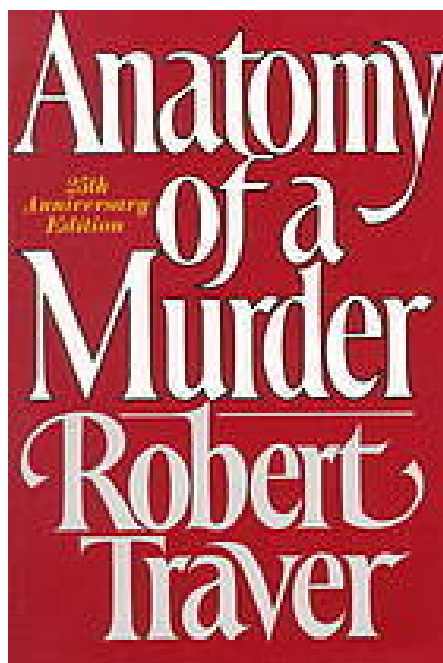




## **Anatomy of a Murder**

*Robert Traver*

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# Anatomy of a Murder

*Robert Traver*

**Anatomy of a Murder** Robert Traver

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First published by St. Martin's in 1958, Robert Traver's *Anatomy of a Murder* immediately became the number-one bestseller in America, and was subsequently turned into the successful and now classic Otto Preminger film. It is not only the most popular courtroom drama in American fiction, but one of the most popular novels of our time.

A gripping tale of deceit, murder, and a sensational trial, *Anatomy of a Murder* is unmatched in the authenticity of its settings, events, and characters. This new edition should delight both loyal fans of the past and an entire new generation of readers.

## Anatomy of a Murder Details

Date : Published March 15th 1983 by St. Martin's Press (first published 1958)

ISBN : 9780312033569

Author : Robert Traver

Format : Paperback 437 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Crime, Classics, Law, Thriller

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## From Reader Review Anatomy of a Murder for online ebook

### Carl says

#### A classic

I had heard of this novel most of my life, and I finally decided to see what all the fuss was about back in its day. I was fascinated by the approach it took to a murder, knowing guilt at the outset, then truly hoping that innocence by means of insanity would be proven. We learn a lot about human nature, especially our own, by the time we reach the end. Equally fascinating is to compare that time, 50 years ago, to today. Maybe it's best I waited so long.

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### Judy says

At #2 on the 1958 bestseller list is this story of a murder and trial, set in a small town in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The legal thriller has become a staple in current fiction but was a fairly new genre in the 1950s. *Compulsion*, a 1957 bestseller by Meyer Levin was the beginning, but Levin had a journalism background while Robert Traver had been a practicing lawyer and judge.

The writing is clunky and wordy but Traver goes quite extensively into all aspects of preparing a case, selecting a jury, and the differences between the approach of a prosecuting attorney versus a defense attorney. He also manages to make what I consider a dry subject interesting.

The murderer confessed to his crime and turned himself in on the night of the murder, so our hero, former DA Paul Beigler, plans his defense around a variation of the insanity plea. The reader gets instructed along with the judge and jury, on the workings of such a plea.

Because of some intriguing side stories about the murderer, his wife and the victim; because a rape preceded the murder; because the setting is integral to the plot, it was all in all a satisfying read. I could see the "surprise" ending coming but the tension of the trial was good and taut.

An Otto Preminger movie from 1959 with James Stewart and Lee Remick features Duke Ellington as the piano player in the bar and includes some of his tunes.

Another piece of the puzzle regarding fiction in America falls into place for me.

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### Lesley says

Thanks to a facebook friend for recommending I read this book for my read 50 books from 50states challenge. This book takes place in MICHIGAN! and I heard it is loosely based on real events.

Well I will say for a book written in the 1950's this was a topic I did not expect to be, and then I found out it was a very popular book and made into a movie.

A crime of rape and murder that is brought to a sensational trial. Most of the book is about the prep work for

the trial and then the trial. Hey courtroom drama has not changed much in all these years.!

This was a very satisfying read

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### **Barry Bridges says**

This book really does not need another review but I must comment on the linguistic structure. Traver delivers straightforward literature; articulate, intelligent and expecting the same of his reader. His structures are immaculate, his word choice superb. The dry humor of his character delivers chuckle after chuckle. This book bumps into my top ten. Highly recommended as a stretch for younger readers - a challenge to read, with a dictionary close by. This is the kind of entertainment that is difficult to come by - enjoyable while raising the standard of expectations.

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### **Angela says**

I got this hardcover 1958 edition for free from the library today! It's so gorgeous! It makes my old soul happy, but my already large TBR very unhappy.

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### **Mary says**

I have mixed feelings about this book. It started out feeling overly stuffed with colorful similes and analogies at the expense of the story but once I got to the courtroom scenes the tension pulled me along. It is clear that the author understands the law and how a trial works. The descriptions of the trial are detailed and could have been tedious but are not. It is a good story with some interesting wrinkles but I don't think I would choose this author again. (I bet the movie is good though.)

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### **Devin says**

I randomly picked this up off my grandparent's bookshelf of leather-bound Franklin books. I have to say that not only did I thoroughly enjoy the well written story, but I learned more about our legal system than in both my high school and college civics classes combined. This will absolutely be a re-read!

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### **Steven Starry says**

I'd give this book 6 stars if I could. I haven't read many books in this genre other than To Kill a Mockingbird, but if they're all as good as Robert Traver's, I'll be reading more of them soon. The author's personal experiences as both a prosecutor and defense attorney lend it an undeniable air of authenticity. Simply excellent! My question now is, "Amazon/Audible, where's the audiobook version?" I would love to have listened to it.

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## Tracey says

I can't believe I've never seen this book's movie; I love James Stewart. But at least this way I had no idea what was going to happen next in the book; that was nice. And, funnily enough, I still had the odd little perk of being able to hear Jimmy's voice in my head for a lot of the lines. (Oh, and Lee Remick is perfect as Laura Manion.) I have a \*cough\* irresistible impulse to rent the movie. Soon. (Actually, the dvd might be in my mailbox now; I just can't get to it because of ALL THE SNOW.)

This is a book that requires the right mindset. 21st century feminist prickliness has to be firmly suppressed; all the tv and movie images of young and zealous lawyers working flat out eighteen hours a day to get their clients acquitted have to be put aside. The other images from popular media, though, the ones of lawyers seizing on any slender possibility that could remotely work in their favor? Those can stay.

Well, no, the second par of that's not fair; once it gets going, everyone begins putting in those eighteen+-hour days and falling asleep at their desks. It's only in the very beginning that the main character keeps sloping off to go fishing.

None of which is to say this isn't a terrifically fun book. It had to be made into a movie; every page screams it. It is so very late 50's, from the dialogue pattering as easy and funny and sharp as a Gene Kelly – Donald O'Connor dance routine, to Laura Manion's tight sweaters, to the big old chrome-and-fins cars you just know everyone's driving. And, of course, former DA Paul Biegler (Jimmy Stewart) (well, not in the book, except in my head) said it himself: "The case has everything. Rape, murder. Even a little dog." It's a fictionalized account of an actual trial, "written by Michigan Supreme Court Justice John D. Voelker under the pen name Robert Traver. Voelker based the novel on a 1952 murder case in which he was the defense attorney." (< Wikipedia)

It looks so simple at the beginning: When his wife Laura woke him up and to tell him she had been beaten and raped, Army Lieutenant Frederick Manion picked up his loaded Luger went out and shot the man she said did it, bartender Barney Quill. It's pretty straightforward; Laura has been and continues to be courageously open about the assault, and her husband (Manny) quite matter-of-fact about the shooting. The underlying idea is *What husband worth his salt wouldn't kill the man who did that to his wife?* Problem is, while perfectly human and understandable, it was still murder, and Manny's been in jail ever since, trial pending.

Former DA Paul Biegler is pulled away from his fishing to consider taking the case for the defense. He needs a case; he's not the only defense attorney in his small Michigan town, and the other one's flashier; his secretary, Maida (the perfect 50's secretary, sassy and efficient both), would like to be paid her salary, thank you. So he puts down his fishing rod and goes to the jail, and finds it a tough call: the Manions have no money. And it seems like it could be a tough sell: Laura is very frank (too frank) about Manny's jealousy, and however much empathy there can be for a man going after someone who raped his wife, within the strict letter of the law it simply was not justifiable homicide. It was revenge. Unless... Biegler's got a few tricks up his sleeve, and his old buddy Parnell has more up both of his, and between them – and some surprising items turned up as they look into the details of the case – they're ready to put up a fight to get the Lieutenant free.

I tend to doubt very many writers nowadays would quite have the gall to use phrases like Traver does. A "blouseful" indeed. And the handling of the rape and the discussion of it is ... interesting, a blend of euphemism and clinical directness from everyone concerned, with almost no emotion whatsoever. The prosecution – trying to set the victim in as positive a light as possible – has no problem dismissing the rape as either irrelevant or imaginary, whichever's more convenient, and to tarnish her reputation in any way possible; the defense is concerned that Laura's beauty might tell against them, but otherwise is determined to stick her on the stand come what may. Her own reactions are the only real weak point of the book, perhaps

excusable by the male first person point of view: clueless. I'd be curious to see a more impersonal viewpoint of Laura's testimony, if such a thing were possible, because if she really did exhibit the level of sang-froid that she seems to in the book, she was a stunningly tough – or toughened – woman.

That being said – and being allowed to take off an invisible half star from the rating (so on LibraryThing it's 4.5) – I enjoyed the hell out of this book. The film version was directed and produced by Otto Preminger, but – rape aside – I could easily see this as a Capra film. The blurring of right and wrong – who's lying? And why? What exactly is the truth, and should this man be allowed out of jail? – side by side with the sort of fervent idealism Jimmy Stewart should have had a patent on ... again, whoever was at the helm, it's the perfect 50's movie. In a book.

Because Jimmy Stewart plays our hero in the movie, there may be little doubt going in as to how the case will turn out – but it's not that simple. It's a pitched battle, this trial, a bare-knuckle no-holds-barred brawl in which just about anything goes as long as you word it right. I've never seen or read a better revelation of the nuts and bolts of the US trial system – the mechanics of getting people to say – on and off the stand – what you as either the defense or the prosecutor need them to say, without letting out details that tip things to the other side. The head-to-head expert witnesses, the careful manipulation of the witnesses and the jury, the role of the judge and the use and formation of precedent – so that's what draws some people to the law. It has to be exhilarating. And it all comes down to a nail-biter, complete with a last-minute curveball and an epilogue that will leave you blinking.

Characterization is vivid and colorful - and so is the setting. Dialogue is natural; supernatural, actually, in its wittiness and quickness - this is the way I wish I could talk (except less chauvinistic). And the story is gripping. It's terrific.

Side note: I find this other comment from the Wikipedia entry for the movie nauseatingly unsettling: "The Lumberjack Tavern is still in existence today. The murder scene body outline is still there, although it is possibly a restoration and not the original outline." There's a picture, captioned "where the body fell":

Seriously? (And Barney actually died behind the bar, at least in the book - but that wouldn't be as much ... fun, I guess.)

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## **Corey says**

The book is not always better than the movie. In this case the Jimmy Stewart movie made from this is a distillation of the best of the novel, or put another way, the book is like a deeper immersion into the film. The movie is five stars; the book maybe only 3 1/2, because of some dull passages. Still, well worth reading.

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## **Debbie Maskus says**

Of course, I have seen the movie version with Jimmy Stewart, and will now need to revisit the movie. I thoroughly enjoyed this book by Robert Traver. The story vibrates with life and images. Laura Manion throbs with sexuality and her husband, Frederic Manion, simmers with jealousy. Paul Biegler, alias Polly, relishes spending all waking hours fishing, until he decides to defend Frederic Manion on a charge of murder. The story centers on the trial preparation and the trial. One of my favorite quotations is, "The notorious undependability of juries, the chance involved, is one of the absorbing features of the law. That's

what makes the practice of law, like prostitution, one of the last of the unpredictable professions-both employ the seductive arts, both try to display their wares to the best advantage, and both must pretend enthusiastically to woo total strangers." This, in essence, sums up the following trial of Frederic Manion. Traver displays vivid imagery, setting and characters. This is not your afternoon book, this is a book that will need to be read slowly and savored.

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## Jeff Mayo says

Author Robert Traver is the pen name for Michigan Supreme Court Justice, and avid fly fisherman, John D. Voelker. His protagonist, Paul Biegler, is a former prosecutor in private practice who spends much of his time fly fishing. A woman is raped. Her husband, and army lieutenant, gets a gun, goes to the bar owned by the rapist, and shoots and kills him. He then waits for the police. His wife hires Biegler to defend him. Using a temporary insanity defense, the case does not go well at first. The prosecution is able to march witness after witness to the stand to attest to the fact that Lt. Manion was known to abuse his wife and Mrs. Manion was known to be promiscuous. But bar owning rapist Barney Quill had plenty of secrets of his own that come out. In the end the jury finds Manion innocent by reason of temporary insanity. Manion and his wife skip town without paying Biegler for his services. Well written but at times a bit too much legal talk for the average reader. All in all it is a good novel worth the read but not great, meaning you won't need to read it more than once.

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## Daniel Villines says

Of the many constructs that have been invented by mankind to keep society whole, I see the invention of law as being the most important. It may have started with ancient chiefs and kings dictating their personal, passionate, and biased desires for justice. From there, councils took form, which somewhat normalized its application. And finally, the law became what it is today: words on paper that intend rule society with reason. As with every evolutionary process, there were diversions along the way, but in comparing where we are to where we once were, we have achieved a path of improvement.

*Anatomy of a Murder* is a novel that lives within the construct of law. The book makes no mystery of the killing that takes place. The killer is known and confesses in the opening pages. From there, the plot takes its reader through a passionate search for truth while guided by the law. Evidence is sought and amassed and the story unfolds.

*Anatomy of a Murder* then becomes a book about that evolved ritual of the law known as the trial. The trial phase puts the reader in the courtroom, practically as one of the jurors. Whiteness are questioned and both sides are strategic and convincing in their arguments. The process is guided by a judge, who's sole responsibility is to place the law above any human passion present in the courtroom. At the end of arguments, the case is sent to the jury with all possible outcomes in their charge as well as floating in the mind of the reader. The ordeal is a human process, but one that is governed by the rule of law.

I decided to read *Anatomy of a Murder* because it was recommended as being the book I just described. Additionally, it was not a part of a series. In fact, Robert Traver seems to have written more books on fishing than he has about law. The result is a book that stands alone. And it's also a book that will be relished if you are like me and think that the trial part of every *Law & Order* episode is far better than the initial investigation.

## DeAnna Knippling says

The best sort of courtroom drama, in which you feel a real trial is going on and yet are still gripped. Not a masterpiece, but definitely entertaining drama. It did annoy me about all the loose threads at the ending, but I can see where it could also leave people with pleasant arguments to take on afterwards--What about Mary indeed.

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## Christopher says

This is a wonderful courtroom thriller that set the stage for an entire genre of books in the past fifty years since its first publication. Most of you will probably recognize this book from the famous 1959 movie of the same title, inspired by the book, directed by Otto Preminger, and starring Jimmy Stewart as defense attorney Paul Biegler and George C. Scott as the prosecuting attorney Claude Dancer. For the most part, the plot remains the same from the movie: a bartender allegedly rapes an army lieutenant's wife and the lieutenant shoots the bartender/alleged rapist. Then the book and the movie deviate from there, sometimes for good, sometimes for bad. I won't go into detail about the plot in the book (I leave that for you to discover), but the best thing the book does is that it gives Parnell McCarthy, Biegler's drunken partner, a larger role in the case and Traver, harking on his experience as an attorney and a Michigan Supreme Court judge, goes more deeply in to the legal issues surrounding the case, which is interesting for those who have an penchant for legal verbiage. Where it falters (and probably why Traver had such a hard time finding a publisher) is that sometimes the book also tends to go into the legal minutiae of court proceedings, which makes the narrative sluggish at times. The judge's instruction to the jury before they go into deliberations at the end of the novel is an exercise in excruciating patience. There are other changes in the plot that make the novel less dramatic than the movie, but I'll let you read the book and watch the movie and find out for yourself.

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## Stephen says

A woman is raped at the gates of her neighborhood, but her cries for help register too late. By the time her husband, one Lieutenant Frederic Manion of the US Army, realizes what has transpired, the rapist has fled for the safety of the local bar...a bar which he owns. Undeterred, the Lieutenant enters the bar, calmly empties his Luger pistol into the man's chest, and leaves to deliver himself into the hands of the closest deputy-sheriff. Paul Biegler is a former prosecuting attorney with congressional ambitions and a struggling practice. While Biegler is a potent lawyer, a more bombastic rival in town attracts most of the criminal defense work. A call from Manion seems like a dread godsend: while a victory could establish and spread his reputation, a defeat might make him a laughingstock. The prosecuting attorney is a man who has already defeated Biegler once at the polls, and who has an eye on the same congressional seat as Biegler. This seems like a simple case: a decorated war hero killed the man who raped his wife. But it isn't enough that a jury might sympathize with Manion morally: how can he be defended legally?

The American Bar Association includes the dramatization of this book on their list of "25 Greatest Legal Movies", and that list drew my attention to the book in the first place. While I've been reading legal thrillers by John Grisham for the last fifteen years, I'd never heard of this 1950s-era novel. Despite the dramatic start, Anatomy isn't a 'thriller'; it strikes me as a more mature novel. The author was a practicing attorney and a judge, and wrote the novel based on one of his own cases. The judge's lifetime of experience is on full

display here, talking with the reader through Biegler's conversations with Manion and others about the nature of law itself: its uses, its shortcomings. Anatomy is thus a philosophical novel, and I for one found the musing just as provocative as any nonfiction read. The trial remains an interesting mystery throughout, as there proves to be more to the story than a hotel owner deciding to attack Mrs. Manion. Traver (John D. Voelker's pen-name)'s best talent lies with dialogue. The aforementioned philosophical conversations are fascinating, of course, but the on-going banter between Biegler and his law partner never failed to delight. In short, Anatomy of a Murder is a richer legal novel than any I've read, and I wish my library carried more by the author. I also intend on watching the movie, but that's a given considering it stars James Stewart.

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### **Stacielynn says**

one of the first courtroom procedural dramas. read it because it was one of the top 10 best sellers of 1958. it was really long and sometimes a little long-winded, but it was ground-breaking for a few reasons: it was a courtroom procedural, it addressed rape in a straight-forward manner; and it used the insanity defense.

in an era when everyone has seen a billion tv shows or movies about the legal system, some of the explanation and background in this book may feel cumbersome, but when it was written the process was not so commonly understood.

the perspective that a woman who is attractive and not with a man is looking for trouble was swiftly and effectively discussed.

the concept of insanity as a defense was explored and its pitfalls illustrated.

some of our book group members watched the movie instead of reading the book and the general consensus was that the book addressed the above issues more openly and effectively, while the movie was more inclined to accept popular opinion at the time (1959).

can't say the writing was especially good. or that the character development was thorough, but it was a page-turner that kept me reading to see what would happen next.

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### **Hilary says**

It was interesting, and definitely edgy for 1958, but it was written in this pedantic, good old boys, kind of style that drive me mad. If you like courtroom drama, AND you don't mind a man's man type style... and you're not too hung up on getting to the story quickly, this will be a great book to read. If any of those things annoy you, stay away.

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### **Lysistrata says**

I'm so glad I'm studying law at the time when the discovery process exists.

Proper review to come eventually.

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## Sandra Stiles says

John D. voelker was a Michigan Supreme Court Justice. He wrote Anatomy of a Murder based on a 1952 murder case, under the pen name of Robert Traver.

In this novel Paul Biegler is a lawyer who was formerly the prosecuting attorney. He takes on the case of an army lieutenant name Frederic Manion. He has been charged with shooting a bartender who his wife said raped her. Manion returns to the park after the murder and gives his gun to the park attendant and waits for the police.

The problem is, how do you defend a man who commits a murder in front of a bar full of witnesses and then admits he did it to the police? I had put off reading this book eventhough it was for a reading challenge because I didn't believe I would enjoy it. After all it was published in 1958, the year I was born. I was definately wrong. I felt like I was sitting in the courtroom watching this case. I was even more thrilled to learn that it was made into a movie many years ago. I now must try to find it and watch it. I definately recommend it and recommend that we not judge books before our time because we "think" we might not like it.

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