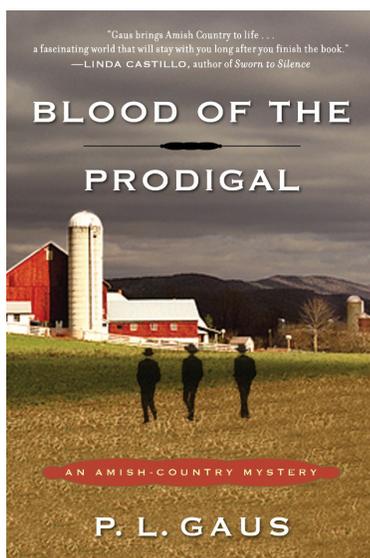


Blood of the Prodigal: An Amish-Country Mystery by P. L. Gaus A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit



About the Book

"P. L. Gaus's *Amish-Country Mysteries* offer puzzling crime stories seamlessly interwoven with an intriguing exploration of Ohio's Old Order Amish culture." —Jennifer Chiaverini, author of the *New York Times* bestselling *Elm Creek Quilts* series

When an Amish boy is kidnapped, can three men bridge the divide between two peoples?

The Amish, or "plain people," and English, or "vain ones," share a home county in the pastoral hills of Ohio. As summer approaches, boyhood friends and lifelong residents Pastor Caleb Troyer and Professor Michael Branden anticipate a season of fishing for bass, until a ten-year-old boy disappears from the home of the Amish bishop who had exiled the boy's father a decade earlier.

"*Say little. Listen a lot,*" are Troyer and Branden's simple watchwords as they begin, at the behest of Bishop Eli Miller, to work the case. Following the bishop's mysterious strictures, the pair is plunged into the traditionally closed Amish society whose followers, innately suspicious of English ways, have been suddenly made vulnerable to the dangers of the world. When the man suspected of seizing the boy turns up dead, Sheriff Bruce Robertson takes up the investigation—only to uncover truths that many, especially the bishop, would prefer to leave undisturbed.

Deeply atmospheric and morally complex, *Blood of the Prodigal* is first in a riveting series that explores a fascinating culture of a people set purposely apart from mainstream America.

Book jacket image and book description courtesy Plume, a member of Penguin Group USA. Used with permission.

Book details:

Blood of the Prodigal: An Amish-Country Mystery by P. L. Gaus

Gaus

Plume, 2010. ISBN 978-0-452-29646-6 (paperback).

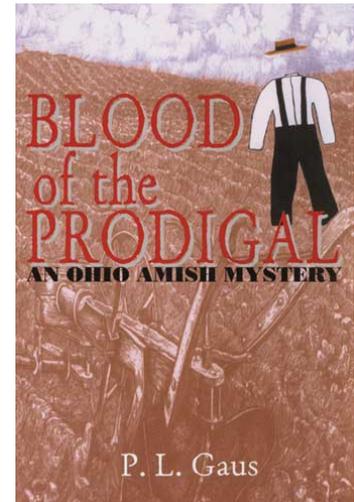
<http://us.penguinroup.com/nf/Book/BookDisplay/0,,9780452296466,00.html>

Ohio University Press, 1999. ISBN 978-0-8214-1276-3 (hardcover).

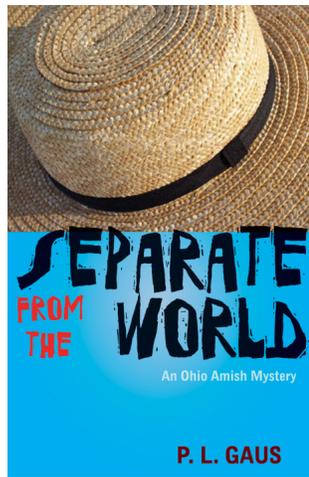
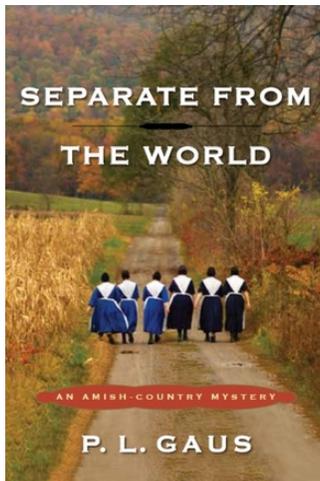
<http://www.ohioswallow.com/book/Blood+of+the+Prodigal>

Available through the State Library of Ohio Talking Book Program:

<http://www.klas.com/talkingbooks/ohio>.



Blood of the Prodigal is the first in P. L. Gaus's **Ohio Amish Mystery** series, originally published by Ohio University Press. The books are being republished in paperback as the **Amish-Country Mystery** series by Plume, a member of Penguin Group USA. Additional titles in the series to date include, in order of publication:



- Broken English** (2010, 2000)
- Clouds Without Rain** (2010, 2001)
- Cast a Blue Shadow** (2011, 2003)
- A Prayer for the Night** (2011, 2006)
- Separate from the World** (2011, 2008)

Dates listed are the Plume publication date followed by the Ohio University Press publication date.

Harmless as Doves, the 7th Amish-Country Mystery, will be published in 2011 with the hardcover first edition from Ohio University Press.

For more information about all the books in this series, see

<http://www.plgaus.com/aboutthebooks.html>.

*Book jacket images on this page courtesy Ohio University Press except **Separate from the World: An Amish-Country Mystery** jacket courtesy Plume, a member of Penguin Group USA. Used with permission.*



About the Author

P. L. (Paul) Gaus was born in Athens, Ohio, in 1949, and has lived in Ohio for most of his life. He has lived in Wooster, Ohio for the past 33 years with his wife Madonna. Paul's extensive knowledge of the culture and lifestyle of the Ohio Amish comes from over thirty years of travel throughout Holmes and surrounding counties in Ohio, where the world's largest Amish and Mennonite population sprawls out over the countryside near Millersburg, Wooster, and Sugarcreek.

Gaus took an interest in writing fiction in 1993, and with the advice and encouragement of author Tony Hillerman, he began working in the summers to write mystery novels set in Holmes County, Ohio, among the Amish. The first of Gaus's mysteries, ***Blood of the Prodigal***, was published in June of 1999 by Ohio

University Press. A total of six novels have appeared in this series: ***Broken English***, 2000, ***Clouds without Rain***, 2001, ***Cast a Blue Shadow***, 2003, ***A Prayer for the Night***, 2006, and ***Separate from the World***, 2008. All six books are being republished by Plume in 2010 and 2011 under the series title ***An Amish-Country Mystery***. A seventh novel in the series is in preparation. Future mysteries in the series will still first be published in hardcover editions by Ohio University Press, with Plume bringing out the paperback editions as Amish-Country Mysteries some time later.

Paul and his wife Madonna still travel frequently in Holmes County. He lectures widely about Amish culture at libraries, bookstores, literary societies, and the like, and his books have been featured prominently at Book Expo America and similar professional shows around the country. Gaus's novels have been reviewed favorably in numerous publications, including *Kirkus Reviews*, *Foreword Magazine*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Library Journal*, *Ohioana Quarterly*, and *The New York Times Book Review*.

Paul retired recently as the Benjamin S. Brown Professor of Chemistry at The College of Wooster, where he was Chairperson of the Chemistry Department. He was educated at Miami University (B.S.) and Duke University (Ph.D.), and he has held positions as Visiting Professor of Chemistry at the University of Illinois, Texas A&M University, University of Wisconsin (Madison), and The Ohio State University. In his academic career, he taught chemistry at the freshman, junior, and senior levels, and he is co-author of the best-selling senior text, ***Basic Inorganic Chemistry***, published in its third edition in 1995, by John Wiley and Sons.



<http://oh.webjunction.org/ohcтроintro>

Author Resources:

P.L. Gaus's official website

<http://www.plgaus.com/>

P.L Gaus's Ohio Amish Journal

<http://blogs.ohioswallow.com/gaus/>

Author page on Mystery Writers of America site

<http://www.mysterywriters.org/user/547>

Author page on Plume site

<http://us.penguingroup.com/nf/Author/AuthorPage/0,,1000077596,00.html?sym=BIO>

Author page on Ohio University Press site

<http://www.ohioswallow.com/author/P+L+Gaus>

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See P.L. Gaus' website for appearance information and a list of scheduled author events:

<http://www.plgaus.com/appearancesbytheauthor.html>

Talk About it!

(Spoiler warning! Some discussion questions refer to key events in the book. Do not read if you don't want to find out what happens.)

- ***Blood of the Prodigal*** explores Amish culture in great depth. How does this book affect your idea of the Amish and what it means to be Amish? How did the Amish lifestyle presented in this book differ from any preconceived notions you had about the Amish, if at all?
- At one point in the novel, Branden observes to himself, "*They're peasants, really. Not saints.*" What is your opinion of Branden's relationship to the Amish? What do you make of his requesting, at the end of the book, a scholarship for Amish kids looking to transition to English life?
- Much of ***Blood of the Prodigal*** is about one's transition from one culture to another. How does this book speak to your own experiences in cultural transitioning? How do you feel the book handled that communication between two very different cultures?
- The Amish in the book exhibit a traditional reluctance to involve the outside world in their affairs. What is your reaction to Bishop Miller's handling of his grandson's kidnapping? Of his son's murder?
- Another powerful theme in this book is loss. How does loss inform the actions of the Brandens? Of the Millers? What roles do their individual faith, culture, and upbringing play in their relationship to loss?
- Sheriff Robertson has a unique challenge in enforcing law on a people who are separate from mainstream society. To what extent should public law enforcement respect the deep cultural seclusion of a group like the Amish? When does the gravity of the crime outweigh the religious and cultural individuality of a people, if at all? What other tactics could Robertson employ?
- At the heart of this novel is a multi-layered mystery. Which characters did you first suspect as the kidnapper? As the murderer? What surprised you about the ending?
- Jeremiah witnesses his father's murder. What impact do you feel this will have on his relationship with his Amish heritage? On his idea of the English and the outside world?

- The land is as much a character in this book as the people in it. Discuss the roles land and geography play in the story. What is the Amish relationship to the land and how does it differ from that of the English characters' relationship to it?
- What is your opinion of Branden's shooting of Mel Brikker? Was it justified? What would you have done in that situation? What impact did this have on how you saw his character, if any?
- When told his wife wouldn't talk until her husband arrived, Bishop Miller says, "*she recognizes my authority.*" What did you observe about the relationships between men and women in ***Blood of the Prodigal***? What is your opinion of the Millers? Of the Brandens?
- How does your lifestyle differ from the Amish lifestyle? Could you see yourself in that culture? What appeals to you about it? What would you find to be the most challenging aspect of it?

Discussion questions courtesy Plume, a member of Penguin Group USA,
http://us.penguin.com/static/rguides/us/blood_of_the_prodigal.html; used with permission.



<http://oh.webjunction.org/ohctrointro>

Explore more!

Blood of the Prodigal Reading Group Guide from Plume

http://us.penguin.com/static/rguides/us/blood_of_the_prodigal.html

Plume's resources for readers include a discussion with P.L. Gaus about his writing, Amish society, and the future of the Amish-Country Mysteries.

Holmes County, Ohio Official Website

<http://www.co.holmes.oh.us/>

Information about government departments and services in Holmes County, featuring a slideshow of photographic images of county life.

Ohio History Central: Amish

<http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/entry.php?rec=573&nm=Amish>

Ohio History Central: An Online Encyclopedia of Ohio History is a service of the Ohio Historical Society.

P. L. Gaus's Blog on Mystery Writers of America

<http://www.mysterywriters.org/blog/547>

Blog featuring the author's reflections on his series, and descriptions and photographs of some of the settings found in the Amish-Country Mysteries.

P. L. Gaus reads from *Separate from the World*

<http://wiredforbooks.org/plgaus/>

Audio reading from the sixth book in the Amish-Country Mysteries, available in RealAudio or for download as an MP3 file.

Quick and Simple Booktalks: *Blood of the Prodigal*

http://nancykeane.com/booktalks/gaus_blood.htm

A ready-to-use booktalk by librarian Nancy Keane.

"Tale for Three Counties: Finding Common Ground" by Ben Beagle

<http://bit.ly/91QIPH> (opens *The Daily News Online*)

Article about Gaus's novels, background, and writing process, published in conjunction with the regional "Tale for Three Counties" reading program in western New York.

About Choose to Read Ohio

Choose to Read Ohio (CTRO) spotlights Ohio authors and promotes reading across Ohio. The State Library of Ohio, in partnership with Ohioana Library Association, developed this initiative to encourage Ohioans of all ages to share literature by authors native to, residing in, or associated with Ohio. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits: <http://oh.webjunction.org/ohctrointro>.