



Blood of the Prodigal

P.L. Gaus

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From the choppy waves of Lake Erie's Middle Bass Island to the too-tranquil farmlands of Holmes County's Amish countryside, mystery and foreboding lurk under layers of tradition and repression before boiling up to the surface with tragic consequences.

For Jon Mills, the journey begins with his decision to retrieve his ten-year-old son from the hands of the Bishop who had ten years earlier cast Mills out of the Order, the same Bishop who is Jon Mills's father.

When Mills turns up dead, dressed in Amish garb, and with the boy missing, Professor Michael Branden plunges headlong into the closed culture to unravel the mystery and find the boy. Working in tandem sometimes and at cross purposes at others with his old friend Sheriff Robertson, Professor Branden digs through the past, recent and otherwise, to uncover the truths that many would prefer to leave undisturbed.

In the tradition of Tony Hillerman, P. L. Gaus depicts a culture that stands outside the norm, but one that is every bit as susceptible to the undertow of the human spirit as any we might know.

Blood of the Prodigal Details

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From Reader Review Blood of the Prodigal for online ebook

Barbara says

I'm a fan of Linda Castillo's mysteries set in the Amish region of Painter's Mill, Ohio, so I thought I'd give P.L. Gaus's first Amish whodunit - published in 1999 - a try. Unlike Castillo's stories, which have shocking bloody crimes and a Police Chief detective, Gaus's book is a cozy mystery with an amateur sleuth.

The story: Bishop Eli Miller is an 'Old Order' Amish leader in Holmes County, Ohio. The Bishop is very strict with his church members, and expects them to live simply; work their farms; wear plain clothes of the appropriate colors and style; eschew books and education; not use radios; avoid interaction with outsiders ('the English'); and so on.

Bishop Miller has to break his own rule, however, when his ten-year-old grandson Jeremiah is kidnapped. Desperate to get the boy back - and unwilling to contact the police - the Bishop asks university professor Michael Brandon (an 'Englischer') for help. The Bishop tells Brandon that his son, Jonah Miller - who was banned from the church for rebellious behavior -snatched Jeremiah, who's his biological son.

Brandon searches for Jeremiah, but makes little progress before Jonah is found shot dead on a road leading to the Bishop's house. Sheriff Bruce Robertson investigates the killing, but he knows nothing about Jeremiah's abduction - so the Professor still has to find the missing child.

The main suspect for Jonah's murder is Jeff Hostettler, whose sister Brenda was involved with Jonah, and gave birth to Jeremiah. Jonah abandoned Brenda before the boy was born, and she eventually committed suicide. Jeff blamed Jonah for his sister's death, and vowed to kill him.

To discover where Jeremiah may have been taken, Brandon looks into Jonah's past. The Professor learns that Jonah always chafed against the restrictions of Amish life. As a schoolboy Jonah wanted to read books and learn about the world, but the Bishop wouldn't allow it. Later on, Jonah took to drinking, dressing in English clothes, and carousing with girls....which led to his banishment.

The plot has some elements of a police procedural, and - as the story progresses - the Sheriff's investigation and Brandon's search come together.

Secondary characters that add interest to the book include: Pastor Cal Troyer - an Englischer that Bishop Miller respects; Ellie Troyer - the Sheriff's dispatcher, who has a sense of humor; Deputy Rick Neill - the new guy in the Sheriff's Department; Caroline Brandon (Michael's wife) - who helps search for Jeremiah; and more. Ellie and Rick have crushes on each, so that's a perk for romance fans.

The story has a straightforward plot with no big surprises....and not much excitement.

I do like the glimpse into the lives of the Old Order Amish, who seem to have the philosophy 'all work and no play.' It was also interesting to read about bundling - an Amish practice that involves boys and girls sleeping together (without sex) for courtship purposes. (This seems very odd to me.....and a tricky proposition.)

All in all, this is an okay mystery in an intriguing setting, but I probably won't go on with the series. The novels are popular though, so if you're a fan of cozies you might want to give it a try.

You can follow my reviews at <https://reviewsbybarbsaffer.blogspot...>

LORI CASWELL says

Set in Holmes County, Ohio, we are introduced to a group of "Old Order Amish" or "plain people" who only trust a precious few "English people".

When one of the Amish boys disappears the Amish Bishop meets with Professor Michael Branden and Pastor Caleb Troyer, two "English" men he feels he can help locate the boy. The Bishop believes that the boy was taken by his father, the Bishop's son, who had been exiled from the Amish community 10 years ago. The Bishop begs the men to not involve any police as he hopes to get the boy back and settle the matter quickly and quietly.

When the man suspected of taking the boy is found dead right down the road from the Bishop's home, the local sheriff starts to investigate the death but is not made aware of the missing boy until 3 days later at the bequest of the Bishop. When the sheriff is given all the information many secrets that the Bishop hoped would remain in the past are revealed. Time then becomes a matter of urgency to try to find the boy before it is too late.

This story is written by a man with over 30 years of research into the Amish lifestyle and in fact lives just a few miles away from one of the world's largest and most varied settlements of Amish and Mennonite communities and it shows throughout his writing.

Just reading this first book in this series I understand so much more about a culture I have found fascinating for years. We have small communities of Amish in Wisconsin but aside from seeing them out shopping from time to time, hearing some stories, reading romance type books featuring "plain people" and seeing the buggies along the highway I really know very little about their lifestyle.

This book not only educates us about the Amish culture, it also contains not only one but two mysteries. One who killed the Bishop's son and two who actually has the Bishop's grandson. The author blends the dangers of America today with the Amish way of life totally respecting their values and attitudes. It is truly different from any other book I have read that tries to mesh these two worlds together. I am really looking forward to the next book in the series "Broken English" and if it draws me in like this edition the reading will be a true pleasure.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from Plume Books, A Division of Penguin Publishing. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255 : "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

Molly Morris says

This is an excellent novel. Although a bit slow in places I loved the scenery and details because I am from Ohio and love visiting the Amish country. I have great respect for the people and enjoy learning more about their culture. The mystery was revealed slowly and well while introducing us to the main characters.

Becky says

At the library, I was looking for an Amish book that was different from the usual romances that I enjoy. This one jumped out from the card catalog, and I selected the first book in the series. This is the first book I've read by P.L. Gaus, and I appreciated the disclaimer in the front of the book that says this is a complete work of fiction, not based on actual events.

I really liked the mystery with the Amish setting, and it is evident that Gaus is familiar with Amish culture. The descriptions of the bishop and women fit with other Amish books that I've read. Prayer, as a way of handling problems, was both realistic and frustrating for someone who comes from our modern culture.

I did like Mike Branden's character. He was respectful, knowledgeable, and played by the rules of the Amish. Michael didn't show off his knowledge, and he showed strength of character. I find it ironic that the bishop thought Branden was prideful. Robertson was a bit brash. I questioned his motives and character on more than one occasion, which may have been Gaus' intent. I liked Neill, too. I wondered if there was going to be a plot twist with his character, but none came up in this novel.

This mystery kept me guessing the whole time. I thought I had the suspects narrowed down, but in the end I was wrong. The fact that the bishop was not transparent from the start was upsetting, but within the character of an Amish person speaking to an "English" person. The action really picked up in the last quarter of the novel. In the end, the mystery was solved, but I'm not sure I'd call it a completely happy ending. Usually I like a happy ending. Gaus did a great job writing, and I enjoyed his writing style, but I would have liked to see more of the end at the beginning. You know, maybe a flashback type of novel showing Jonah's past with present and the company he was keeping. I am fascinated by the Amish (maybe because I was a JW – another high control religious group- for 10 years). However, they frustrate me beyond belief, too. The "must-keep-separate-from-the-world" philosophy is prideful in itself. Following a religion or a book (the Ordnung) rather than Christ is craziness to a Christian.

If I could change something, I would have have learned more about Jonah's character and background rather than be limited to what the bishop or Miss Beachy had to say.

Bottom line, I liked the book. It wasn't fast paced until the end, but it was still interesting and cultural. I would recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn more about the Amish and won't be too frustrated by their closed yet interesting lifestyle. I plan to read more books in this series.

My Rating: 3.5 out of 5 stars

Carol says

3 stars for mystery - 4 stars for learning

Most of us have lots of books on our TBR piles. Over the years I've often thought about reading one of P.L. Gaus's mysteries set in Ohio Amish country. Those of you who follow what I'm reading know that I recently finished another author's fourth in an Amish mystery/thriller series. Though I thought that one was ok, it didn't quite live up to my expectations.

Once again I'll preface my comments by saying, I, like many, have a curiosity and fascinations with the Amish way of life. I think I yearn for a simpler time, uncomplicated by the hustle and bustle of mine. The older I get I also wish for less electronic intrusion and more quiet. Gaus likens it to "the grand spectacle of excess that we see in modern life". He also states "People want to know that these specific communities, set apart, are still out there, and they are curious to know how and why Amish people choose to live as they do. We wonder, sometimes, I think, if maybe they don't know a secret". Secret or not, I'm not certain why I think the Amish life would be any easier. Though there is perhaps less of that intrusion, living the simple life is quite a lot of hard work and has its own set of everyday issues. Gaus, in his mysteries, is able to examine the Amish culture, tradition and lifestyle.

Unlike many Amish stories, Gaus's series is set in Holmes County, Ohio, not Pennsylvania. Having visited this area *Blood of the Prodigal* seems accurate in its setting and more true to the Amish than many others I have read. The basic story might be nothing new. Bishop Miller's ten year old grandson, Jeremiah is kidnapped. Bishop Miller is certain he has been taken by the boy's father, Miller's son, Jonah, who is shunned or mited when he leaves his community and rejects his Amish roots. Bishop Miller seeks the help of English Professor Michael Branden to find his grandson without involving the police. When Jonah is found dead in a roadside ditch, dressed in the traditional old order Amish clothing of his district, the clock may be running out for Jeremiah.

Blood of the Prodigal is a 3 star mystery but a 4 star read. I could be wrong but I felt an authenticity for the Amish ways lacking in other stories. I learned more about the Amish in this than other fiction I have read.

I liked Gaus's writing style, attention to detail and exploration of the lives of the people, English, Amish, Mennonite inhabiting Holmes and Waynes County. They are wholesome reads that will appeal to readers who want a book lacking swearing and gratuitous sex or violence. I would feel safe recommending them to readers of Christian fiction. Penguin Group, USA, seemed to like them too as the series, first known as the Ohio Amish Mysteries were revised and republished as the Amish-Country Mysteries by Plume, a division of Penguin. The seventh in the series, *Harmless as Doves*, was published last June. It releases in trade paperback this June.

Trish says

Not compelling enough, neither the characters, nor the plotline. Maybe too many one star reviews shows more about my frame of mind than it does about the books. I'm sure there are people out there that will like this book about a crime committed in Amish country. It sounded interesting enough. If we all thought the same, what a dull world it would be. In Nick Bilton's book, *I Live in the Future*, the author tells us that online reviews with no poor ratings are mistrusted because they can't accurately reflect the range of opinions. Take

heart, author, I wasn't so kind to Bilton, either.

Kaitlin Moore-Morley says

A was baptized into the Mennonite church just a few weeks ago, when we were sitting at lunch before the baptism one of the members of the church laughed about "bonnet rippers" their term for Christian romanic fiction. I'll admit i liked those books when I was in high school, and with our recent move to Pennsylvania and my indoctrination into the anabaptist world I wanted an novel that wasn't a bodice ripper but focused on the Amish.

The book was pretty decent. I'll admit my knowledge of the Amish is that of Indiana and Pennsylvania, working with the Indiana Amish at the hospital and one one occasion staying in an Amish and conservative mennonite homes with my best friend (she rented from them) while running an in Lancaster Co. But unless the Holmes Co Amish are significantly different from the ones I've spent time with the book has serious flaws.

1. Why in the world would Jonas have joined the church after Rumspringa? It's a common misconception that if you don't join the church you're shunned, this is untrue. Only those who join the church and break their vow are shunned and even then it's often less difficult than we think it is (although sometimes it is just as bad). He implied that after they finish school they immediately rumspringa. Again, wrong.... school ends after your 8th grade year and rumspringa doesn't begin until you are 16. Typically lasting 1-2 years but sometimes shorter sometimes longer. If Jonas was that unsure I have a hard time imagining why he would have joined the church before 18, or at all.
2. Jonas would have had custody of the boy... unless the grandparents applied for custody, which they wouldn't have, Jonas is the boys legal father and therefor legal guardian as the mother was dead. Therefor an abandonment case could be made but not kidnapping.

(view spoiler)

I've been interested in Anabaptist lifestyle since I was young, writing my dissertation on why conservative anabaptists have such a high retention rate. I am probably going to be a little overly critical of this novel. So if you are looking for a fun book to give you a broad view and not necessarily strictly accurate this book is fun-ish.

Sometimes I need novels that rot my brain a little bit. And while this is Christian fiction it's not annoying or overt. A little idealistic and inaccurate but I'm curious if the author becomes more sophisticated with time. I'll probably continue the series when I need a little brain rest between books.

Claire says

I was a bit disappointed with this book. After the first few chapters, I wondered if this really was the first book in the series (it is according to both the ebook I borrowed from the library and the Goodreads db) since there was very little introduction to the characters, and no character development to speak of over the course of the story. I could have overlooked the lack of character development if the mystery itself had been interesting, but there too, I was disappointed. I read mysteries for the whodunnit aspect, to see if I can solve

the mystery along with the investigating characters, but that was impossible here - there was simply no way of doing so. The "climax" of the story seemed rushed and to come out of nowhere, as did the 'villains' responsible for the mystery. Between the flat characters, a mediocre mystery, and a very out-of-place high-speed chase, I felt as if the book was a waste of time. The best thing I can say is that Gaus really knows the Amish world (well, it seems that way to me) and the sections of the story set among the Amish were the most interesting parts of the book.

Christine says

It was pretty interesting. Really easy to read.

E says

As a fan of Linda Castillo's Kate Burkholder series, also set in Amish country, I was interested to see how this compared. While I didn't find it as tight or compelling (nor as dark) as the Burkholder series, and prefer the police procedural genre that the Burkholder series uses, this book did get better as it went along, and the characters were interestingly developed (e.g., the bipolar sheriff). The last 10-15% of the book definitely raises the stakes and picks up the pace. I am hoping there is more finesse in the series as Gaus picks up steam in the next books.

Two things did get stuck in my craw, though. Perhaps I missed something since I listened to this on audio, but I kept waiting for an explanation of why a history professor would be so involved with police cases and carry such authority as an investigator other than being a long-time friend of the sheriff (narrative indicates that the civil war professor has worked with the police on other cases prior to the events in the novel - what were his credentials to do so?). But I decided to let that go, and moved on with "reading." The other piece that seemed ill-explained was the professor's motivation for dressing up and shaving like an Amish person for part of the book.

Finally, some sections of dialogue get very repetitious (as with arguments trying to explain or justify the Amish ways or the conversation at the end between the professor and the college president). A strong editor would probably have helped with all of these issues, and I will read the next one in the series to see if things get a little tighter and better paced.

Mary says

I confess I didn't finish this book, it is just too mind-numbingly awful. There are many things wrong with it; the most annoying aspect is the way the characters keep reviewing the same information over and over again, chapter after tedious chapter, each time being completely amazed by it, forcing me to the conclusion that none of them are very intelligent. I'm quite sure that the whodunnit will turn out to have been perpetrated by a character that will not be introduced until the end of the book (a very weak writing trick) but I will never know because I plan never to pick this silly novel up again.

Richard Derus says

Rating: 3.8* of five

The Publisher Says: Plume's paper edition copy: A compulsively readable new series that explores a fascinating culture set purposely apart.

In the wooded Amish hill country, a professor at a small college, a local pastor, and the county sheriff are the only ones among the mainstream, or "English," who possess the instincts and skills to work the cases that impact all county residents, no matter their code of conduct or religious creed.

When an Amish boy is kidnapped, a bishop, fearful for the safety of his followers, plunges three outsiders into the traditionally closed society of the "Plain Ones."

Ohio University Press's hardcover copy: From the choppy waves off Lake Erie's Middle Bass Island to the too tranquil farmlands of Holmes County's Amish countryside, mystery and foreboding lurk under layers of tradition and repression before boiling up to the surface with tragic consequences. For Jon Mills, the journey begins with his decision to retrieve his ten-year-old son from the hands of the Bishop who bad ten years earlier cast Mills out of the Order, the same Bishop who is Jon Mills's father.

When Mills turns up dead, dressed in Amish garb, and with the boy missing, Professor Michael Branden plunges headlong into the closed culture to unravel the mystery and find the boy.

My Review: I don't imagine that I need to go over my hostility, nay hatred, for christian religion and its evils yet again. But given that I am without sympathy for the central organizing principle of the book's characters, why on EARTH would I pick it up?

Because it is never a good idea to shut one's self off from points of view not one's own. Illumination comes only when the curtains are open.

I started reading the book with modest expectations, and the writing delivered on those admirably. Not one paragraph stands out in my mind. No phrases clink against the myriad of quotes stored in my magpie's-paradise of a memory. Not one single crappy turn of phrase, a few slightly ungainly sentences, but overall a solid B+ effort of writing. It's the first in the series, so that's okay by me.

The murder and its motivations made me smile. Seeing a grand high muckity-muck of a christian sect that's looney even by their looney standards get it in the eye? Bliss! Seeing their bizarre separatist way of life illuminated so clearly? Fascination. The sleuthing team's interconnectedness and small-town life-long knowledge of each other, and watching that develop and alter, was a pleasure.

Gaus very clearly understands the world he's writing about, and clearly also makes a strong effort to be fair and informative to and about it. He doesn't go all preachy-teachy and he doesn't gloss over the good or the bad effects of the Plain People's (hubristic) separation from the world of the English and its attendant vanities. (Isn't a focus on eliminating vanity simply vanity in sneakers?)

I liked the book. I'll read the next few, though I doubt there's enough there there to keep me reading for all eight that exist to date. Of course I could be wrong, heaven knows it wouldn't be the first time.

But my wrongness aside, don't turn away from the pleasure of acquainting yourself with this interesting, weird world.

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Carly says

It has taken me a long time and many Amish books to warm up to reading Amish fiction, but I have finally gained an appreciation for good Amish stories. I don't think I have read an Amish mystery before and I am certain I have not read one of P. L. Gaus's before reading *Blood of the Prodigal*, so I was looking forward to yet another type of Amish story with an author who is new to me. Mysteries have also not been a favorite genre of mine, so adding that together with some reluctance about Amish fiction, I had big expectations going into this book.

For the most part, I was not disappointed, actually I was quite impressed with the quality of the writing and the intricate and interesting plot. This book went by very quickly for me and I found that I enjoyed the mystery and the extensive education about the Amish. This book is another take on the Amish community that has fascinated readers for a very long time. I always like learning more about the Amish when I read these books, mainly because it gives me a greater appreciation for their simple living. I also appreciate a good Amish story with a high entertainment value. *Blood of the Prodigal* had everything I was hoping for and fans of mystery books and Amish books will appreciate P. L. Gaus's research and storytelling.

JoAnn says

After reading *Cast a blue shadow*, I knew that I had to get another book by the same author, P.L. Gaus. I think that this book was even better than the last one I read, and it kept me thinking. What had happened was that in the Amish culture, it is wrong that you do anything to go out of Old Amish order. You must obey their rules and do as the elders say. The Bishop's name is Eli Miller, and he had a son named Jonah Miller. Jonah grew up as an Amish boy, but then started straying from the Amish beliefs. Jonah became rebellious and left their ways. He then had a boy named Jeremiah, but Eli Miller had been taking care of him since Jonah had been shunned. Then one day Eli had woken up, and his Grandson Jeremiah had been kidnapped. The whole town was upset about the happening. They all had figured that Jonah had taken Jeremiah to live with him, but no one knew where they were living. It became a search, and the Amish don't like to involve people outside the Amish lifestyle, but they had to. One of the professors then gets heavily involved, and it lets you see the story through his point of view. I really did like this book, it was pretty easy to read and follow. Some parts went along slowly, but it was nice because that allowed there to be breaks and let your imagination grow. I would defiantly recommend this book to anyone who is interested in Murder solving stories. It was relaxing, but enjoyable and fun to read, while it wasn't boring, and it keeps you engaged. It also never left you hanging, you always kind of knew what was going to happen.

Connie says

I have read several books in this series and I would say that this one is probably the best written and the most engaging. The book kept me reading. The only criticism that I would have is that the "bad guys" were not introduced till the end of the story and seemed almost like an afterthought and perhaps just thrown in to finish the book.
