor'. Her offence, the pamphlet stresses, was petty. She 'kept in her house good lodging and orderly diet for entertainment of strangers and wayfaring men'. The tailor was one of those who 'resorted to her house', but he 'ran more on the score for lodging and dyet, then he was able to pay'. He asked to work off this debt and so she gave him 'an old petticoat' to mend, and paid him 'but sixe-pence'. Flood took her to court for this trifling exchange within her network of credit⁷¹; even though she was 'well-known and reputed of among her neighbors', she was fined forty shillings (Sig. [A4 v]). '*How he troubled a poore Sheere-grinder, for relieving his owne father*' tells of even more outrageous pettifogging and 'cruelty'. Flood came to a 'Sheere-grinders shop', where he saw 'a very poore Country old man' turning the grindstone. This was the shear-grinder's father, who 'took that paines' out of 'love to his sonne' and to save him from having to hire someone to do the work. This scene of paternal devotion provoked no sympathy in Flood's 'pittlesse courses': 'with a harsh and commanding language' he denounced him for having 'set a Forreiner on work'. The artisan was 'amazed' by these 'threatning words', and had to pay Flood after he submitted his information; 'the old man was discharged from any further labour therein, but lay upon his poor son to be kept in charity' (Sigs. B2 r-v). In both cases, the informer's actions enforcing the letter of the law are characterised as cruel.

His treatment of 'a poor Flaxe-maid' had even more desperate consequences. She had served a twelve-year apprenticeship, and then 'wearyed with that servitude, tooke shop for herselfe'. However, she consequently remained 'not free but a forreiner'. So Flood threatened her with prosecution and prevailed on her to pay him a regular fee in order 'to buy . . . quietnesse'.⁷² Wearying of this, she followed the advice of a friend 'to get her freedome, which she might easily doe, having served twelve yeares Prentise'. Accordingly,

⁷¹On the ubiquity and significance of credit networks, Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*.

⁷²One 'Forren Flax woman' was fined for keeping open shop in the City in 1611, Birt, 'Women, Guilds and the Tailoring Trades', 150. By contrast, Elizabeth Banion, who had been 'bound to learn the art of dressing flax' was made free of the Merchant Taylors in 1610, Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds*, 36. More generally and with a focus on the later seventeenth century, see Gowing, 'Girls as Apprentices'.

she 'was made free of a worshipfull Company, but not of the City, which was thought sufficient for a womans security to follow Flaxe-dressing'.⁷³ Baulked of his usual bribes, Flood devised 'another trick of Information against her'. When he 'espied a Country Chapman buying a . . . parcell of Flaxe of her', he seized it and the chapman's deposit 'as goods forreine bought and . . . sold'. Tragedy ensued:

the maid was still haunted with the Informations of this *Flood*, which drave her . . . to such a melancholy that she tooke no comfort in her businesse, and as it was knowne afterward, she hanged herself in her owne girdle. The cause I will not say was Flood's, but let such as understood the manner of her life and carriage, in discretion, judge and censure thereof rightly. (Sigs. B2 v-3)

The publication of *The Life and Death* (whose title leads the reader to understand this as a biography of an informer) coincided with a crescendo of complaint about their actions. In 1615 artisan cloth-makers of London told the Privy Council that they were 'greivously vexed by informers' – 160 of them had been arrested 'to their greate disturbance in their trade, losse of tyme, greate expence in lawe, and the utter undoeinge of themselves and their poore families'.⁷⁴ Five years later Wiltshire JPs complained of the 'intollerable abuses' of the 'agents of . . . notable informers of London', who were extorting money from chapmen and 'forginge . . . Ticketts and Informacons'.⁷⁵ A bill against the 'troublesome persons commonly called relators, informers and promoters', gained wide support in the 1621 Parliament; in a subsequent proclamation James announced steps to remedy the 'great damage' they caused.⁷⁶ Within months of Flood's execution, Parliament passed an act barring informers from presenting offences to the Westminster equity courts in order to relieve the poor commons who had thereby been so 'greivously charged troubled vexed molested and disturbed'.⁷⁷

However, *The Life and Death* locates Flood in the streets, taverns and open spaces of the City, not at the Exchequer. Three episodes place him in the Guildhall; he is shown collaborating with a City officer. The offences mentioned in the pamphlet were overwhelmingly infractions of civic regulations.⁷⁸ One presentation was under London's building rules; one episode involved potentially illegal measures; all the remaining cases concerned the employment of foreigners or their independent economic activity. The pamphlet thus offers a fresh perspective on metropolitan attitudes to non-citizens.

Late medieval and early modern London was a city of immigrants. Many came to undertake an apprenticeship, and thereafter became citizens, but in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries much larger numbers of new arrivals (many from mainland Europe, more from across the British Isles) lived and worked in the capital without taking

⁷³For the pamphlet to highlight this signalled her extreme economic marginality as well as the lesser relevance of the political rights conferred by citizenship – Rappaport found that in the 1550s only 4% of those becoming free of a livery company did not take out full citizenship, *Worlds within Worlds*, 28.

⁷⁴Faller, *Turned to Account*, 289; *Acts of the Privy Council of England [APC] 1615–1616*, 386 & 512.

⁷⁵APC 1619–21, 42, 46, 63, 85, 99, 128–9, 211; TNA SP14/110 fo. 191; SP 14/112 fo. 19. (The Privy Council also initiated action against informers in at least four other counties.)

⁷⁶Notestein, Relf & Simpson, *Commons Debates 1621*, ii 31 & 43; Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics*, 110 & 121; Larkin & Hughes, *Stuart Royal Proclamations Vol I*, 512.

⁷⁷21 J I c. 4, *Statutes of the Realm*, iv 1214. Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics*, 183, 191–92. Beresford, 'Common Informer' documents the effectiveness of this legislation.

⁷⁸The jurisdiction and operation of the Mayor's court in regulatory matters (which did not change significantly) is most clearly outlined in the *Second Report of the Commissioners*, 124; see also 346. For its other activities, see Tucker, *Law Courts and Lawyers in the City of London*, 99–104 & 146–52; Scott, Wallis, Webb, *Apprenticeship Disputes in the Lord Mayor's Court*, 132–33; Wallis, 'Labor, Law, and Training'.

the freedom of the City.⁷⁹ This influx swelled the population of the metropolis from some 50,000 in c.1550 to perhaps 375,000 a century later. Scholars have documented how London's expansion placed enormous strain on its physical and social fabric and provoked numerous interventions designed to rein in this growth, to regulate its inhabitants and to reduce disorder.⁸⁰ The regulatory powers of the livery companies were substantially weakened by rapid suburban growth, and numerous protests and petitions denounced the newcomers for endangering the rights, privileges and livelihoods of London's citizens, and called for their exclusion from trade and employment and for stricter enforcement of regulations against goods 'foreign bought and sold'. In the 1580s, for example, the wardmote inquest of Tower told the Mayor of 'great Complaynt' of the 'the pore Freemen who have served for the freedom of this Citty & . . . borne skott & lott' who could get no work 'by reason of the . . . infinite number of Forreyners & strangers who have shrowded themselves into this . . . Citty'. (Foreigners were English-born non-citizens, strangers were those born abroad).⁸¹ The following decade the Weavers' Company deplored how 'strangers and foreigners' had driven 'freemen, dwelling within this city' from the trade⁸²; twenty years later the freemen cobblers urged the Mayor and aldermen to restrict the damaging incursion of 'Englishe fforreiners Aliens or strangers' into their trade.⁸³

Although the city's governors averted most physically violent expressions of xenophobia,⁸⁴ civic institutions strove to defend citizens' rights, for these lay at the heart of urban corporate life.⁸⁵ Officers from the Lord Mayor's household seized ox hides and walnut planks, shovels and Purbeck paving stones and many other kinds of goods when foreign bought and sold; working alongside the livery companies, they levied fines on foreigners working in the city and on citizens employing people who had not taken out their freedom; City officials periodically shut up the shops of the unfree.⁸⁶ In April 1606 a new Act of Common Council claimed that the non-free led to 'the great detriment and hurt of the freemen' and declared that no 'Strangers borne, and Forrainers . . . [should] use any trades, or keepe any maner of shops in any sort within this Citty, Liberties and Freedom thereof'.⁸⁷ This Act offered informers one third of the forfeited goods after successful prosecution and more generally informers were at the forefront of implementing these laws. Some, like Hugh Alley, paid by the Brewers

⁷⁹Ormrod, Lambert and Mackman, *Immigrant England 1300–1550*; Wrigley, 'A Simple Model of London's Importance'; Wareing, 'Changes in the Geographical Distribution', 241–249.

⁸⁰See, for example, Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*; Jenner & Griffiths, 'Introduction', in Griffiths and Jenner ed., *Londinopolis*; Griffiths, *Lost Londons*.

⁸¹LMA COL/AC/008/1 'Articles of the Charter', fo. 47. Scot and lot was the term for local rates. For subsequent complaints from wardmotes, Rep. 29 fo. 157.

⁸²Luu, 'Taking the Bread Out of Our Mouths', 15. Cf. Ward, 'Fictitious shoemakers, agitated weavers', 80–87.

⁸³Rep. 32 fo. 336.

⁸⁴Archer, 'Responses to Alien Immigrants in London'; Waddell, 'The Evil May Day Riot'; Ward, '[I]mployment for all hands that will worke', 76–87.

⁸⁵Barry, 'Bourgeois Collectivism?'; Withington, *The politics of commonwealth*; Das et al., *Keywords of Identity*, s. v. 'Alien/Stranger', 'Citizen', 'Denizen'. As a result, the Acts of Common Council setting out the City freedom were often copied into livery company ordinance books and customs, eg., GL MS 2890 p. 21ff; MS 14337.

⁸⁶LMA COL/CHD/CM/10/001, Book of Fines fos. 213 v, 250 v and *passim*; GL MS 4326/6 fos. 434 v, 436–37 v, 481 & 530 v, 558 & 585; MS 7351/1 accounts for 1612–13 and 1622–23; MS 3297/1 fos. 100, 112 & unfoliated sections covering 1619–20 & 1621–22; Sleigh-Johnson, 'The Merchant Taylors Company of London', 333–44; LMA Letter Book CC fos. 77 v & 142; Rep. 36 fo. 59. See also Archer, Barron and Harding, *Hugh Alley's Caveat*, 23–24; Charlie Taverner, 'Moral Marketplaces'.

⁸⁷LMA Letter Book CC fos. 144 v–45 v; Journal of the Common Council 27 fos. 34 v–35; *By the Mayor. An Act of Common Council*. See also the proposed 1605 parliamentary legislation enhancing the regulatory powers of livery companies, GL MS 8334; Ward, *Metropolitan Communities*.

and the Fishmongers late in Elizabeth's reign, and John Braye, who worked for the Barbers under James I, were hired by livery companies.⁸⁸ Others worked on their own initiative. Figures like Flood and Alley proposed to enforce the policy by taking the lead in prosecutions. When Flood claimed in his petition to the aldermen that foreigners were selling beer 'to the . . . undoing of manie freemen', he echoed official City language.⁸⁹

Particular animus was directed at foreign-born aliens or strangers who were for the most part Protestant immigrants who had come from France or the Low Countries seeking to escape persecution. Alien craftsmen were obliged to sell wholesale to English retailers, and they were barred from the freedom.⁹⁰ Their position was precarious. In 1599, for instance, sixteen Dutch candlemakers complained that the London informer John Symes had 'most maliciously . . . vexed and molested [them] from one Courte to another'. Two years later another six informers were said to be harraying various members of the metropolitan French and Dutch churches so fiercely that they dared not 'goe abroade'.⁹¹ However, such hostility was tempered by Privy Councillors who were sympathetic to the pleas of persecuted Protestants, and valued the skills they brought with them. In addition, the alien Churches lobbied effectively against such initiatives with the assistance of the Dutch ambassador, Noel du Caron, who had friendly relations with James I.⁹² In repeated petitions du Caron solicited royal protection against informers. He claimed that 'diverse poore handycraftes men, strangers, members of the Dutch Congregation of verie honest and quiet behaviour, are daelie molested, and driven to excessive charges, by the "uncharitable vexations" of certen informers'.⁹³

Given the vehemence and regularity with which foreigners and strangers were denounced, it is striking that *The Life and Death* does not endorse their harassment. The one episode involving an alien emphasizes Flood's ungrateful rejection of social exchange, not the otherness of the immigrant.⁹⁴ Apparently, when Flood was in the Compter for debt, he was helped by a Dutch chandler who 'in pity oftentimes sent him much reliefe' (either food or money) 'to comfort him'. He was not motivated by simple kindness: the chandler had 'an interest after his imprisonment to draw him to his friendship'. He hoped that Flood would defend him from other informers 'for commonly these Dutch Chandlers are much troubled with those kind of people'. He thus conceived of his help as an exchange: present relief for future favour. Flood, however, did not reciprocate. Even though he accepted the chandler's gifts, his benefactor 'was the first man he brought in action' once released (Sig. B[4 v]). Furthermore, the tales of how Flood (mis)treated foreigners or prosecuted Londoners for setting them on work highlighted how the informer's behaviour violated expected norms of neighbourly give and

⁸⁸*English Historical Documents*. Vol. V(A): 1558–1603, ed. Ian W. Archer and F. Douglas Price (London: Routledge, 2011), Document 112; GL MS 5570/1 p. 289; MS 5257/4, pp. 9, 58 & 70. See also GL MS 5445/13 October 6 1612; MS 2150/1 January 26 1640/1; Gadd, "Being like a field", 174n. The relation between companies and informers was not always so harmonious, eg., GL 2890 p. 2.

⁸⁹Rep. 35 fo. 19 v.

⁹⁰Luu, *Immigrants and the Industries of London*, 70–71; Selwood, *Diversity and Difference*, esp. ch. 3.

⁹¹Hessels ed., *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum*, 1034–35 & 1056–57. See also *ibid.*, 1195–97, 1267, 1323. For similar informer-led harassment in Norwich, Chitty, 'Aliens in England', 135–36.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 72; Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, 137–8.

⁹³LMA MISCMSS/363/21, COL/RMD/PA/01/016, Transcript of Remembrancia 1614–15, fo. 74; GL MS 34010/4 pp. 310, 330, 347, 361–2.

⁹⁴Several of the people named in archival sources as being prosecuted by Flood had Dutch-sounding names, Rep. 31(1) fos. 19 & 52.

take, and how he pursued people who had a stake in the community.⁹⁵ As we have seen, the ale-wife was ‘well-known and reputed of among her neighbors’ (Sig. A[4 v]), the flax-maid had served a long apprenticeship and the sheer-grinder was employing his father. Many of Flood’s actions were technically legal, but they were not charitable – they ignored social ties and familial bonds. The pamphlet’s stress on the importance of reciprocity pervades even its account of the informer’s final days.

Flood in Newgate

Flood’s life and career ended after he committed murder. ‘[T]he last period’ of the informer’s ‘shame and devilish manners’, we read, was when ‘(furthered on by Satan) he most wickedly stabbed a Constable, and . . . a Vintner’ (Sig. [C4]). Frustratingly, the pamphlet does not elaborate on this final violent altercation. One can only speculate about whether it arose from Flood’s profession. The Vintners had been troubled by the ‘violent courses of Informers against retaylers of Wynes’ and by the ‘injurious and maliciously [sic] courses’ of those ‘pretending a . . . more stricte observacon of the Sabaoth’. As we have seen, Flood was outwitted by a vintner whom he had tried to present for serving in time of divine service.⁹⁶ Chipperfield himself had a history of violence. A few years before he had been required to compensate an apprentice whose eye he had put out when beating him.⁹⁷ One wonders if the stabbing occurred when Flood’s ‘violent courses’ encountered pugnacious resistance.⁹⁸

In Webster’s *A Cure for a Cuckold*, the character Compass hopes that ‘the Ballad of *Flood* that was prest’ will induce metropolitan informers to mend their ways.⁹⁹ We might expect *The Life and Death* to convey a similar moral message, and some passages certainly do. Its narrative progresses conventionally enough from smaller sins to homicide; Flood’s culminating crime is associated with the workings of the devil. However, although sections follow the conventions of murder pamphlets, its overall shape and focus are very different. Murder pamphlets tended to ‘concentrate on particularly bizarre, bloody and grotesque killings’, and to describe them in lip-smacking detail.¹⁰⁰ Buyers clearly had a taste for accounts of murderers like Margaret Vincent, who ‘assisted by the Devill, . . . tooke the youngest of the two [children] . . . like a fierce and bloody Medea, . . . and with a Garter taken from her legge, making thereof a noose and putting the same around her Childs sweet necke, . . . in a wrathfull manner drew the same so close together, that in a moment parted the soule and body’.¹⁰¹ Flood’s killing of Chipperford, by contrast, is described matter-of-factly – the vintner lay ‘long . . . languishing’ before he ‘died as a man murdered by wilfull violence, for which this Flood was attached, imprisoned, arraigned, and put to tryall’ (Sig. [C4 r]).

⁹⁵For an incisive, richly documented discussion of the latter group, see Benson, ‘Boundaries of belonging’.

⁹⁶GL MS 15333/3 Extraordinary payments 1619–20; MS 15201/2 pp. 226–27, 233, 240, quotation at 233. See also, Crawford, *History of the Vintners Company*, 106–08. In the early 1620s the Brewers too solicited help ‘to free the compannie of inform[er]s’, GL MS 5445/14, 8 October 1622.

⁹⁷GL MS 15201/2 pp. 273–74.

⁹⁸Compare the expenses which the Cordwainers incurred about the ‘killing of a man when the Company went to search’, GL MS 7351/1, 1621–22.

⁹⁹*A Cure for a Cuckold* in *Works of Webster II*, 350–52 & 423–24.

¹⁰⁰Lake, ‘Deeds against nature’, 259.

¹⁰¹Anonymous, *A pittillesse mother*, sigs. A3 v–A4 r.

In many pamphlets, homicide sparks contrition, and one passage in *The Life and Death* signals this possibility, suggesting that, once in prison, Flood might have begun to grasp the enormity of what he had done. The murder ‘something terrified him, and a little troubled his Conscience’. His sleep was tormented:

blood lies heavy on a murderers soule, and the revenge thereof hourelly thunders in his eares; so by this Flood was it here verified; for upon a night in Newgate as hee lay in his bed, in his dreame a fearfull vision appeared unto him, which was (as hee thought) the ghastly shape of the man hee had murdered, with a bleeding wound in his brest gaping wide open, threatening as it were a speedy revengement, at which Flood in his sleepe cryed out most fearefully, the Divell, the Divell pursues me, helpe helpe. (Sig. C2 v)

A woodcut (Figure 2) shows both the moment when the informer stabbed the vintner and the victim’s terrifying *post-mortem* apparition – the man on the right with blood gushing from his chest.¹⁰² But this vision does *not* introduce a tale of repentance following salutary godly counsel from a chaplain in Newgate.¹⁰³ Indeed ‘little remorse of conscience possessed him, and all his former offences came little to his remembrance’ (Sig. C2 v). The pamphlet thus ends anticlimactically, giving a bald account of the informer’s demise: he was ‘put to tryall, but by no perswasions would he commit himself to the Law, but most obstinately stood to the severe iustice of the Bench, who . . . censured him to the Presse’ (Sig. [C4]).

By refusing to enter a plea, Flood became liable to *peine forte et dure*, the agonizing judicial ordeal of being crushed under heavy weights until dead. It was, *The Life and Death* acknowledged, ‘a most fearfull death’ (Sig. [C4]). Reporting how the matricide Henry Jones was pressed to death in 1672, one pamphleteer described it as a sentence filled with ‘much . . . terror’.¹⁰⁴ Unsurprisingly it was a rare occurrence. The surviving Elizabethan and Jacobean records of the Home Circuit Assizes contain only twenty-three individuals given this sentence.¹⁰⁵ In London, it was a little more frequent. Under James I at least thirty-five people were so condemned, as were another dozen during the 1650s.¹⁰⁶ The sentence often coerced defendants into entering a plea.¹⁰⁷ However, as Andrea McKenzie has shown, a small number endured unto death. Some, like Henry Jones, ‘stood mute’ in order to save their estates for their heirs; others were protecting accomplices; some used their recalcitrance to seize back a modicum of initiative in the process of their judicial erasure.¹⁰⁸

Pressing to death was sometimes mentioned in ballads describing murder and retribution.¹⁰⁹ Some occurrences of *peine forte et dure* were set out in longer prose narratives. Such texts were either (as with the York martyr Margaret Clitherow) hagiographic in nature or were godly Protestant narratives of repentance and

¹⁰²In the BL copy this woodcut faces the titlepage; in the Folger Shakespeare Library copy it is on its verso.

¹⁰³On these, Lake, ‘Popular Form, Puritan Content’; Dobb, ‘Henry Goodcole, Visitor of Newgate’.

¹⁰⁴*The Bloody Murtherer* (London, 1672), 41–43.

¹⁰⁵Cockburn, *Introduction*, 72.

¹⁰⁶Jeaffreson, *Middlesex County Records*, II xviii–xx, 247–314, III xxii; *A True and Perfect List of The Names of those Prisoners in Newgate*, 3.

¹⁰⁷Cockburn, *Introduction*, 72n, 122.

¹⁰⁸McKenzie, ‘This Death Some Strong and Stout Hearted Man Doth Choose’; *The Bloody Murtherer*, 41; *A new ballade, shewing the cruell robberies and lewde lyfe of Phillip Collins*, 128–33.

¹⁰⁹Eg. *A Cruell murder committed lately upon the body of Abraham Gearsy; L. P., A Warning for All Wicked Livers By the example of Richard Whitfield, and M. Gibs who were two notorious offenders* details clerical efforts to win the condemned to repentance, not the manner and symbolism of their execution.



Figure 2. *The life and death of Griffin Flood informer.* (1623), Folger Shakespeare Library 155966, reproduced with thanks under a CC BY-SA license.

redemption.¹¹⁰ Early in James I's reign Jeffrey Bownd of Cheshire refused to plead and was therefore pressed. The reader learns that he confessed before two or three

¹¹⁰Mr John Mush's *Life of Margaret Clitherow*; Dillon, "Spectaculum facti sumus Deo": The scaffold as image; Lake & Questier, 'Margaret Clitherow'; Lake & Questier, 'The Reckoning: Arrest, Trial and Execution'.

preachers and ‘made a very penitent end’; the pamphleteer describing Henry Jones’s terrible and protracted demise reprinted many pages of his prayers and expressed the hope that he had obtained divine pardon.¹¹¹

The Life and Death’s title page woodcut (the only surviving seventeenth-century depiction of this ordeal) (Figure 1) would have suited a similarly pious publication. Flood lies with his back positioned on the sharp angles of pieces of timber; he is being crushed by a box filled with weights; a millstone and other heavy objects are placed nearby to be piled upon him. The informer’s pose recalls the crucifixion; the stone or pillow beneath his head is halo-like. Such Christological parallels were explicit in other accounts of *peine forte*. We read that when the weights were laid on George Strangeways in 1658, he cried out, ‘Thus were the sacred Limbs of my every blessed Saviour, stretch [sic] forth on the Cross’.¹¹² *The Life and Death*, by contrast, as we have seen, reports Flood’s end prosaically, stating merely that the informer ‘obstinately’ refused to enter a plea.

By emphasizing his ‘obstinacy’, it links the informer’s end to his more general refusal to enter into peaceable social exchanges. Its account of his last days in Newgate gives further examples of his utter recalcitrance. Flood is said to have ‘continued . . . in great discontent without any patience’, and to have rejected opportunities to reconcile with those he had dealt with. He asked a tapster to bring him some money he owed him. The latter ‘in pitty, by reason of his imprisonment brought him a part thereof, thinking therewith in that his extremity to content him’, but Flood ‘as his churlish custome ever was’ would not accept ‘lesse then his whole debt’ (Sig. C3 v). His refusal to meet the other man half way rebounded on him, for the tapster promptly ‘goes his ways’ and bid Flood ‘recover it by action’. Although Flood ‘threatned to doe’ so, he soon realised that he was not only in no position to follow through upon his threat but also ‘much impoverished’. Accordingly, he sent for ‘some part of his money before promised’. The tapster refused to give him another chance, declaring that he was now ‘otherwise minded’ and repeating the proverb, ‘He that will not while he may,/When he would he shall have nay’¹¹³ (Sig. C3 v).

Furthermore, many came to ‘vexe and torment’ the informer during his incarceration. ‘[A]mongst the rest in a merry vaine came certaine Tapsters to him in Prison, belike some which hee had wronged by his troublesome informations’. Inverting alehouse rituals of good fellowship, ‘every one called for his Can of beere, saying to him in mockage, heere Mr. Flood, I drink to you’ . . . ‘each of them tossing off his beere, giving him onely the Empty Cans’.¹¹⁴ Lacking true Christian ‘patience’, Flood flew into an impotent general rage, to have called them ‘Slaves and Rogues’, and ‘vow’d a revenge (if ever at liberty) against all other Tapsters’ (Sig. C3 r-v). An essential part of a ‘good death’ was reconciliation with the world and especially with those whom one had wronged. Flood’s end upends this convention and underlines that this was a story of his ‘bad condition, foule speeches, and ill demeanor’ (Sig. A3 r).

¹¹¹Dugdale, *A True Discourse of the Practises of Elizabeth Caldwell*, sig. B3; *The Bloody Murtherer*, 2 & 20ff. See also *Of the Endes and Deaths*. Cf. *A Cruell murther committed lately upon the body of Abraham Gearsey; A Warning for All Wicked Livers*.

¹¹²*The Unhappy Marksman* (London, 1659), 29.

¹¹³This ancient saying is more commonly rendered ‘Who that will not when he may, when he will he shall have nay’, Speake ed., *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*.

¹¹⁴On such rituals, Hailwood, ‘The Community in the Alehouse’. This may be an echo of the vinegar and gall offered to Christ on the Cross.

Conclusion

Flood's notoriety quickly faded.¹¹⁵ The woodblocks cut for *The Life and Death* were, it seems, never reused.¹¹⁶ His name was never invoked in the condemnations of other informers published under Charles II and William III, and he slipped into historical oblivion until Lucas announced his discovery. However, wider conclusions can be drawn from this closer examination of the pamphlet. Recent work on cheap print in early modern England has emphasized how it followed stock narratives. This style of exegesis, effectively reading for the plot, predisposes scholars to interpret such texts as revealing and reinforcing coherent cultural patterns. Yet, as we have seen, *The Life and Death* follows no such smooth linear development – the attempt to turn Flood's demise into a satisfyingly climactic 'good death' peters out. Rather its retelling of his life is heterogeneous, lurching from the comedic to the calamitous. In this, *The Life and Death* is not an isolated and idiosyncratic outlier. Many pamphlets describing crime, roguery and witchcraft have an equally episodic exposition and a similarly uneven tone with unexpected comic notes.¹¹⁷ Scholars have dismissed these texts as 'trivial' or as purely fictional, preferring to concentrate on works which strike them as more serious, documentary, or pious.¹¹⁸ But constructing such evidentiary hierarchies by genre or tone is unhelpful. Despite their messiness and resistance to coherence, pamphlets like *The Life and Death* told the lives of figures who had recently walked the streets of the capital.

In so doing, they left suggestive evidence of metropolitan attitudes. The cumulative effect of the stories related about Flood was to validate, even to celebrate, a kind of idealized communal life which the informer repeatedly disturbed. Historians of early modern London have long debated whether the bonds of community dissolved amid the city's population explosion.¹¹⁹ They continue to dispute the speed, extent and timing of changes in neighbourliness within the capital.¹²⁰ Whether or not the capital became more anonymous and anomic in this period, *The Life and Death* valorizes mannerly conduct and harmonious social relations with those with whom one shared a street or parish.¹²¹ For it harps on Flood's refusal to engage in civil life and conversation, cataloguing his 'churlish manners', 'harsh . . . speech', 'threatning words', and 'harsh roring language' (Titlepage, Sigs. A3, B2 v & B3 v). Indeed, 'rogue, raskall, slave, and runnagate, were as common in Floods mouth, as *how doe you sir* to a man of courtsie' (Sig. C1 v). Above all, perhaps, it shows how he *troubled* the city, relating his 'troublesome carriage' and 'troublesome courses of life' (Sigs. C2 v & [C4]). The manner in which he enforced the law and civic orders is presented in the same terms: informing was a 'troublesome course of life'; he proved 'a great troubler' of his fellow apprentices; his was a 'troublesome office'

¹¹⁵There is no evidence that Flood's dependents sought parochial assistance and thereby kept his memory alive, cf. Cunnington ed., *Records of the County of Wilts*, 137–38.

¹¹⁶See <https://bpi1700.org.uk/research/britishbookillustrations/britishbookillustrations.html>. It is, of course, impossible to prove a negative, and much cheap print has not survived.

¹¹⁷Korhonen, 'The Witch in the Alehouse'; *The Lives and Deaths of the Two English Pyrats*, sigs. [B8 v]–C3.

¹¹⁸Gibson, "Necessary" and "trivially" pamphlets'.

¹¹⁹This literature includes Beier, 'Social Problems in Elizabethan London'; Pearl, 'Change and Stability in Seventeenth-Century London'; Boulton, *Neighbourhood and society*; Gowing, 'Gender, Household, and City'; Highley, 'Theatre, Church, and Neighbourhood in the Early Modern Blackfriars'.

¹²⁰Shoemaker, 'The decline of public insult in London 1660–1800'; Wrightson, 'The "Decline of Neighbourliness" Revisited', esp. 34.

¹²¹For a thoughtful discussion of how urban civility centred on conformity and co-existence rather than etiquette, see Barry, 'Civility and Civic Culture in Early Modern England'.

in Moorfields; his career was marked by the pursuit of ‘troublesome Informations’ (Sigs. A3 r-v, C1 v & titlepage).

With this vocabulary *The Life and Death* rhetorically constructs an imagined community of the troubled, encompassing free and non-free. Not only do both groups suffer from Flood’s actions, but the informer’s self-centred course of life (the pamphlet gives no hint that he was married or had children) is contrasted with that of his victims, who are shown sharing friendly neighbourly relationships in which citizens drink with and employ foreigners. Such scenes of social harmony convey the pamphlet’s sense of justice, one in which living in charity with one’s neighbours outweighs the letter of the law. Although it describes Flood’s victims as ‘plaine dealing people’ (Titlepage), many of those whom the informer prosecuted were, in fact, contravening statutes and civic regulations. The ‘honest Ale-wife’ was serving beer in pots which had not been sealed as being of full measure; the ‘Worshipfull Knight’ could have been seen as depriving citizens of employment; the servants and apprentices were at taverns and playhouses when they should have been at church. But *The Life and Death* depicts these infractions as causing much less ‘trouble’ than Flood’s relentless, pitiless and profit-oriented pursuit of minor offenders. In styling the informer’s post at Moorfields a ‘troublesome office’, it was not describing its onerous, time-consuming and physically risky nature but registering how it caused (potentially unnecessary) dissension and disorder, ‘uncharitable vexations’, in the words of the Dutch ambassador Noel du Caron.¹²²

Many scholars have argued that Elizabethan and early Stuart rogue pamphlets and criminal biographies grew out of the dangers and deceptions characteristic of a novel urban modernity where people did not know each other.¹²³ Many others have related them to authorities’ fearful desire to categorize and thus to know, regulate and control the itinerant poor.¹²⁴ However, social historians have also shown that throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries drives for the meticulous implementation of the letter of the law remained in tension with other concepts of order which emphasized discretion, peaceable coexistence and charity.¹²⁵ Highlighting Flood’s avarice and his vexatious prosecutions, *The Life and Death*, and particularly the woodcut on its title page, cashed in on the sensational demise of a murderer, but its character assassination also articulated broader communitarian understandings of justice, rooted in the ideals of social peace and charity. In that context, Flood the informer came across as a worse villain than Flood the murderer.

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¹²²The resonance and ambiguities of the term ‘troublesome’ in early modern England remain underexplored.

¹²³Eg., Dionne, ‘Fashioning Outlaws: The Early Modern Rogue and Urban Culture’, and Hansen, ‘Sin City and the ‘Urban Condom’.

¹²⁴Slack, ‘Vagrants and Vagrancy’; Fumerton, ‘Making Vagrancy (In)Visible’; Roger Chartier, ‘The Literature of Roguery in the Bibliothèque Bleue’.

¹²⁵See eg., Wrightson, ‘Two Concepts of order: justices, constables and jurymen in seventeenth-century England’; Wood, *Faith, Hope and Charity*.

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