

Hi, I'm Bill Christison along with cohost Steven Starry and today were going to discuss Robert Travers' 1957 novel *Anatomy of a Murder* along with Otto Preminger's 1959 film version of the same, also titled *Anatomy of a Murder*. The novel, it's closely based on a true murder case that took place in a small town in Michigan's upper Peninsula in 1952. The novel like the film begins with Paul Biegler, returning home one evening from a fishing trip. He's a former district attorney who's recently been voted out of office and currently ekes out a living as a lawyer filing briefs, drawing up wills or handling divorces and stuff. Upon his arrival home he finds a note that he is to call one Laura Manion and it's very urgent. So, turns out Laura Manion's husband Army Lieut. Frederick Manion has confessed to murdering a bar owner up in a little town of Thunder Bay just the night before alleging that the latter had raped his wife. Well, Laura says that that's true and that her husband the Lieutenant desperately needs a lawyer to defend him. In the end Paul Biegler agrees to accept the case. Why? Well, winning a big murder case would bring him notoriety and hopefully more clients because he's actually going broke and can't even pay his secretary. But it would also increase his chances at winning a state congressional election coming up in a few months. His opponent running for the seat is the current DA Mitch Lodwick who beat Paul Biegler in the last District Attorney elections. So, victory here would be a sweet vindication. Then, last but not necessarily least, the challenge of defending a decorated war hero facing life imprisonment for a murder committed under very extraordinary circumstances is one could say irresistible. And that's basically the way the story is set up both in the movie and the and the novel, irresistible.

Irresistible because an irresistible impulse?

Irresistible impulse, yeah, yeah exactly.

It's a little play on words there.

Yes.

Okay, well I thought this book was fantastic. I think it's one of my favorite books now definitely. I am I'm surprised though you know the the movies and I think top four for the BAR's top 25 list of legal crime dramas.

That's right.

And, but it's way down at 50, you know, or way down you know from somewhere from 40 to 50 and some other lists I've seen. So, it's not as popular a book as you would expect.

Yeah, I guess.

That was really surprising. It's just such a good book. And I think I just can't imagine why it wouldn't be higher up on any lists.

I've heard still some criticism that it's the style is sort of dated...

Well, it did take place back in the 50s.

Right, exactly, I mean if you read it as a document of the day and you keep in mind that you know there were different turns of speech, different ways of expressing things, you know, even different ways of treating women for that matter. . . . very condescending to say the least. But I mean those are the days, I mean it's just like watching *Mad Men* you know you say well it's that's how it was, you know. But, I thought it was very well written so that it was just fine.

I think though that the fundamental ways that he approaches I mean this guy is obviously so experienced at what he's writing about.

Yeah.

He said somewhere I mean in the introduction like his old teachers, his old writing teachers said something like a "An ounce of authenticity is worth a pound of hot gas city". I think yeah exactly yeah yeah.

And and that is true for this, I mean he's and it's not an ounce of authenticity, the authenticity just permeates every bit of the text.

Yeah, right.

You know you can see that this guy's experienced both sides of you know both the defense attorney and prosecutor, he was a prosecutor for 10 years?

Yeah, right.

And then he was a defense attorney when he lost to Mitch (Right), you know whatever his name is.

But he was on the State Supreme Court and (yeah) you know what he was while he was writing in that's why he had to change his name, which wasn't really Robert Traver but it was, what was his name? John, oh, my God.

I don't recall. We would have to look it up.

Yeah, but anyway yeah.

It was something Broderick or Barrick.

Yeah, but it's always listed as Trevor anyway, still is listed in the books, so he had a lot of experience and. . .

It's interesting to follow you know the, because I don't know anything about law, but it's interesting to follow the way you know they think about the trial and how they ask their questions and how they set traps for each other (right) you know. Maybe they would rather have their opposition ask the question because if the if you know in his case if the prosecutor asks certain questions, it's better for him. It's better for his defendant, right? (right) and so and also I think another thing is it's just the the idea of the way they look at it, it's sort of like it's ritual combat, you know? (Yeah) The judge is a referee (right) so to speak and these two go at each other, the prosecutor and the defense attorney, right? Right, they're always calculating, you know, they can't get too, they can't rack up too many objections sustained so sometimes they have to be quiet and sort of bite the bullet and just let some questions be asked and then just see how it plays out and it's just so calculating, you know.

Yeah, and sometimes like they can't risk asking certain questions (right) because or they don't ask certain questions because they know what the answer will be and they don't want that to . . . they don't want the jury to hear that. (right) So, yeah.

Or they make a question, yeah they ask a question and then before it even can be objected to, they say, but I withdraw that question, right, so the jury can hear it, you know? I think in one part of the movie as well as in the book the lieutenant Manion says, how can they, I think that the judge had ordered it to be struck, stricken from the record and he said, "Well how can that be removed from the record? It's already been said", And then you know, Biegler says, "Well, I can't. It's out." You know. Yeah, yeah. So those things he says, well the jury doesn't forget them.

Yeah, (right) exactly.

And other times when I think the prosecutor raised an objection, then he also raised an objection to reinforce that, what they were objecting to, and he wanted removed from the record.

Yeah.

He added his two cents worth.

Yeah, I forget, there was yeah a point, I think he says, "Okay well then I won't make a comment that Blah, Blah, Blah, you know, repeating the comment that he made and if you don't want me to make that comment" and he did that he ran on for a couple of times. It was quite good.

Yeah, he repeated it a couple of times. I think it was the fact that the defendants wife's ex-husband offered to help.

That, yeah...

Was that the one?

That's, I think you're absolutely right.

Yeah, yeah.

And, which was really funny.

Yeah.

And then the other thing that surprised me is like I mean the prosecution obviously was out in this story the prosecution was obviously out to railroad this poor guy, right?

Yeah.

I mean he had murdered this guy, right?

Right.

But they went all out to you know hide some information from the case from that trial.

Right.

Like they didn't investigate the whole issue of the rape, for example.

Right, well they didn't even want to speak about the rape. They didn't even want to get that into the

case at all.

They raised objection after objection and it took him a lot of work, it took Paul Biegler, is it? an awful lot of work to get that, the rape, into the case, which is surprising to me, because okay here's this guy, why did he commit the murder? (yeah), but that wasn't important to them.

No, no, they just wanted . . .

The why wasn't important, they said, "no, it's not relevant. This guy murdered the other guy, and that's that," right? (Yeah) And so that's surprising. Some of the real things you know the real things that happen in court cases came up, although you know, this is, there were some things here to about you know the small town versus big city...

Right, there was another card that to be played with the big Lansing lawyer from downstate helping out.

Right, because the his opponent for Congressman, was it?

Yeah.

...who'd taken his job as district attorney, right? was a little, not incompetent, but a little inexperienced (yeah) and Paul Biegler was obviously going to eat his lunch so ... so, the prosecutor's sponsors, I guess, patrons, yeah (I guess) sent this other guy down to help them out (right), the big city lawyer. And then there was something political about that too because down in Lansing or wherever they, the political party, I assume it was a Republican, I'm not sure (yeah) but the political party that this Mitch would've been running on was the same as the politician who sent up the lawyer to help them, so you know, you scratch my back . . .

Yeah, they were part, they were in the same political party, (right) and I guess, and so, I guess they had something invested, they were investing something in this guy and (yeah) they had big plans for him and they didn't want to see him lose against Paul Biegler because . . . I guess because they figured he would.

Right, and it was sort of funny when they realize, "Oh, God we got a big guy from downstate here helping Mitch Lodwick, but then Parnell said well I think that was in the novel, I get the novel and the movie mixed up, they're so close together. But he said, "Well, this this is better. It'll keep you alert and (yeah) also won't be suffering from the sympathy that this poor Mitch Lodwick would be getting.

Underdog syndrome, which is true, also he was considered locally to be some sort of hero, because he been, he'd fought in World War II and Paul Biegler hadn't and he'd been a football star in high school or something like that, and Paul Biegler hadn't. And so that's the reason he'd won (right) against him in the district attorney race, so there wasn't the issue of how they were dealing with the community at large too, because Paul Biegler at certain points like, you know, there's like two parts of the book, the first part is you know like before the trial, right? (right) and he goes around sort of sensing what the general opinion of the community was. So before the trial even began he sensed that the community was on his side, right? (right) The sheriff was you know let them go out or let them leave the police station (Oh, yea, right) and consult out on the steps of the police station, right? (right) And so on these little things, these were little things that helped him decide to take the case. And then he made sure that Laura dressed properly, right? (Oh, yeah) There's that, some of that...

It's 1950s small-town...

Chauvinism, whatever...

Oh, yea, that would've influenced the jury definitely in those days, you know? (yeah) "Make sure you were a girde", you know, "in court wear a nice suit and don't wear sunglasses. Wear regular glasses so they can see that you're not hiding anything and you know but it was sort of funny at one point when the prosecutor says, well some referring to that she's actually good-looking woman, I forget how it came up but then Paul Biegler says, "well, of course she's a good-looking woman. Stand up Laura!" And this is in the film as well as in the book, stands up, "take off your hat and take off your glasses" and stands up and you can hear the little rumbling in the courtroom home, "oh, oh". (Yeah) Oh, yea, that was a great one, but yeah...

Yeah, they made her out to be somewhat, I don't know, a little slutty? Maybe? For that time, for the 50s (right), a libertine so to speak, but I don't know.

Yeah, it was definitely...

So, she had to you know not wear tight sweaters or (right) that sort of thing.

Yeah, oh, yea, you know when they were testifying, "and, oh, she even took her shoes off in the bar when she was playing pinball."

And I was like, "oh, no, (oh, man) took off her shoes, I can't imagine."

But then again at the same they had put up they were trying to put up some guy to give false testimony saying that he was had been dancing with her and that he had put her shoes (yeah, Hippo, yeah) in his back pocket, Hippo, yeah.

Hippo had the shoes, but they never put hippo on the stand, (no) the prosecution never did, that was something... of course she refused or she denied that she had worn the or taken off or danced with him, that's right, (right) or that he had taken her shoes, that was another one that she (oh, yeah) he had actually had her shoes in his pocket (right) or something like that...

Yeah, in his back pocket was, yeah, they were going to say, yeah, that's well yeah and that was one false testimony that the defense, I mean, that the prosecutor was willing to put up there and then you had the prisoner in the next cell testify to get presumably to get his case lowered or to have the DA go easy on his case where he was saying that Lieutenant Manion said, "why, these set corncobbers, I'm just going to tell the jury that I was crazy and they're going to let me off, and they're just a bunch of country bumpkins or something like that, I can't remember exactly. (yeah) That was a good moment in both the book and the film when that was pretty much debunked when they went through all the guy's police record, you know, like an arm's length long and then, you know, it was actually worse I think for the prosecution than better, that's for sure.

Yeah, he had committed perjury, he had committed several, several times he had committed arson, I think.

I think arson was what he was up for when they had him that time, yeah.

I mean, it's a crazy tactic, I don't know, how can you put somebody like that on the stand, I think (yeah) the jury, even the jury at this point because throughout the trial Paul Biegler had been making this guy look like a bit of bully, right? (right) or a bit, yeah, he's like being really unfair by hiding, well what did the judge say at the end? The judge said that this was like the best prosecution he'd ever seen (huh, yeah) or something like that, because it was both a defense and a prosecution of (Oh, yeah) the victim.

Yeah, right, it was...

He had prosecuted him for rape (correct) during the trial and basically convicted him in the minds of the jurors, right? (Right) That's why, I mean, there's no reason for the jury to declare him "not guilty" and that fact ... yeah, and there is the other thing too, is you know, is when he's going the... I think for the time it must've been something, not the typical type of movie they watched, was the guy the defense attorney, when he's deciding to take this case, he doesn't care that the guy's actually guilty of murder. (right) Okay, there is that legal thing, but there's the moral thing, so he's thinking one of things there is. one of the things he's, they point out is that there's no such thing as what is it? the law of the land or (the unwritten law) the unwritten law, that's it. The unwritten law is that hey if somebody rapes your wife, well, you're free to run over and you know, kill him, right? (right) That would be anybody could understand that, right? (Sure) And, well, nope! He says but according to the law, but he has no problem, he himself has no problem justifying defending this guy, right? (Yeah) He goes through the trouble of asking Sulo what he thought. Sulo was ... (the jailer, the deputy or something yeah) He said, "what do you think? Is this guy guilty or innocent or what?" And the guy thought well innocent, he's innocent so that's when he was fishing around in the community to see what they thought (right) and when they supported it I guess he supported you know 'cause the whole time he's worried about votes too, right? (right) because he wants to get elected to congress. (Oh, yeah yeah absolutely) He's always saying, like "Oh, that's one less vote for me and that's one less vote or one more vote for me or that sort of thing (right) when people walk out angry..."

Exactly. Yeah it's just it's the book and the movie is just an exercise in ambiguity. I don't know if you noticed in the book it was a little more clear that she probably that she got raped, that it wasn't Lieutenant Manion who had, you know, beaten her up, (right) that in the book there were actually screams heard by several of the people in the trailer park and that pretty much vindicated her there,

but again it's still so ambiguous because well what was she doing in the first place with this guy even though she said that he had scared her into believing the bears were out there and that he'd be better off driving her rather than she walking, but who's to say, you know, just from her whole deportment, I guess, when she was in the beginning just talking with Paul Biegler in his office, you know, when she first met him, you know, she just looked at Paul, she said, "hi, oh your tall", you know just, her movement and body language...

Yeah, in the movie, right? Not in the book. Was it in the book too? It wasn't in the book. I don't think she came on as hard or, you know, as hotly . . .

Well, that was in the movie. Yeah, it was it was more, it was spicier in the movie. The movie was like oh man, this girl really wants something, you know.

Oh, yeah, absolutely.

But I didn't get the impression, I didn't get that impression from the book.

Not as much. It was stronger in the movie.

Maybe in those days putting your hand on somebody's shoulder or on their hand was interpreted differently, you know.

Hm ...

I didn't see it.

Yeah.

Well, in the movie it was perfectly clear.

I think that was in the book too, where she puts her hand on his hand and saying something, "well do you want any problems, because your husband can see us from up (right). I think it was both in the book and the movie.

Yeah, because he was jealous basically.

Yeah.

I mean. The whole irresistible impulse thing is a joke, (yeah) really. I think well yeah he had an irresistible impulse (right), but I don't know, somehow it seems like a joke.

I know, because where do you draw the line? What is irresistible and what is resistible?

Well, I think they make the point that, ok, this little thing allowed the jury to save face, right? (right)

Besides the fact that it was in the state of Michigan at that time apparently it was on the books, right?

(Yeah) It was a process that you could... but on top of that, I mean the jury has to do... this is another thing I found interesting, I didn't know, is the jury has, gets these instructions, very very clear instructions (right) about how to approach what they do when you know the trial's over and they go back into this back room and decide whether or not this person's guilty and guilty of what, right?

(right) And if they don't get these instructions to free this guy, if he's, you know, if he's temporarily insane, has got this irresistible urge or impulse, then they can still declare him not guilty, but they lose face. (Yeah, right, yeah) He talks about people needing to, you know, not lose face in the community, right?

Right. Yeah, I mean they had to follow the instructions really closely. I think you know, if you think this, then this. If not, then no. Although, and then, as you say, the other option would be just simply flat-out not guilty and they couldn't do that.

Yeah, they couldn't've done that without ...so that's what he was saying in the beginning, when he was talking to his client to begin with, is that "we have to find some way, I mean, your guilty of murder. Now we've got to find some way of getting the jury to let you off the hook, right? (right right) And in the movie, I mean it's, I didn't like it as much I have to tell you, I think it does have you know the general feeling and all that, but I read the book first and then I went to watch the movie and it's like different, you know?

Well, I don't know . . .

It's just confusing. It's just like, what the heck? And it's like you know what takes place in the book, you know, over a period of four pages, it's handled in two sentences or skipped over entirely.

Yeah yeah right, the original movie, before they cut it, they had to cut it, it was four hours.

Oh, really?

And I wish and I don't...

I would like to see that.

Yeah, I'd put it into a miniseries or something, but yeah and then they just had to cut it, 'cause it runs two hours and something as it is, which is pretty long. But yeah they couldn't get it all in, but John Voelker, I've got the paper here now, Robert Trevor, his real name is John Volker, but he had written to somebody a friend of his and he says, "I'm delighted that you like the movie. It is heresy for a writer to say so I gather, but I am in love with it. It has faithfully captured the spirit of my book." Well that's what he says. But I don't know, to me it does, but again it's certainly the abbreviated version after reading the book, definitely.

Yes, it's got it, it's got the spirit, and just like you said. Things are in it, happen in a different order, different people say them, say some of the lines (right) and like I think Laura should've had, you know. She should've looked rougher, you know, two black eyes. (yeah) She had, you know, a little discoloration under her eyes, a little bit, you know, it's come on! so I think that they had to go easy on that because of the audience, right?

Yeah, that could very well be, yeah.

And the viewers and so on. So...

I guess the original case this guy was in, his name was Barney Quill, the real one the book is based on, his name was Maurice Chenoweth I think, and the other guy was Lieutenant Peterson, his wife's name was Charlotte and I've seen pictures of her, maybe you have too, and she's older she's like she was like 41, and a good very good-looking woman but older and I guess the Lieutenant was five years younger or something like that. So it's a little different when you talk about the real case, you know, but . . .

Yeah, and I read that they got divorced.

Yeah, shortly after.

...after shortly after that I guess. (yeah) They were just putting on an act...

Sure.

... really. So, you have to wonder what really happened, you know.

Yeah, you just...

Maybe, she had had, I mean, for real, she really did have a relationship with this, what was the victim's name again?

Barney Quill.

Barney Quill, that's it.

Yeah, that could very well be. You just don't know, and maybe something maybe they wouldn't go or she'd never gone that far with him, something went awry, who knows? But, yeah, it's definitely.

In the movie she had to swear on a rosary or something like that.

Yeah, swear on a rosary, of course she also took ...

She was a Catholic, right?

Yeah, and she took a lie detector test. That was sort of funny how Biegler squeezed that in or slipped that into the testimony, you know, not...

"I'm not asking him what the results of the test were..."

"I'm not asking what the results were, I'm just asking him if after he heard the results, he felt that he believed her, right?" (Right) It was pretty good.

Yeah, there is a some really I mean the whole book is just so well done, every aspect of it. There is like I can't find any weaknesses with it. I think it's fantastic... Oh, yeah, It's great! I think by today's standards people maybe don't have the patience to go through it, but it's a lot of detail because, well there's a lot of detail. because that's how a former DA sees it. That's how things are. I thought it was fine, but I could see where people want something maybe less detailed, I don't know. It's a fine book.

I mean to me, with the book and the movie, it's one of those rare cases that one just to me just complements the other so well and then of course we didn't even mention the soundtrack, the Duke Ellington soundtrack. Yeah, oh yeah.

Oh my God.

Of course, you don't hear Duke Ellington at all during the trial. That would've been too much. That would've just taken away from...

No, and the acting was...

You didn't need it, yeah.

James Stewart, George C. Scott, (yeah) some of his delivery there was just... the timing was just perfect.

Oh, absolutely, yeah. And I guess he was very if you look tense at moments, he didn't get along too well with Otto Preminger apparently, from what I read, so there is (oh, really?) probably some authentic tension there perhaps, but no he did his job and a very good job and Preminger was happy afterwards but there was friction there, yeah.

That's surprising.

But otherwise, Preminger had a reputation for having well conflicts with his actors but in this case from what I've read everything was fine except a little bit of tension with George C Scott but other than that, it was really good. It worked very smoothly. The again to the music is for the exteriors and it just fits so well, to the point were now I listen to that the recording of the whole soundtrack and I can just see bits of the movie. It just evokes it, brings it right up. But it's a fine piece of work. It's great to see Duke Ellington actually in the film playing pie.

Yeah, at one point they're sitting down together at the piano, James Stewart and him.

At the Mount Shasta Inn. It's right up not too far away.

That's where Laura, while her husband was in prison, was out dancing with some other soldiers, having a good old time.

And tipsy as all get out.

She had a buzz going and he pulled her out of there and he said, "you go home, you behave yourself from now on, honey, darling."

Oh, yeah, sure.

Something like that. "And you're going to wear a girdle whether you like it or not." That's it.

The good thing about the exteriors were there is shooting, the where the murder took place, when they're in the bar and in from the very beginning when Laura Manion calls and she's in the bar and she's got the little dog next to her, that's the actual bar where the murder took place, you know, (yeah, that's amazing) but they for the exterior is not a good particularly good-looking place for outside shots, they up the road, they went up the road a mile or two to another place called the Thunder Bay Inn, it was the Bay Inn or something like that, and they changed it to thunder Bay Inn for the movie and Preminger had a whole new front built on to that just so they could use it to show the people walking up to the bar and then as soon as they opened the door and went into the bar, they'd have to go and take the whole crew down to the other bar and film inside the old bar, so it's was really kind of crazy, but just to get the feel of the place and get the, you know, the atmosphere of the exteriors the lake in the background, Lake Superior, and all that. They really went to great lengths to get it right.

Yeah, the color photos. It still looks the same, right?

Yeah, yeah.

Is that mahogany? That would? It's like the entire bar is mahogany? Like the counter, the walls, everything?

The Mount Shasta, I think they're logs, I think. I don't know, maybe mahogany, I don't know what kind of wood, but yeah it's all pretty much preserved. It's quite the place!

And it's like a tourist attraction even.

Yeah.

They've still got, 50, 60 nearly 70 years later? They've still got pictures up on the walls, right? Of James Stewart . . .

Right, yeah, in the back of both bars, yeah.

A painting on the floor of a body of ...

Yeah, the outline of the body where the body fell.

The outline of the body, but like the one that's on the cover of the poster, of the movie poster.

Yeah the Saul Bass drawing of the body yeah, which is a great, just another just a great illustration of you know just the anatomy of the American legal system, you know. How do you, where do you put the pieces and how do you put it all together for the jury? Yeah, it's really brilliant! little tidbits to enjoy

know when reading or seeing the film or listening to the music or whatever but, yeah.  
That's it. Thank you for listening. My name's Steven Starry ...  
and I'm Bill Christison and thanks for listening.  
Bye-bye.  
Bye.