

Cultural Daily

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Uma Thurman Stars in Limp Political Play on Broadway

David Sheward · Wednesday, December 6th, 2017

It seemed like the perfect set-up. A political comedy-drama written by the creator of Netflix's *House of Cards* starring the elegant Oscar nominee Uma Thurman in her Broadway debut. That's why it's a pity that *The Parisian Woman*, the first major Broadway show to tackle the Trump administration, is such contrived claptrap. Listed in the program as "inspired by" Henri Becque's 1885 play *La Parisienne*, Beau Willimon's uneven script has the creaky feel of a century-old potboiler.



Uma Thurman in *The Parisian Woman*

Credit: Matthew Murphy

Willimon peppers his overboiled plot with pointed barbs directed at the Orange President, which draws appreciative laughs and some applause from the sympathetic New York audience (the play opened in 2013 at South Coast Repertory and has undergone some rewriting to reflect current events.) Yet popular progressive sentiment fails to save this *Woman* from soapy suds and unconvincing characterization both in the writing and acting.

Thurman plays Chloe, a Washington socialite not above using her considerable charm and sex appeal to advance the career of Tom, her tax-lawyer husband. When a federal judgeship opens up, Chloe schemes to secure it for Tom. The pursuant twists and turns among the political elite fill the show's 90 minutes. At first Chloe and Tom appear to be a ruthless power couple whose only goals are achieving power and influence—not unlike Frank and Claire Underwood, the main characters of *House of Cards*. But in order to advance the storyline, the author has them undergo a 180-degree personality change midway through and suddenly they're altruistic liberals out to thwart the regressive agenda of the new prez. More unbelievable reversals follow plus ridiculous dialogue such as "Do you really think so little of me?" and "It's a miracle what we have; to be so free together."



Uma Thurman, Josh Lucas, and Marton Csokas in *The Parisian Woman*.

Credit: Matthew Murphy

Director Pam MacKinnon won a Tony Award for breathing new life into *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* but she fails to make these cardboard figures believable even though her staging is smooth and sleek (Derek McLane's attractive DC sets help.) Thurman and Josh Lucas are both beautiful to look at, but cannot overcome the impossible switcheroo demands Willimon has placed on them.

These are glittering shells rather than flesh and blood people. Marton Csokas does make a hissable high-level Trump insider, though it's hard to believe Thurman's character would ever become involved with this guy, even to gain political advantage. Blair Brown has moments of authenticity as a Republican power-broker and Phillipa Soo from *Hamilton* briefly breaks through the melodrama to create a credible young idealist abused by the machinations of the other characters.

Today's off-stage drama, leaving us reeling after every news cycle, is much more exciting and scary. Wilson was forced to suspend production on *Cards* when his leading man Kevin Spacey was slammed with allegations of sexual harassment and before the play opened Thurman tweeted she might have damning material against disgraced film producer Harvey Weinstein. An in-depth examination of either of those real-life incidents would have made a more compelling evening of theater than *The Parisian Woman*.

Nov. 30—March 11, 2018. Hudson Theatre, 141 W. 44th St., NYC. Tue 7pm, Wed 2pm & 7pm, Thu 7pm, Fri 8pm, Sat 2pm & 8pm, Sun 3 pm. Running time: 90 mins. with no intermission. \$69.50—\$250. (855) 801-5876. www.thehudsononbroadway.com.

This review has previously appeared on ArtsinNY.com and Theaterlife.com.

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