

BERLINALE 2026 Berlinale Special Review: *The Blood Countess*

by [SUSANNE GOTTLIEB](#)

17/02/2026 - BERLINALE 2026: Ulrike Ottinger reawakens the legendary blood countess Elizabeth Báthory in a darkly comedic tale set in contemporary Vienna



Birgit Minichmayr and Isabelle Huppert in *The Blood Countess*

“Death must be a Viennese” is a popular Austrian saying. Dying and death are ever-present in the city’s culture; in prose and song, death appears as an old friend. This macabre tradition sits comfortably alongside the bloodthirsty, vampiric, all-consuming traces of a once all-powerful empire. In **Ulrike Ottinger’s** [The Blood Countess](#), which had its world premiere as part of the Berlinale Special section at the 76th [Berlinale](#), the city becomes the resurrection ground of the old elite. Death is, as quoted, “an eternal recurrence”.

The settings are equally morbid: an underground lake where the Nazis were building jet fighters; the heart of the city itself, built upon the heart crypt, with the resting bones and organs of the Habsburg; the heroes’ mountain, a monument to the warmongers and generals of the empire, an hour outside the borders the

Heldenberg.

Ottinger visually plays with the greys of the city and its modern-day, cold symmetries, interweaving them with soft, anachronistic, clichéd images of a bygone Vienna and red spots of colour. At the centre of it all is **Isabelle Huppert** as Erzsébet Báthory. Huppert, who famously appeared in *The Piano Teacher* [\[+\]](#) two decades earlier, is reunited not only with the city's morbid moral code but also with writer **Elfriede Jelinek**, who contributed to the dialogue.

Her countess is based on the real 17th-century Hungarian noblewoman Elizabeth Báthory, who became closely associated with vampire mythology through the alleged baths she took in the blood of young girls to preserve her youth. Her image as a secluded aristocrat preying on the vulnerable helped shift vampire lore away from peasant superstition towards the seductive, noble predator later seen in Gothic literature and influenced the modern archetype of the vampire.

Powerplay and noble standing also aid the countess' quest, as she returns to the city to feast and search for a book said to transform vampires into mere mortals. She creates unease for those around her. But in Austria, one does not question hierarchy and traditions; one looks the other way. The hotel manager bows, but is glad when she is gone. "A fine lady", the toilet lady murmurs, while blood and destruction await in the toilet cabin where she bit someone. Not even her vegetarian vampiric nephew, Rudi Bubi Baron von Strudl zu Buchtelau (**Thomas Schubert**), can convince his therapist (**Lars Eidinger**) that danger is lurking.

But Ottinger does not solemnly plunge into class critique. Instead, she engages with the principles of commemorative culture and the ways in which its self-serving logic becomes a tool for preserving power. Who is remembered - who remains "undead" - shapes the narrative of authority. "What will remain of us if we do not erect a monument to ourselves?" a dead general asks Elizabeth in the crypt. A book that can make you disappear becomes a threat. "Then it would be all over for us," observes the indignant vampire maid Hermine (**Birgit Minichmayr**).

"We live in the past. It's convenient because it's predictable," seems to be the motto of the status quo. But sometimes, as the film shows, the old just has to show up with a new face to validate its ongoing, bloodsucking grip on the people.

The Blood Countess was produced by both [Amour Fou Vienna](#) and [Amour Fou Luxembourg](#) and the German company [Heimatfilm](#), in co-production with German company [Ulrike Ottinger Filmproduktion](#). US company MAGNIFY handles international sales.

more about: [The Blood Countess](#)



Review: *The Blood Countess*

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Isabelle Huppert leads Ulrike Ottinger's *The Blood Countess*

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The Venice Gap-Financing Market selects 61 projects

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Film Fund Luxembourg announces the recipients of its latest round of funding

Last month, the body granted development and production bursaries

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07/06/2024 | Production | Funding | Luxembourg

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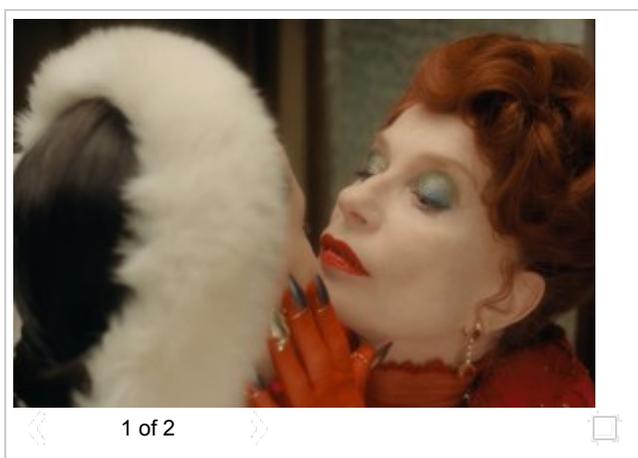
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international title: The Blood Countess

original title: Die Blutgräfin

country: [Austria, Luxembourg, Germany](#)

sales agent: Magnify (US)

year: 2026

directed by: [Ulrike Ottinger](#)

screenplay: [Ulrike Ottinger, Elfriede Jelinek](#)

cast: [Isabelle Huppert, Birgit Minichmayr, Thomas Schubert, Lars Eidingen, André Jung](#)

main awards/selection

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full film profile

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