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THEATRE503
PRESENTS

MILK AND GALL

[CARE PACK]

BY MATHILDE DRATWA
DIRECTED BY LISA SPIRLING



£17 / £12 / £10

3 – 27 NOV

020 7978 7040 | WWW.THEATRE503.COM



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ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

What is Milk and Gall?

Milk and Gall is a play written by Mathilde Dratwa. It is a theatrical exploration of early motherhood in the first year of Donald Trump's election. We follow Vera from the traumatic birth of her first child, and her response to the world and the newly elected President, with her changing body and a newborn son.

What is a Care Pack?

A care pack is designed to give you information to know if you will be affected by any of the themes covered throughout the show, and suggestions as to where to get help and resources. We will highlight potentially difficult subject matters, and point you towards places of resource that will be able to help. We will also highlight our accessible performances.

Care Pack Contents:

- Selfcare
- Content warning overview
- Resources and help breakdown
- Full play synopsis
- Accessible show information
- Acknowledgements

NB

Please be aware that there will be in depth information about the play ahead, and spoilers within the play synopsis. It's also worth noting that although the play is set in the USA, and many of the resources shared here are online, they are for predominantly UK Audiences.

Selfcare

Some of the topics covered in Milk and Gall might be distressing for some audiences, and looking after yourself is always the first priority. Attached is a content warning overview so you can see at a glance if there is anything you might find difficult. If you want to read about a specific scene without reading the whole synopsis the icons are there to show you where in the play these themes will crop up.

Reach out to someone – if you are struggling reach out to a friend, family member, or see below for contact information for confidential and anonymous support 24/7.

Ground yourself – If you are able to, place your feet on the floor to help ground you.

Take deep, slow breaths in through your nose for four counts, hold for four, then release your breath slowly out of your mouth. Repeat this exercise a few times.

Take care of yourself – Drink a glass of water. If you are able to, take a walk outside in nature. If possible, turn off your phone and take five minutes for yourself.

When we panic it can be easy to spiral. A simple exercise to follow is tune in to your senses:

- Notice **5** things you can see around you
- Notice **4** things you can touch
- Find **3** things you can hear
- **2** things you can smell
- **1** thing you can taste

Finally, you are the expert on you! If something isn't right for you, you are always able to walk away. Put yourself first, and do what's right for you.

Content warning overview

Childbirth, Physical Trauma	
Anxiety, depression, postnatal depression	
Isolation	
Sexual Trauma	
Racism, Racial microaggression	
Physical assault	

Please be aware that excerpts of Trump's speeches will be used in the pre show.

Resources and information

[Wellbeing](#)

Tommy's Online support tool for care and resources through childbirth, childcare and child loss. You can also create a wellbeing plan to best support the mother or parent after birth which can help with Mental Health and overall welfare.

[Birth Trauma Association: Home](#)

A place for those who have been through difficult and traumatic births, including those who have experienced trauma watching their partner go through a difficult birth. There is an email to contact for support and a Facebook support group.

[Home page - PANDAS Foundation UK](#)

PaNDAS are a resource staffed with volunteers who are there for you if you are suffering from postnatal depression.

[Sleep Deprivation](#)

The Sleep charity has a phone line you can contact between 7- 9pm Sunday to Thursday, and also offer courses and workshops around sleeping.

[PTSD UK](#)

A charity which helps support anyone going through Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, from helping you to identify it and steps you might want to take.

[Loneliness](#)

Support Line is for those who feel isolated, vulnerable or are at risk of abuse, offering a free and confidential helpline to those who need support.

[Race On The Agenda: ROTA](#)

One of the UK's leading anti-racist change drivers, ROTA works closely with communities impacted by systemic racism, prioritising mental health, education and criminal justice.

[Free, 24/7 mental health text support in the UK](#)

Shout offer free Mental Health support in the UK, fully confidential and anonymous.

[Samaritans](#)

The Samaritans are free to call 24/7, 365 days a year to support you with whatever you are going through. You are also able to contact them via letter or email, and they have a self-help app.

Play Synopsis

○ □ The play opens with Vera, a Jewish woman in her mid-thirties giving birth a month earlier than her due date against the backdrop of the 2016 American Election night. The birth is long, traumatic and develops complications as it progresses, with the doctors attending to her frequently not communicating enough information or being distracted. As the election results are called her partner Michael chooses to lie to her and say that Hillary has won to give her something positive to hold onto as she undergoes an emergency c-section. Throughout the play Vera's body is always that of someone who's just given birth, and her baby shapeshifts throughout.

○ The day after delivery she receives her friend Amira and her mother, Barbara. Michael continues to lie about the 'first female president', encouraging both of the other women to take part in his lie. Vera only finds out the truth when she wakes up to Elaine, Michael's highly conservative mother sitting with her baby made of glass, who triumphantly reveals the truth that Trump has won the election. Hearing the news Vera drops the baby, who shatters. Michael and Vera furiously clash about the lie, having gathered all the shards of the broken baby into a pillowcase. Vera tells the baby she regrets having him, and then berates a nurse for offering a wheelchair to leave the hospital in desperate to be able to walk out independently, but ultimately has to give in due to pain.

○ ◆ □ At home, Michael leaves for work, leaving Vera struggling to communicate with her newborn and asking Alexa for help, who does not understand the question. We experience the first few days home as Vera attempts to soothe the baby, and experience the trauma of having to go to the bathroom for the first time after birth and vaginal tears with stitches.

○ ◆ We meet the lactation consultant, who explains that traumatic birth can often cause milk production to suffer. Vera has been in pain and unable to breastfeed the baby, who is losing weight, and has been described by the phrase 'failure to thrive'. The pillowcase baby deflates like a balloon throughout. Barbara pops round and Vera shares the gruelling routine the couple are going through, to pump the milk and then feed the baby from a bottle, and when Barbara causes Michael to spill the milk Vera screams like an animal.

○ ▲ As time passes and we hit the six week mark with the pillowcase baby Vera grows more confident talking to him, and we meet her staring into her vagina in a mirror, telling him about the targeted ads she gets for transvaginal mesh. She is now magically wearing a cow costume, with the baby attached to her udders nursing, and she is engaging with Alexa for news of the troubled outside world and politics. Alexa suddenly suggests that as it has been six weeks since she gave birth, she should be having sex again. Vera is shocked, while Alexa pushes her to be the 'kind of woman' who should want sex to keep her husband interested. As Michael comes home with coffee, she demands sex from him, overriding her actual wants and needs and mooing in pain.

□ Later when Amira comes round, Vera shares that they had sex, and states that her boobs are only for the baby. When Amira questions why she is forcing the breastfeeding so hard she admits that she

wants the baby to like her the most. Amira sets her up with a site that is like tinder, but for other mums so Vera can meet some friends.

◆👉 After returning from one of the baby and mom days, Michael says he has forgotten to pick up some of the things they need for the baby. Vera is slightly aggressively singing a song from the mother and baby day, admitting to not liking any of the other mums but wishing she were able to be friends with the nannies, who she describes through the lens of cultural exoticism as making you feel like you are 'on the beach, sipping real coconut milk from a coconut', and claiming that they are her people instead.

When Vera later takes her baby to the park, she bumps into one of the nannies who is caring for two children, and lies that she is one too. She chats with the nanny who reveals that she has four of her own children at home who she isn't with, due to working for the wealthy family whose children she cares for.

○◆ Amira comes round and with Vera they watch Obama's farewell speech. They discuss whether the baby's birth was so traumatic because he knew the bad things that were coming, and talk in detail about a cousin of Vera's who had a traumatic birth then passed away in a road collision fourteen years later. They get their things and head off to a protest march, with Vera on a tight schedule to return for the breast pumping and feeding routine. She is determined to go and be a part of democracy, but is shocked and overwhelmed by the amount of people, and feels panicky and claustrophobic.

◆☐ They get back home, the shapeshifting baby now has hands, feet and a head. Elaine has been flown in at the couple's expense to spend time with him, and talks in an overly babyish voice while ignoring Vera. Elaine starts to say how much she could eat him up and then begins to devour him.

Later when Amira and Vera are spending time with each other, Vera tries to tell her about some of the other mothers ignoring her when she went for a walk. Amira tries to talk about things to do with her own life that aren't to do with the baby, while Vera is constantly distracted, worrying if the tattered pillowcase baby needs changing. They keep miscommunicating with each other, Vera stating how rubbish it is that people get babies gifts of clothing that they will immediately grow out of, with Amira holding a present that ends up being exactly that.

◆☐ The baby later develops a rash with Vera panicking and turning to Alexa, who physically manifests as a woman and has arrived in the room. They clash about care options for the baby, with Alexa judging Vera for who she decides to call for help, patronising her about toys she has not yet bought for the baby and challenging her on the milestones the baby should have already hit.

◆👉 We return to Vera and Amira watching the news and celebrating Macron who has been voted in over the far right Le Pen, dressing up as French stereotypes and speaking to each other in French until Vera realises it is making the baby cry, and shouts at Amira to stop. Amira gently tries to raise the subject of postnatal depression and uses the example of not loving her cat in the beginning as a parallel to Vera's circumstance, which infuriates Vera. They find themselves frustrated about being on different pages. Vera tries to make more of an effort to take in what Amira has been saying about someone she likes. Amira tries to state that Vera is lucky compared to some of Amira's family members who have given birth in Syria, and tries to share her perspective as a first generation immigrant in

Trump's America. They argue, and Amira leaves snapping that Vera's baby looks like Donald Trump. The baby has turned into a small Trump doll.

◆ ◻ Vera is watching Law & Order on her own with the baby, and hallucinates Investigator Bob Mueller coming in to look for a missing person, which turns out to be Vera. He rummages through all her belongings whilst ignoring things she is saying, and when he tries to look into a box of sex toys it turns out the entire box has been fully replaced with baby toys. Vera desperately tries to convince Mueller she is Vera, and still very much here, not missing, and not chopped up by the baby like he suspects. She kisses him and he turns into Michael, who is happy about a recent promotion at work. She can't concentrate, and starts to think she is losing her mind.

◆ ◆ She reaches out to her mum for the first time properly in her life, and asks for help. Barbara is thrilled to be more involved. They argue about care and expressing affection as mothers, and where Vera feels like Barbara was lacking. Her mother thinks Vera should be thinking about getting back to work. Barbara disappears and Hillary Clinton arrives, also dispensing motherhood advice and giving hints that Vera should be making much more of an effort to keep Michael interested now that there is now a child involved, as she didn't with Bill Clinton. Vera is angry about the election, and as they talk they unravel the knowledge that deep down, Vera knows that Michael didn't vote. This knowledge pushes Vera over the edge and she attempts to stab Hillary repeatedly, who refuses to die. She clicks her fingers and instead it is Vera that is dying, with nurses attempting to resuscitate her.

○ ◆ Vera remains lying down as she flatlines, with Michael, Barbara and Amira entering, and talking in turn about her, and how she'd changed and failed as a person, with Vera desperately trying to get someone's attention. Hillary snaps her fingers and brings her back, and gives her life advice about giving birth to herself, and they toast each other and aspects of motherhood – to stitched up vaginas, padsicles, and nipple cream.

○ ◆ ◆ We cut to Vera on the phone, calling to oppose the health care bill reform that will defund Planned Parenthood. She keeps getting cut off but persists in calling back. Michael comes home and they fight about having to see his mother. Vera desperately asks how they can move forward with Trump as president, Michael giving careful, thoughtful and poetic responses about being involved in their son's life and teaching him to think critically. They clash again, with Michael admitting he didn't find time to vote. Vera shows Michael all the lines and cuts on her body that have been wrought on her by the baby, by Trump, politics, Brexit, the #MeToo movement. Michael tells her she looks cool and beautiful, like a superhero. She shoots at him with her wrists, and his clothes fall off, and they have their first moment of tenderness and intimacy since the birth, which is then interrupted by the baby crying. She goes to him, Michael disappearing into the sofa, and she pulls out a real four year old boy for the first time.

The play ends with Vera and her young son. They are both wearing matching masks and she is teaching him how to vote inside a pool of light.

Accessible show information

The play will run for 90 minutes, with no interval.

Relaxed performance: **Weds 17 Nov, 7.30pm**

Our parent/guardian and baby showing: **Weds 17 Nov, 12pm**

Captioned performance: **Weds 17 Nov, 7.30pm**

Pay What You Choose: **Sat 13, 20 and 27 Nov, 3pm**

Socially distanced show: **Fri 12 Nov, 7.30pm.**

After the Saturday matinees we will be trialling a series of Open House events, where everyone is welcome to join us to connect and discuss the show with other audience members and open up creative conversations.

Acknowledgements

This care pack was directly inspired by the Self Care Guide created by Clean Break for the play Typical Girls, which ran at Sheffield's Crucible Theatre, which in turn took inspiration from [20 Stories High](#) and [Resources & Research](#).