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## BERLINALE 2024 Competition Review: *The Devil's Bath*

by [SUSANNE GOTTLIEB](#)

20/02/2024 - BERLINALE 2024: Directorial duo Veronika Franz and Severin Fiala dive into the tortured mind of an 18th-century farmer's wife



Anja Plaschg in *The Devil's Bath*

A small village in Upper Austria. The year is 1750. A woman is picking up a crying baby and taking it for a walk amongst the impenetrable greenery of the forest, along the clear stream winding its way through rock and soil, all the way to a thunderous waterfall. There, without batting an eyelid, the woman drops the baby to its death. The movie does, however, not linger on this moment. In the next scene, she is knocking on the gates of the church. She has a murder to confess. The next time we get a glimpse of her, we see her laid-out, dead body overlooking the valley – a warning to others not to stray from religious righteousness.

What happened here? Austrian directorial duo **Veronika Franz** and **Severin Fiala**, whose [The Devil's Bath](#) [\[+\]](#) is playing in Competition at the 74th [Berlinale](#), do not provide answers immediately. Instead, their focus

switches to protagonist Anges (**Anja Plaschg**). She is a sensitive young woman with a deep sense of spirituality. When we meet her, she is about to be married off to Wolf (**David Scheid**), the son of farmer woman Gänglin (**Maria Hofstätter**). Being only the second son, with little to inherit, it becomes clear that their marriage will be one of hardship, of fighting the elements and of strong tradition. Traditions, on the one hand, keep the community alive, but on the other, they demand motherhood and the subjugation of the wife.

Bathing the early moments in warm sunlight, like a fleeting, happy memory, the directors then start to darken the mood. Nature, a maze of trees, stones and river junctions, becomes a menacing antagonist that edges in on Agnes, creating a claustrophobic, suffocating space. The expectations instilled in her, Wolf's refusal to touch her and the constant criticism of her mother-in-law start to gnaw at her mental and physical well-being. Heads start turning, and there are whispers: Agnes cannot fit in. The child murderess from the beginning, across whose body she stumbles on a plateau, turns into a morbid fascination – an escapist fantasy, a way out.

But the Church still has a strong grip on people, and suicide is a deadly sin from which there is no absolution. Agnes will have to take a radical step to be freed of her plight. While it seems easy to identify the source of Agnes's suffering as her surroundings, Franz and Fiala abstain from creating a clear antagonist. Their fascination lies within shedding light on the poor, the illiterate and the women, whose stories in history are seldom told.

Working with historical protocols, they not only paint a picture of a bygone era, but also draw attention to a dark chapter in history, whose pattern of events is not only found in the Austrian countryside, but can also be found all over Europe. At the same time, specifically in those unforgettable closing minutes, it becomes a harsh reflection on dogmatism, the supposed salvation it offers, and the restrictive corset of dos and don'ts that lead to tragedy. Plaschg, known as singer **Soap&Skin**, shines in her second feature as an actress, drawing on her upbringing in a rural Austrian town. Her mesmerising eyes and the minimalism in her expression pull us in. The soundtrack, for which she is also responsible, draws on the eerie mood, employing historical instruments and otherworldly tunes.

*The Devil's Bath* is a movie that will stick with the viewer for a while. It's a drama drawing on the rich horror background of Franz and Fiala, while also emancipating itself from the genre they became famous for. The sheer extent of female history is still a blank, a century-long erased trauma, and *The Devil's Bath* intends to shine a light on one meaningful fraction of it.

*The Devil's Bath* was produced by Austria's [Ulrich Seidl Filmproduktion](#) and [Heimatfilm](#), and is sold internationally by [Playtime](#).

## more about: [The Devil's Bath](#)



### Review: *The Devil's Bath*

BERLINALE 2024: Directorial duo Veronika Franz and Severin Fiala dive into the tortured mind of an 18th-century farmer's wife ▶

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## Playtime to pull out all the stops in Berlin

The agent will sell Competition titles *The Devil's Bath* and *Suspended Time* and upcoming films by François Ozon, Rithy Panh, the Coulin sisters, and Mehdi Idir and Grand Corps Malade ▶

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## The Berlinale unveils its Competition and Encounters titles

New efforts by Mati Diop, Viktor Kossakovsky, Bruno Dumont, Olivier Assayas and Andreas Dresen are just some of this year's Golden Bear contenders ▶

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## Playtime to sell 13 titles in Cannes

Spearheading the line-up are *About Dry Grasses* by Nuri Bilge Ceylan and *Homecoming* by Catherine Corsini, both battling it out for the Palme d'Or, and *No Love Lost* gracing Critics' Week ▶

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## Potential selections and suspended expectations seven days from the Cannes announcement

Invitations trickling in, intensive final viewings and well-kept secrets in the final stretch before the very promising Cannes selections are revealed ▶

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## Playtime preparing for a new spring in Berlin

Wielding upcoming movies by Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Robin Campillo, and Catherine Corsini, as well as new works by François Ozon and André Téchiné, the French sales agent will be making a strong comeback ▶

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**Berlinale 2024** – Forum

Review: *The Secret Drawer*

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**Berlinale 2024** – Panorama

Review: *Every You Every Me*

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Review: *Memories of a Burning Body*

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**Berlinale 2024** – Encounters

Review: *Some Rain Must Fall*

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## trailers & videos

**international title:** [The Devil's Bath](#)

**original title:** [Des Teufels Bad](#)

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

**sales agent:** [Playtime](#)

**year:** [2024](#)

**directed by:** [Veronika Franz, Severin Fiala](#)

**screenplay:** [Veronika Franz, Severin Fiala](#)

**cast:** [Anja F. Plaschg, David Scheid, Maria Hofstätter](#)

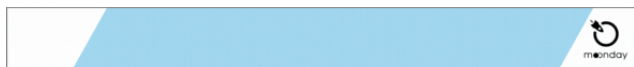
## main awards/selection

**Berlinale** Competition  
**2024**

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