



## The Blood Countess

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## **The Blood Countess** Andrei Codrescu

Andrei Codrescu, NPR commentator and journalist, has written a fascinating first novel based on the life of his real-life ancestor, Elizabeth Bathory, the legendary Blood Countess. Codrescu expertly weaves together two stories in this neo-gothic work: that of the 16th-century Hungarian Countess Elizabeth Bathory, a beautiful and terrifying woman who bathes in the blood of virgin girls; and of her distant descendent, a contemporary journalist who must return to his native Hungary and come to terms with his bloody and disturbing past. Drake Bathory-Kereshtur, a Hungarian-born journalist who has lived in the United States, returns to his native Hungary, only to be the target for recruitment among a patriotic group that wants to restore the glory--and the horror--of the Hungarian aristocracy. As a descendent of the Countess Elizabeth Bathory, he is heir to all that is wonderful and terrible about his country and his family's past. Codrescu brilliantly explores Drake's anguish, as he realizes the truth behind his gruesome family history. But more importantly, Codrescu also creates a convincing and historically accurate picture of a sadistic woman obsessed with youth, vigor, beauty, and blood\_a woman with enough power to order the deaths of 650 virgins so that she could bathe in their blood.

"The Blood Countess" is a bizarre and compelling book about the horrors of the past, shown so effectively in the monstrous yet attractive personality of Elizabeth, and what pull these horrors have on those who live now.

## **The Blood Countess Details**

Date : Published July 2nd 1996 by Dell Publishing Company (first published 1995)

ISBN : 9780440221913

Author : Andrei Codrescu

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## From Reader Review *The Blood Countess* for online ebook

### **Karen says**

I read this book to get a better sense of some Hungarian legends before traveling to Budapest. Despite being about a purported sado-masochistic lesbian vampire whose spirit continued to live in her descendants and arose again during the fall of communism, this was an extraordinarily boring book.

I had high hopes--it was written by an NPR reporter who actually was related to the Blood Countess--an actual countess who was tried during the 15th century for bathing in the blood of virgins. Unfortunately, it was poorly written and laden with the extra plot about her spirit rising during modern times.

Wouldn't the S&M lesbian vampire be enough? I was also hoping for more critique of the legend--I've heard that the trial was a farce based on tortured confessions, conducted because the throne wanted to collect lands she inherited once her husband died. If he wasn't going to go for that angle, why get so squeemish about the actual violence? He described a fair amount of it at the beginning, but once he made the historical fiction choice that she had killed all those women, he didn't really get into much detail of the initial kills, or how and why they escalated.

Big disappointment.

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### **Savannah says**

I just finished reading this for the second (or third?) time, and it is every bit as interesting and captivating as the first time. Basically the story of a woman in the sixteenth century who is both spoiled and unable to comply with the definitions of Luther's "complacent" woman, she is thirsty for experience and knowledge, which eventually leads her down a dark and doomed path. Weaving in and out of this main tale of Countess Elizabeth Bathory is the tale of her distant descendant, a man unwittingly drawn into a strange and murderous plot to bring her back to life in the modern age. It is a heavy, dark book, and definitely not for the faint of heart, yet so compelling and engaging (despite the occasional didactic digressions that read more like a nonfiction tome) that I can't imagine anyone not being intrigued by the tale. Codrescu, being of Balkan descent himself, shows a deep appreciation for the medieval heart and mind of a strong-willed and strange woman. Despite the occasional odd sexual scenes, I couldn't help wondering if this novel wouldn't make a very intriguing movie. Here, the modern character sums up his emotions about Bathory:

"I found it difficult to imagine the absolute power that my ancestress had over the lives of others. Common people were mere dirt to her. Their lives could be snuffed out with the twitch of her aristocratic nostril. Her carriage never stopped for peasants or for their children. Sex, like other appetites, was there to be satisfied by whatever means necessary. The place of morality was taken by an elaborate code of manners. Protocol was infinitely more important than kindness or the Ten Commandments."

It is easy to see how a woman, losing years of her youth and married life in empty waiting, could become corrupt in the backwoods and dark stones of medieval Balkan Europe.

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## Yomna hosny says

The Blood Countess: Andrei Codrescu

The other day I was listening to "Cruelty brought thee orchids" by Cradle of filth which tells the story of the Hungarian Countess Elizabeth (or Erzebeth) Bathory.

Her likeness hung in the black gallery

Commanding unease

Demanding of death to breathe

..

Midst the whirl and daylight fauna of society at court

Elizabeth bedazzled

Her presence sought applause

Though her torch lit shadow thrown on the damp cellar walls

Greeted nothing but despair from slaves her nights enthralled

Listen to the song on Soundclod

<https://soundcloud.com/kevlloydavey/...>

I had first discovered Countess Bathory when I was much younger and somehow fascinated but the slew of serial killer information freely available over the internet.

On wikipedia no less.

The gruesome story held my attention and I couldn't stop reading about her.

So after I'd exhausted all the non-fiction (and short) accounts I could find about her over the internet, I looked for books.

A Goodreads search will show you that the world is absolutely mesmerized by serial killers. I looked and looked for any of these novels but couldn't find any. It wasn't until earlier this year when I found "The blood Countess" by Andrei Codrescu in a traveling book fare that was in town for a week.

The copy was sadly battered and abused. But it was quite the find!

Whatever floats your boat, right?

The book tells the story of Elizabeth from her early years side by side with the account of a Hungarian man descended from her line. Derek Bathory-Kereshtur escaped from his country during the fall of the communist regime. He escaped to America and lived in anonymity, finally freed from the burden of his aristocratic heritage.

But heaven is never forever

The story has some fascinating political commentary on the state of unrest within a European country going through revolution. This kind of in-depth knowledge could only come from someone intimately acquainted with the country's turmoil. The author, Andrei Codrescu is Romanian-American.

Whether you disagree or not with the accounts that suggest that Bathory bathed in the blood of virgins. That

she killed over a hundred young girls in the dungeons of her castle seems a valid fact of history.

Elizabeth, a countess, was eventually tried for her crimes. But while those murders would have certainly got her executed in an age when even petty theft was punishable by death. Her punishment was to be confined to her quarters for the remainder of her life.

The novel is particularly gruesome. In fact, there are enough torture scenes in the first seventy pages to give you nightmares for a few weeks.

What I found most interesting were the descriptions of life in 16th century Hunagry. The life of nobility and castles is portrayed in exquisite detail. Unfortunately I have no way of judging the accuracy of Codrescu's account as I haven't read anything about that particular part of history.

There are a couple of different views explained throughout the books about Elizabeth's crimes. Was she the victim of a thorough defamation? Or was she the bloodthirsty, disturbed and very prolific murderer we think she was?

The novel does drag on a bit towards the end. And I expected a detailed history of her crimes not the witchy spin the author put on things. If anything that made her less of a an actual person who lived and committed crimes for which she never received just punishment and more of a folk tale or an old myth.

There is plenty of graphic content in here; both sexual and violent so beware!

I recommend you give this a try if only for the shock value and the political commentary which, in my opinion, is the better part of this book. But only if you have a strong stomach!

RATING: 3/5

<http://thebookpile1.tumblr.com/>

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### **Cecily says**

I was way too young to read this when I did. Until this day a part of me is scarred!

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### **Serena says**

Addictive read.

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### **A.J. says**

Good. God. Agnus.

This may have been the worst book I've ever read (contending even with Warcraft: Day of the Dragon). I don't know quite where to begin. How about the cover?

On the hard-backed edition I have, the front page reads, "Blood Countess: A Novel." Lie #1. This is not a novel. A novel contains a plot. One does not exist here. Nowhere in all 347 pages of Mr. Codrescue's rambling do even the faintest traces of a story appear. Instead a long-winded, overwritten blizzard of exposition crushes anything that dares to capture the reader, like say, any hint of conflict.

Half the story could have been cut. The only mildly interesting facet of this work was the Elizabeth Bathory thread. The other half takes us to the present time where the author self-inserts himself in order to add some intellectual weight to Bathory's brutality. His entire thread is dry, unbelievable, and uninteresting. I can't imagine how he even managed to write this without falling asleep at his computer. Mr. Codrescue is so enamored with adding some historical/philosophical posturing to Elizabeth Bathory that he offers up the basic necessities of a novel as a sacrifice. He strikes me as the type of writer that belongs in nonfiction, and this is a perfect place to start. If you want to craft a dissertation on the murderous countess, great, but don't plaster "NOVEL" on the cover, as now I am neither a) entertained nor b) confident that anything I read is historically accurate. Useless. Utterly useless.

I think the worst thing about this novel was that it promises much and delivers little. Mr. Codrescue isn't a horrible writer. When he strings words together in a sentence, they make sense, and he seems to be well-informed about his subject. Great. Grand. Wonderful. A perfect starting place to get us into the mind of one of history's most infamous serial killers. But instead of taking his talent and crafting some sympathetic characters through which the reader can view the horrendous evil of Elizabeth Bathory, he just rambles on and on. His story dips and dives into historical asides and irrelevant backstory. It's like watching a speech in which the speaker tries to pack in too much information. Nothing is accomplished except confusion and mild irritation.

From conception to excruciating finish, this novel misses. I picked it wondering how on earth anyone could go as whacko as Elizabeth Bathory did, and I cannot imagine a way in which I could have been more disappointed. This work has no insight, no adventure, no thrills, no horror. Nothing except some bloated intellectualism and six hours of my life. What a mess.

I think I'll treat myself to some King just to get the taste out of my mouth.

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## Chris says

Open Road Media is a publisher that if I am unsure of a book, I will try it anyway. Usually, I end up loving it. The few times I don't, and this is one, it is more of a case of the author's style not being to my taste.

There is too much telling and not enough showing in the Countess parts of this book for me, and for the more modern setting, I just can't bring myself to care. Partly it is because of the overt sexuality, and not sensuality (at least to my tastes). I know it is about the Blood Countess, so of course it is going to be there, but there is a way to do it that doesn't smack of using breasts to get readers.

The idea is interesting, and I have no doubt that several people will enjoy it this. In some ways, it reminds me of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, and since I was lukewarm about that novel, my reaction to this is no surprise.

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## **Trixie Fontaine says**

I always want to grumble when a man does a good job writing about women (see also *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All*) but this is one of those books where I have to grudgingly admit I couldn't point to a single thing and say, "A WOMAN NEVER WOULD HAVE WRITTEN THAT ABOUT ANOTHER WOMAN!"

Anyway, it was a beautiful, rich, decadent read. Kind of hard to build in any kind of climax, though, when the entire thing is so dramatic (fine with me, but other people might wish for a higher peak towards the end).

The violently kinky sex parts were vivid and rang true without reading like "erotica". Brutally delicious and horrifying without being totally depressing, though it was definitely a drag imagining how hideous it would've been to live in those times. Within E. Bathory's context she didn't seem much worse than anyone else . . . just more . . . prolific, if any of the stories are true.

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## **Christine Whittington says**

Bloody Magical Realism in the Balkans

Andrei Codrescu has created a savory paprikash, served with Tokaji and the occasional bloody sausage. His story not only encompasses the anguish of a contemporary journalist, who bears a physical and professional resemblance to Codrescu, but the brutal history of Inquisition-era Europe, revolving around the Blood Countess, Erzebet (Elizabeth) Bathory. Both Codrescu and his protagonists are relatives of the Countess.

Journalist Drake Bathory asks a judge to convict and sentence him to death for a murder he has committed. Anchored by his story, the narrative jumps from the courtroom to Drake's misadventures among contemporary neo-Fascist Hungarians, to the mazes of towers, passageways, dungeons, and stairways of not one, but several, including the ?achtice Castle, the exemplary creepy castle, where Elizabeth Bathory murdered an unknown number of virgins and spent her last days imprisoned in a walled chamber.

It is possible that Blood Countess would be less compelling to a reader who did not already have some knowledge of the Countess's reputation and Carpathian geography and politics. I do wish maps of the region and castles had been included, but they are easy enough to find elsewhere.

Codrescu's prose is exquisite and his book is a lush and bloody delight.

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## **Erin says**

Find this and other reviews at: <http://flashlightcommentary.blogspot...>

No. Just, no.

I'm tempted to leave my thoughts on Andrei Codrescu's *The Blood Countess* at that, but I think my fellow

readers deserve an explanation. That said, I want to be very clear that I did not finish this book. I made it through 45% of the narrative and bailed. I did not bother skimming through to the end as there seemed no point in subjecting myself to material I found both salacious and repugnant. I'd award a single star to the portion I completed, but as I did not finish the book I've chosen to leave this review unrated.

I am familiar with Elizabeth Bathory, but my objections to the material within these pages have nothing to do with blood baths and dead virgins. I don't know how the author utilized the material later on, but the obscene sexual nature of the chapters I did experience didn't sit well with me. Drake's climax in the iron maiden was uncomfortable, Elizabeth's hands on approach to Johannes' encounter with the gypsy disturbed me, and don't get me started on the harlequin doll. I'll give Codrescu the benefit of the doubt and assume the material was meant to elicit the response it did, but the depravity he depicted went too far and I lost any and all interest in the story he was trying to tell.

Speaking of story, I felt the contemporary elements of the piece should have been scrapped altogether. I didn't care a whit for Drake or his experience. These sections were tediously slow and dominated by exposition better suited to nonfiction. I will note the religious elements of Elizabeth's story arc were interesting, but Codrescu's narrative is so drawn out that the ideas felt fractured and incoherent.

The description claims the novel unforgettable and for once I honestly agree with the sales pitch. The Blood Countess is unforgettable, but for all the wrong reasons. Not for me and not something I could possibly recommend.

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### **Trina Burton says**

Told in parallel stories, "The Blood Countess" gives a retelling of the alleged crimes of Elizabeth Bathory, a sixteenth century Hungarian noble said to have tortured and bathed in the blood of 650 virgins and her fictional descendant, Drake Bathory-Kereshtur, a Hungarian emigre who has returned to his native land to investigate the Blood Countess and reconnect with his own past. It is told as if Drake Bathory-Kereshtur is giving testimony at a trial. He has turned himself in for the murder of a young girl but insists that it was the Blood Countess who was ultimately responsible for murderous crime. In between his trial transcript, there are graphic and gory descriptions of Elizabeth Bathory's life starting with her abduction at the hands of peasant rebels. She witnesses the rape and murder of her two sisters, which begins her lifelong fascination with sex and violence. The story continues with her strange sexual education at the hands of her aunt but even more interestingly her fascination with being able to make people do things for her, even if they are degrading or painful. As Drake starts to learn more about his ancestor, he becomes more caught up with her story and begins to believe that she is trying to come back to life through a vessel. He is determined not to let this happen but will Elizabeth once again be able to force someone to do her bidding?

I literally could not put this book down and ended up reading it in a day. I was fascinated with the historical descriptions of Hungary (my father is Hungarian) as well as this depiction of a noble serial killer who had so viciously murdered young girls. Like so many books who use the plot device of jumping back and forth through time, I was hurrying through the modern portions to get back to the interesting historical chapters. The ending was not as satisfying as I had hoped but I did enjoy this book on the whole.

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## **Laura says**

Reasonably good, although I couldn't help but think that the author was a dirty, perverted man. I've read numerous pieces of literature and research about Elizabeth and I know she had a perverse side, but I think some of the accounts were wild infatuations of this male authors mind which just overflowed into his writings.

The story was interesting, it switched between a modern day story and Elizabeth Bathory's day and it kept you on your toes a bit as at times you were quite easily reading two entirely different books. I have to admit at times I just wanted to fast-forward through the modern day sections, but towards the end of the book both sides really picked up and I ended up enjoying the book very much.

I only gave it two stars because of,

- 1) The authors nature, it seemed a bit wild and pointless at times.
- 2) It tended to drag on.

Worth a read though, if you're on an obsession with the Bathorys.

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## **Alex says**

This is an extremely hard book to rate.

I really enjoyed it to start off with, although the scenes with Drake were rather dull. I kept reading his parts faster so I could get back to Elizabeth. Ah, the infamous Elizabeth Bathory, the Blood Countess. There isn't a lot of fiction out there about her, and no wonder - most people wouldn't have the stomach to write about her evil deeds.

This book was extremely gory and perverse, but it didn't take away from the story at all. Given the time period and the circumstances, how could the story NOT be perverse?

Drake's story got a lot more interesting once it began intertwining with Elizabeth's, but I still wanted to fast forward through his parts and get back to her. By the end though, I was extremely disappointed.

Elizabeth goes from 16 to 35 in about two sentences, and her trial is told from Drake's point of view, referencing the past. We don't get to hear about the 650 virgin girls that Elizabeth killed to bathe in their blood at all - it keeps getting referenced, but it's never told through Elizabeth's point of view.

It seems as if the author's intent was to make you understand how Elizabeth might have turned out the way she did, by using her childhood and adolescent life as a guide. Which is fine - but don't market the book as her adult life, which is what I thought I was going to be reading.

So again, it's hard to know how to rate this book. It kept me hooked, because I kept wanting to read more about Elizabeth. But the ending was awful, and extremely anti-climactic.

So, I am going with 3 stars - though I don't think the book quite deserves that. But because it kept me itching

to run home from work and read more about her life, I have to give it that credit.

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### **Oliviu Craznic says**

Dacă povestea nu ar fi conținut un clar mesaj propagandistic (care transformă cazul Bathory mai degrabă într-un pretext pentru prezentarea ideilor socio-politice ale autorului), volumul ar fi meritat 3, poate chiar 4 stele, având o premiză interesantă, bine documentată (chiar dacă nu fidelă istoriei) și expusă cu talent.

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### **Ashlie Gillis-Nelson says**

I really enjoyed this book. I have a morbid fascination to the famous Hungarian Countess Elizabeth Bathory and have read lots of material about her. I would have to say this is definitely up in the top 10 fave books about the Countess. This book is incredibly violent and graphic, so the reader should be advised. But, although certainly fictionalized, it is reasonably accurate to the facts known about one of the most prolific serial murderers of all time. The second plot including Elizabeth's ancestor was fascinating as well, Codrescu writes beautifully. This book is impossible to put down and humanizing Elizabeth. A good read all around.

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