# **Countess Elizabeth Bathory**

## Biography

Elizabeth Bathory also known as the blood countess was a Hungarian countess born on August 7, 1560 into one of the most prestigious clans in Central Europe. She was a beauty who was obsessed with appearance and coming from a privileged background, she had one of the best opportunities for education and social affluence. She was well educated and proficient in over four languages including German, Slovak, Latin, Greek and Hungarian (Telfer, 2017). She came from a peculiar family setting since her parents were blood cousins but this was not startling among the noble who were accustomed to inbreeding. Bathory also suffered from seizures when she was young. As a child Bathory experienced some of the most inhuman acts in her life such as a man being sown into the stomach of a horse for theft. At the age of 10 she was engaged to a 14-year-old boy, Count Ferenc Nádasdy, who also came from an affluent family in Hungary (Thorne, 2008). Consequently, she moved into the Nádasdy palace as was tradition. There were rumours that she got pregnant for a peasant boy while at the Nádasdy palace and was forced to give away the child in secret while her fiancé brutally castrated the boy and threw him to wild dogs. She would later develop a reputation for her voracious libido which always led her fiancé to violence. Some of these aspects would later contribute to her crimes in the future.

On 8th of May 1574, Bathory finally got married to her fiancé at the age of 14. His fiancé Nádasdy was good at war and was reputed for cruel and inhuman killings during the 1591 Ottoman invasion. Bathoryt and Nádasdy bonded through torturing their young female servants every once in a while, when they got to meet. Nádasdy taught her a trick called “Star Kicking” which involved rolling up a piece of paper, putting it in between the toes of a servant and setting it on fire. The couple also enjoyed stabbing people at the same time among other profanities. History remembers Bathory differently because in 1601, a woman called Anna Darvolya, who was rumoured to be a witch, joined the palace and is rumored to have mentored Bathory to kill (Telfer, 2017).

When the “Black Knight” died of illness in 1604, Bathory’s cruelty and violence exacerbated. This was the beginning of her murderous escapades. She quickly turned into a fanatical torturer, thus killing young girls from surrounding towns mostly children with strong dispensable bodies and throwing their bodies to be eaten by wolves. She worked with Anna her “mentor” who assembled an elaborate torture squad composed of five of her friends.

Bathory would begin by slapping, punching and kicking her servants. She would cut their fingers, prick them with pins, strip them before whipping or burning them with iron in her unique “torture chamber”. Sometimes she would beat them until their bodies burst open. Those who sewed incorrectly were tortured using needles. In fact, she once tore a girl’s face using her fingers. However, speculations started springing up regarding her killing spree and the pastors she asked to conduct funeral services began to question the frequency of deaths at the castle. When Bathory’s partner in crime Darvolya died in 1609, she became madder and more obsessed with blood. Her actions were no longer concealable and by this time she realised the blood birth was not keeping her any younger so she stopped preying on peasants and starting going for nobles. Evidence of her crimes also started to show as some girls had burned hands and serious bruises caught the public attention. In 1610, the king ordered an investigation against her which was followed by her trial and later conviction (Telfer, 2017). This led to her downfall and ultimate death in August 22, 1614. Her reign of darknesson a portion of Hungary in the mid 1500s is on record to have allegedly led to deaths of 650 virgins within 30 years of her rule. By all standards, Bathory is the Grande Dame of serial assassins, a representation of the irrational and sadistic depravity of aristocracy. Most of her murders were committed between 1585 and 1610 (Morrison & Goldberg, 2009).

## Psychological Disorders

### Anti-Social Personality Disorder

According to DSM IV criteria for diagnosis of Anti-Social Personality Disorder, Bathory lacks due regard for the law. She is reckless and does not care for the safety of other people. Bathory displayed characteristics of anti-social personality disorder. She was a loner who was also forced to marry Ferencz Nadasdy when she was barely a teenager and she had to part with her parents early in life. Her husband was also unavailable since he was always out to war. Bathory was left spending time in solitude and admiring herself in the mirror (Telfer, 2017). Probably, these kinds of happenings in her environment made her develop personality disorders. She did not care about the law because she had a prestigious social status and felt like she was above the law. As such, she did not worry that her actions may get her to prison or arrested. Besides, she had witnessed her family do it over the years without legal recourse for the victims. The kinds of torture that she subjected her victims to implied that she did not care about the safety of her servants. Some of her servants walked around with burns and bruises from her torture hence she was reckless in her ways and did not acre to conceal her actions when it got bad.

### Psychopathy

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR) outlined the characteristics of psychopathy as an individual who is impulsive, callous, aggressive yet over-confident in their actions (American Psychiatric Association, 2014). They are also pathological liars and insincere. Bathory was a psychopath, her passion and lack of empathy through her killings depicted some amount of insanity and lack of conscience. She had an exaggerated feeling of self-worth, her self-worth was in her appearance. Everyone kept telling her how beautiful she was and she got obsessed with the idea so much so that she resorted to a blood birth in order to sustain her beauty and youthfulness. She believed that she was meant to be eternally and physically beautiful (Telfer, 2017). Bathory would take on younger lovers in a bid to feel young and vibrant. She thought that the young girls’ blood would rejuvenate her. When it did not work out for her she resorted to killing nobles to satisfy her need for eternal beauty and self-worth. Bathory continually lied to pastors who conducted burial rites to her victims that they had died from “chronic cholera”. She even put more than one body in a huge coffin to conceal the number of people that had died. As such, she was psychopathic and delusional.

## Explanation for Criminal Conduct

### Biological Factors

Bathory had seizures that could amount to serious psychological impacts on the victim. Many people said that she had serious explosions of rage and epilepsy. Some of these seizures rendered her unconscious for several hours. Besides, she also had a family history of mental disorders. Her aunt, Klara Bathory was known to be vicious towards her servants and Bathory was accustomed to visiting her aunt every so often. The existence of such tendencies within her immediate family including the fact that her birth parents were previous torturers and killers influenced her resort for crime. There is also a possible relation between epilepsy and crime. Most criminals and patients with mental disorders have suffered from epilepsy at some point in life. According to a survey conducted in Sweden between 1973 and 2009, among people who have suffered from epilepsy, about 973 committed crimes which amount to 4.2% of epileptic patients interviewed, this implies that there is a correlation between epilepsy and crime (Fazel et al., 2011). There is a chance that Bathory’s severe seizures may have contributed to her psychosis and violence. Seizures can be stressful and the fact that it put her down for several hours must have been frustrating and may have made her feel helpless. With her mental status and her family background of violent murders and tortures, there is a possibility that such frustrations are caused by seizures may have resulted in serious stress agents and driven her towards torturing people and committing murders.

### Psychosocial

Elizabeth was exposed to violence throughout her life, that is, from witnessing her parents’ torture and murder people to seeing her sisters being raped and the influence of her husband who literally coached her on the skills of torture. Again, her aunt tortured her servants in her presence and her friend Anna taught her how to kill and it turned out to be the “normal” way to treat servants. Exposure to violence and a condoning attitude (Dziegielewski, 2010). These occurrences early in her life twisted the way she viewed humanity and her perception of servants and women in general. Being around people who heartlessly committed blood rituals could have been mentally troubling for young Bathory. She watched a man, who was accused of murdering her sisters, being killed. In addition, nobles mistreated their peasant farmers all the time which made it even more normal for her to join the bandwagon. Therefore, young Bathory was lured into crime by the events happening around her, she could not deal with all the trauma and decide to be a criminal herself.

## Conclusion

Bathory was a stunning beauty and an intelligent woman. She originated from a socially advantaged family but as a child she was very disadvantaged with regard to upbringing. She witnessed many atrocities committed to poor peasants and murderous torture from an early age. She did not have enough attention from her parents and husband, thus ended up being a loner. As a child, she was epileptic and she was a product of inbreeding which was a norm in among the nobles at that time. Her background contributed immensely to her psychopathy and the bloodbath that followed making her one of the most vicious serial killers of all time.

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