Nearly every scholarly reference to Thomas Shadwell’s *A True Widow* in the past century mentions the fact that it was not commercially successful. However, there has yet to be an in-depth study of the reasons for, and circumstances surrounding, the play’s failure. *A True Widow* is unusual, if not unique, in the length and specificity of the attack on the audience during the play-within-the-play scene in act four, and Shadwell’s dramatization allowed theatergoers no way to distance themselves. Shadwell dramatized audience behaviors in excruciating detail that other playwrights, such as William Wycherley, attacked in a few couplets, and this scene partially caused the unfavorable reception of *A True Widow*. Equally important was the timing of the opening performance. I argue that the date of the first performance of Shadwell’s play was March 21, 1678, and that John Dryden’s prologue directly linked the play in the audience members’ minds to his own failed production of *The Kind Keeper; Or, Mr. Limberham* ten days earlier. Shadwell’s dedication of *A True Widow* to Sir Charles Sedley, after the play had been rejected by viewers at Dorset Garden, represents a damage-controlling rhetorical strategy that enhances our understanding of the multifaceted functions of paratextual writings in Carolean drama.

1 See, for instance, Christopher J. Wheatley, 321; M.F. McBride, 32; Don R. Kunz Jr., 44; and Robert D. Hume, 332. The dates in this article are all in New Style (Gregorian).
2 George Saintsbury claims that the play was “produced in 1679,” apparently conflating the date of the dedication with the date of the play’s debut (121).
3 All quotations from the dedication, prologue, and errata, which are not present in Wheatley’s critical edition in the *Broadview Anthology*, are from the first printed version of *A True Widow* (1679). I use Wheatley’s edition for all citations within the play itself.
Shadwell and Sedley

Let us begin, then, with Shadwell’s own attempts to explain *A True Widow*’s unfavorable reception. In a public dedication to his friend Sir Charles Sedley on February 16, 1679, Shadwell wrote:

This play, which I here recommend to your Protection, either through the Calamity of the Time, which made People not care for Diversions, or through the Anger of a great many, who thought themselves concerned in the Satyr, or through the want of taste in others, met not with that Success from the generality of the Audience, which I hop’d for. (A2)

This dedication was written after the play failed. If one thinks of this gesture in modern terms, it would be like dedicating a film that had flopped at the box office, such as *Gigli* or *Waterworld*, to someone as a compliment. Because sincere veneration from author to patron, or at least the semblance thereof, was the predominant emotion expressed in the performative genre of Restoration dedications, a discrepancy exists between the flattering nature of the paratext and the poor reputation of the play.

Of course, dedications that were either meant or taken as mockery, though rare, were not completely unheard of. For instance, although Dryden’s dedication of *Marriage A-la-Mode* to John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester may look like, and perhaps even may have been intended as, a fairly typical dedication, Rochester did not respond kindly. As Kirk Combe points out, the letter that Rochester wrote to Dryden about this dedication is now lost, but we can still get a general idea of its contents by the way Dryden responded to it:

I have onely ingag’d my selfe in a new debt, when I had hop’d to cancell a part of the old one; And shou’d either have chosen some other patron whom it was in my power to have oblig’d by speaking better of him than he deserv’d, or have made your Lordship onely a hearty Dedication of the respect and honour I had for you, without giveing you the occasion to conquer me, as you have done, at my own weapon. (Combe 145; Critical 7)

While it is not clear exactly what part of Dryden’s dedication incurred this “new debt,” Rochester evidently found something insulting about it. The point here, then, is that the exaggerated praise that characterized dedications could easily be taken or intended as sarcasm.

Yet no record of animosity between Shadwell and Sedley exists; thus if the motive for the dedication was not mockery, then some other reasons must have led Shadwell to dedicate a commercially unsuccessful play to Sedley. As a baronet, Sedley’s estimated annual income was 880 pounds, whereas cottagers’ yearly wages were about six pounds and ten shillings (Davenant 184). When one bears in mind Sedley’s social position, the first

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few words of Shadwell’s dedication of *A True Widow* make more sense. Shadwell begins by saying, “This play, which I here recommend to your Protection” (A2). By asking for Sedley’s “Protection,” Shadwell positions himself as a loyal subject invoking the feudalistic ideal in which a lord protects his vassal from brigands in exchange for service. At the time Shadwell wrote his dedication, February 16, 1679, he was especially in need of protection since the Exclusion Crisis was under way and he was the chief Whig playwright of the era. While Sedley could not turn back time and force the audience to appreciate *A True Widow*, he could protect the things that the failure of this play put at risk: Shadwell’s professional reputation and his future financial status and career. Past success was no guarantee of future favor with audiences, especially with the unpredictable tastes of English theatergoers in the seventeenth century. Derek Hughes demonstrates convincingly that “audience taste was, as always, capricious,” and that “Carolean sex comedy” was characterized by “rapid changes” (96). The owners of Dorset Garden and other Restoration theaters not only had the right to discontinue a play that did not make money, but they could also refuse to run future productions by a dramatist who was potentially unmarketable. Shadwell therefore aligns himself with Sedley, seeks protection, and makes excuses for *A True Widow’s* unfavorable reception, in part, as a damage-controlling strategy.

This idea becomes clearer when Shadwell says that the “want of taste in others” may have been responsible for the play’s lack of “Success from the generality of the Audience, which I hop’d for, and you thought, and still think, it deserved; and I have the Judgment of Men of the best Sense, besides the best of the Poets, on my side in this Point” (A2). In this passage, Shadwell makes binary distinctions that were characteristic of Carolean dramatists. On his “side” are the “Men of the best Sense” and the “best of the Poets,” whereas the other end of the spectrum contains tasteless “others” and the “generality of the Audience.” By creating this distinction, Shadwell accomplishes several things at once. He reinforces his self-esteem, which had just taken a major hit; he shifts the blame for the play’s failure away from himself and onto the shoulders of the audience; he forestalls any future negative criticism of the play and takes vengeance on his detractors by aligning them with lower class and unrefined images of those who lack “taste” and compose the “generality” (as opposed to the elite); and he flatters Sedley by including him among the “in” group.

In fact, Shadwell then goes on to remind Sedley, and simultaneously publicize to the world, that he also had a hand in writing *A True Widow*. According to the dedication, Sedley provided the play with the “benefit” and “honour” of “Correction,” “Alteration,” and “Approval” (A2). Shadwell therefore links himself firmly to Sedley in the public eye. While would-be detractors may not have hesitated to attack Shadwell by himself, whose relatively insignificant social position made him an easy target, they might think twice about openly mocking a person with a title. Even Dryden,
who was then Poet Laureate, was not free
to insult members of the upper classes,
even unintentionally, without repercus-
sions. In December of 1679, he was bru-
tally beaten in Rose Alley in London by
gang of hired thugs for having run foul
of someone, possibly the Earl of Roches-
ter (Johnson 143). The social status of Sir
Charles Sedley, along with the public na-
ture of the document and Shadwell’s per-
sonal investment in defending his play,
therefore cast doubt on the idea that the
dedication represents a fairly dispassion-
ate or even accurate account of why the
play might have failed.

However, one should not discount
Shadwell’s explanations altogether. While
his comment in the dedication to Sedley
about the audience’s lack of “taste” caus-
ing the play’s failure may have been more
of a rhetorical move to save his career and
prevent future criticism than an honest
assessment of the play’s failure, it none-
theless has a ring of truth to it. The word
“taste” has two basic connotations if
viewed in light of the play-within-a-play
scene in act four. First, the audience’s loud
and obnoxious behavior during a typical
play would, from a playwright’s perspec-
tive, be disheartening. Prig complains
about the lack of cards at the theater and
then proceeds to tap people on the back
and then look “demurely, as if he did not
do it;” Selfish asks if his cravat sits well,
brags about his appearance, and says that
he only comes to plays “upon account of
seeing the Ladies;” and some of the four
anonymous men curse the play before it
begins and then try to evade paying the
doorkeeper so that they can see part of
it for free (4.1.53-61, 86-96). Most play-
wrights were able to write only two plays
a year, so the amount of work that went
into one was substantial. Shadwell aligns
himself with this average in the prologue
to The Virtuoso: “He says, if with new fops
he can but please, / He’ll twice a year pro-
duce as new as these” (7). To invest all
that labor in a project and then have the
audience damn the play before it began
or not even pay attention must have been
frustrating. More importantly, audience
reactions directly influenced playwrights’
commissions. Because Restoration play-
wrights’ salaries consisted almost entirely
of the third night’s receipts (and some-
times every three subsequent evenings),
Shadwell probably had no money to
show for his six months’ labor. The ex-
act number of performances of A True
Widow has not survived, but if the play

5 The one exception to this average is Shadwell’s
opera Psyche, in which he viewed himself as a mi-
nor, almost superfluous contributor. In the pref-
ace to the 1675 edition of Psyche, which is not
paginated, Shadwell says:

In a thing written in five Weeks, as this
was, there must needs be many Errours,
which I desire true Criticks to pass by;
and which perhaps I see my self [but] . . .
. have not had leisure to mend them, nor
would it indeed be worth the Pains, since
there are so many splendid Objects in the
Play, and such Diversion . . . Musick, cu-
rious Dancing, splendid Scenes and Ma-
chines . . . as will not give the Audience
leave to mind the Writing.

The elaborate “Scenes and Machines” to which
Shadwell refers were partially responsible for
Psyche’s popular success with thirteen perfor-
mances (Kavenik 30). Moreover, because operas
such as these raised the bar of audience expecta-
tions and provided novelty, they contributed in a
small way to the failure of later plays, such as A
True Widow, that were produced less expensively.
even made it to the third night, negative word-of-mouth gossip would have led to a sparsely attended, and therefore poorly paying, event.

Carolean Moralties

The second way in which the audience lacked “taste,” in Shadwell’s view at least, was in the choice of plays that its members enjoyed. More specifically, Shadwell objected to what he believed was the popular desire for farce, as the note to the reader in A True Widow makes clear: “For some, I believe, wish’d all the Play like that part of a Farce in it; others knew not my intention in it, which was to expose the Style and Plot of Farce-Writers, to the utter confusion of damnable Farce, and all its wicked Adherents” (A7). The word “wicked” in this passage is important because it brings in moral criteria for evaluating a play’s worth, a point that Shadwell consistently espoused. Yet the notion that Carolean audiences uniformly enjoyed “wicked” plays has come under scrutiny in the past few decades, most notably by Arthur Scouten and Robert D. Hume. In “‘Restoration Comedy’ and Its Audiences, 1660-1776,” Scouten and Hume argue that “audiences flocked to see both John Wilson’s crude, coarse The Cheats and Samuel Tuke’s chaste, high-flown The Adventures of Five Hours” (46). Shadwell’s supposition that his play was too moral for his viewers therefore underestimates the complexity of Carolean audiences’ tastes and values.

George Saintsbury reproduces Shadwell’s argument by claiming that the play’s exposure of the “crying sin of keeping” led to its downfall (121). The phrase Saintsbury quotes is from Dryden’s dedication of The Kind Keeper to Lord Vaughan: “‘Twas intended for an honest Satyr against our crying sin of Keeping; how it would have succeeded, I can but guess, for it was permitted to be acted only thrice” (emphasis added, Comedies, Tragedies 108). Although Saintsbury’s work is dated, I include it for a few reasons. Jack Armistead shows that there has been a renewed critical interest in elucidating Shadwell’s “moral viewpoint” since 1980 (101). Yet Saintsbury’s argument that Shadwell’s exposure of the “crying sin of keeping” in act four caused the play to fail has gone untested. I maintain that it was Dryden’s prologue to A True Widow, which caused the audience to immediately and unfairly conflate it with The Kind Keeper, that had a truly devastating effect on the reception of Shadwell’s play.

The keeping of a mistress is not a central theme of A True Widow and it only shows up conspicuously and sententiously in a small section of act two. Shadwell apparently received some negative comments about this part of the play because he defensively says in the dedication, “I doubt not but the Scene in the Second Act, wherein La. Busy would persuade Isabella to be kept, will live, when the Stuff of such Scriblers . . . shall be . . . rased out of the memory of Men” (A3). Indeed, keeping was a common practice. Charles II, who set the fashions for his courtiers, openly had mistresses, sometimes the very actresses who appeared onstage. In a play with five acts, though, one would think that a mildly offensive fraction of
one act buried in the middle of the play would not be enough to sink the whole production.  

*A True Widow*, however, was associated with keeping in a disproportionate way because of the prologue that Dryden wrote for it, which includes the following couplet: “*Well! Flourish, Countrymen: Drink swear and roar, / Let every free-born Subject keep his Whore*” (A5). These lines of the prologue make it sound as though the play is going to spend considerable time criticizing sarcastically “every free-born Subject [who] keep[s] his Whore.” If one accepts the month and year that most critics, such as William Van Lennep, Robert D. Hume, Christopher J. Wheatley, and Paul Hammond agree was the premier of *A True Widow*, March of 1678, this introduction to the play would have been particularly disastrous.  

On March 11, 1678, ten days before *A True Widow*’s début, Dryden’s play with “keeper” in the title (*The Kind Keeper; Or, Mr. Limberham*) failed miserably. Imagine sitting in the audience in 1678 and learning that you were about to watch a play that sounded very similar to one that most likely had not pleased you a week earlier with a prologue by the same author who wrote it, in the same playhouse (Dorset Garden), and with the same basic set of actors. Audience-reception studies of the Carolean stage therefore benefit from a close inspection of the plays that immediately preceded a given production, especially at the same theater. It was not the moralizing exposure of the “crying sin of keeping” that hurt Shadwell’s play, but rather the link in audiences’ minds to Dryden’s unsuccessful play a week earlier, which could have failed for any number of reasons.  

### Time and Sequence  

Since much of the ensuing argument rests on the accuracy of the exact date of the first production of *A True Widow*, a brief explanation of the rationale behind its establishment will follow. Let us begin with what critics all agree on, namely, that the play was performed before the dedication was written on February 16, 1679. As mentioned previously, the dedication of *A True Widow* makes it quite clear that the play had already failed in the theater. Hammond, Hume, and Wheatley list March as the month for *A True Widow*’s début, and Wheatley specifies the twenty-first as the day. Van Lennep reinforces these scholars’ claims when he says that “References in the Prologue also fit the public events of March 1678” (269). The prologue that Dryden provided for this play does not contain any glaring topical references, and Van Lennep says no more about exactly what the “References in the Prologue” are or how they correspond to certain “public events of March 1678.” Elsewhere in the passage, though, he provides more concrete information by saying, “The date for this performance is based upon Lump’s remark in the first act: ‘Upon the one and twentieth of March . . .’” (269). Van Lennep’s description ends with this quotation, but he has provided enough information for us to fill in the rest. The context of the quotation is as follows: Lump explains

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6 Van Lennep 269, Hume 332, Wheatley 321, Hammond xxxiv.
to Lady Cheatly that he does not consider “anyone wise who does not know what he shall do this day fifty years, if he lives” (1.1.39-41). After Lady Cheatly expresses her wish that he will be dining with her then, he replies, “No, upon the one and twentieth of March I shall fifty years hence dine with Mr. Ananias Felt” (1.1.43-44). Because Lump claims that only wise people know what they will do “this day fifty years” and then proceeds to use himself as an example, one can conclude that “this day” is “the one and twentieth of March.”

All that we have established so far is the intradiegetic date or the fictional time scheme within the play itself. One could argue that this date does not correspond necessarily to the actual day and month that the play was first performed because it was merely a hypothetical one provided by Shadwell in the manuscript or it referred to the date that he wrote this particular section of *A True Widow*; however, this argument loses plausibility when one looks at the publishing practices of plays during this time period. According to Edward A. Langhans, it was the theatrically modified promptbook and not the author’s original manuscript that generally served as “the logical text from which to set a printed edition, since it was the final version of the play and could be puffed ‘as performed in the theatre’” (*Restoration Promptbooks* xv).

Furthermore, actors, prompters, machinists, and helpers frequently made textual emendations to a playwright’s original manuscript in order to make it run more smoothly on the stage, sometimes to the author’s chagrin. Playwrights were aware of this practice and often left blanks for the theatrical production team to fill in. For instance, Langhans says that “Playwrights sometimes gave no indication of locale in their stage directions, presumably because they knew the producer would supply from stock whatever seemed appropriate” (“Theatre” 12). In addition to omitting scene specifications, playwrights could and did leave dashes that would allow actors to fill in more timely or relevant information to the live audience sitting in the theater (such as dates, names of public figures, or very recent in-jokes). While the point about Lump’s exaggerated predictability and rigid time schedule would still have made sense with an arbitrary date, it would have been less confusing and more comically self-reflexive to use the actual date of the production. Since the printed text that we read today was made after these changes had been added, the date would most likely be the one that the production team filled in rather than the one Shadwell provided, if he did not simply leave a dash in the first place. The exact number of performances of *A True Widow* has not survived, but because a play that reached the third night would be considered at least moderately successful, one can assume that March 21st was either the first or second showing.

If one accepts this date and then thinks chronologically in terms of *A True Widow* coming right on the heels of *The Kind Keeper*, Dryden’s failed play about what appeared to be the same subject, it is possible that the audience might have experienced an initial disappointment. This first impression was crucial since at
least one cognitive psychological study has shown that people tend to exhibit a phenomenon known as the “primacy effect” in which material presented earlier in a sequence makes a greater impact on a person than later information. In an experiment by S. E. Asch, the order in which an identical set of words was presented had a significant impact on how people interpreted the information. Participants were told to evaluate a hypothetical individual based on the following set of character traits: “intelligent, industrious, impulsive, critical, stubborn, and envious” (Brehm 115). When the words were read in this order (from adjectives traditionally considered positive to those with more negative connotations), participants described the person favorably; however, when the same set of words was read in reverse order (from negative to positive), the people involved in the study described the hypothetical person with these traits in an unflattering way. Researchers concluded that material presented earlier forms a center around which subsequent ideas are forced to fit. Interestingly, the primacy effect intensifies when a person is tired, distracted, or unmotivated to pay attention (Brehm 115). Carolean audiences fall into this category because of the myriad distractions around them on any given day in the theater—prostitutes wearing vizards, fashionable men and women dressed to the hilt, orange women selling their wares, people yelling and sometimes getting into physical fights—and the large quantities of alcohol and coffee that were part of the average diet. There were no obstacles to watching these sideshows since, in Langhans’ words, the theater was “almost as well illuminated as the stage, where spectators could see one another throughout the performance” (“Theatre” 12). Assuming that the audience could hear the prologue in the first place, they may have tuned out the play to focus on what they thought would provide more entertainment: their environment. The reference to a satire on keeping probably caused some members of the audience to focus their attention elsewhere.

### Influencing Audience Responses

One part of the theatrical production, however, definitely caused the audience to take notice: the play-within-the-play in act four. In his dedication of *A True Widow*, Shadwell mentions “the Anger of a great many . . . who thought themselves concerned in the Satyr,” and, indeed, it would be fairly hard not to see oneself in this part of the play since Shadwell created his own “audience.” Among those targeted are orange women, gamblers, sportsmen, fashion mongers, vain coxcombs, people who try to evade bill collectors, noisy people, loose women, amateur play critics, and people who enjoy farce. In other words, Shadwell dramatized a mocking version of the majority of the audience. Nor are the businessmen or “cits” safe from his scathing satire. Lump, who is ridiculously mechanical, sees to that. In fact, one of the few groups who are not mercilessly ridiculed in Shadwell’s satire, the
lower class, were the least likely to have been in the audience. As mentioned previously, the poorer end of the lower classes only made about six pounds and ten shillings per family annually. In the late seventeenth century, the cost of a ticket to the theater ranged from one to four shillings. Thus the people most likely to appreciate Shadwell’s satire were not present in sufficient numbers to rescue *A True Widow* from an early retirement on the stage.

Interestingly enough, Shadwell’s *The Virtuoso* was fairly successful just two years earlier (Nicholson xii-xiii). One reason may have been that the brunt of the satire falls on Sir Formal Trifle’s and Sir Nicholas Gimcrack’s respective shoulders. The former prides himself on his oratory skill and claims to be able to speak on any topic, however trivial, such as a mouse caught in a mousetrap in act three, scene four (77). The latter constantly conducts experiments of uselessness and imbecility. For instance, Gimcrack enjoys bottled air from different counties in England (110). These characters are idiosyncratic enough to enable members of the audience to distance themselves from them and therefore laugh at follies that were not their own. There is no play-within-a-play scene in *The Virtuoso* that forced the audience members to wonder if they resembled the foolish characters onstage.

One final excuse for the play’s failure that Shadwell makes in his dedication was that the “Calamity of the Time . . . made People not care for Diversions.” Hughes maintains that “from late 1678 to 1682 Britain was racked by a political crisis. . . . that transformed both the nature of drama and the fortunes of the theatres” (97). While it is true that the Popish Plot was well under way by the time Shadwell wrote the dedication on February 16, 1679, it had not yet begun in earnest back on March 21 of 1678. While the Popish Plot may have lessened the possibility of revivals of *A True Widow*, they were unlikely to happen anyway since the play failed during its opening. From a purely financial standpoint, it would not make sense for the owners of Dorset Garden to try the play again. Shadwell appears to have forgotten, whether deliberately or not, the chronological origins of the contemporary political troubles and used them as another excuse for the play’s commercial failure. By December of 1678, four months after Oates’ “revelation,” the Popish Plot or “Calamity of the Time” could, in theory at least, have “diverted” audience attention away from the stage. The problem with this supposition is that it assumes that English men and women were so engrossed with the news that they could not tear themselves away for a few hours to watch a play.

**Final Reception**

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7 Kavenik lists the following figures: “During the late seventeenth century, boxes cost 4 shillings, the pit 2s/6d, and galleries 1s/6d” (20). She also cites Harry Pedicord who claims that, in addition to the ticket price, the long hours of the average work day prevented members of the working class from seeing afternoon and evening plays (20).

8 For a more extensive analysis of the Exclusion Crisis, see Susan J. Owen.
Considerations

After evaluating Shadwell’s own explanations for the failure of *A True Widow* in 1678, and those of various twentieth-century critics, let me close by mentioning a few variables that have not yet been factored into this equation but that would, nonetheless, have made a difference. Most critics seek the reasons for a play’s failure internally or by the merits of its script as they see it. One must remember, however, that the script is only one part of a successful production, albeit a significant one. Before the play even began, it needed to be advertised. Emmett Avery and Arthur Scouten, drawing heavily from Samuel Pepys, claim that four basic methods were available to advertise upcoming plays to inform the public during the Restoration: “(a) by posting playbills, (b) by scattering handbills or notices, (c) by oral announcements at the end of a day’s performance, and (d) by word of mouth” (Van Lennep lxxv). Although the “word of mouth” among theatergoers would have been difficult to control, the other dissemination methods could increase greatly the favorable publicity a production received if the people in charge of them were assertive enough.

Playbills and handbills distributed all over London could entice more people to attend and the “oral announcements at the end of a day’s performance,” depending on how enthusiastically they were delivered, could leave the audience with a strong desire to see a forthcoming play. In addition to the people in charge of advertising, prompters and machinists were important to play’s performance. Langhans defines these two occupations by saying that the prompter was concerned with “warnings and cues for actors and sound, and with cuts and emendations,” whereas the machinist and his helpers “were responsible for scenery, properties, special effects, and the like” (*Restoration Promptbooks* xiv). The skill (or lack thereof) of the people in either position could make a play run smoothly or cause serious problems through ineptitude, laziness, or indifference.

Last, but certainly not least, are the actors themselves. According to Langhans, “Restoration promptbooks make little or no mention of costumes, stage movements, or line interpretation” (*Restoration Promptbooks* xxiii). Consequently, much of the responsibility for bringing characters to life was placed on the actors’ shoulders. Especially for comedy, line delivery and the accompanying gestures are almost as important, if not more so, than the words themselves. Casting decisions could also affect the outcome of a play. For *A True Widow*, the names of the players have not been preserved (*Restoration Promptbooks* 269). We do know, however, that at least eighteen actors and thirteen actresses worked for the Duke’s Company in the season of 1677-78 (262). If one looks at the *dramatis personae* of *A True Widow*, it only calls for nine leading male roles and five actresses, along with the minor characters such as the doorkeeper, and the audience of the play-within-a-play. Thus there was at least some choice about who played which role.
The reception of a play therefore does not, as previous critics and Shadwell himself imply, depend solely on the themes it contains, the audience’s attitude toward those themes, or some other easily explainable factor. In practice, the success of a play depends on more than the playwright’s script and the political events of the time. There are many factors involved: the casting decisions; the actors’ movements and line deliveries; and the first impression that the writer of the prologue, in this case Dryden, creates. The aggressiveness of the advertising team also needs to be taken into account along with the vigilance of the prompter and machinist. Furthermore, we should not forget to consider, when we can, the mood, behavior, and level of inebriation or caffeine stimulation of the audience members or the labor of the most seemingly expendable assistants. Finally, immediate context is important to consider as with the plays that preceded A True Widow, such as The Kind Keeper or expensively decorated operas such as Psyche. As I have demonstrated, all of these helped to shape audience expectations and had the potential to produce a twelve-day hit or a two-day flop.

Works Cited


