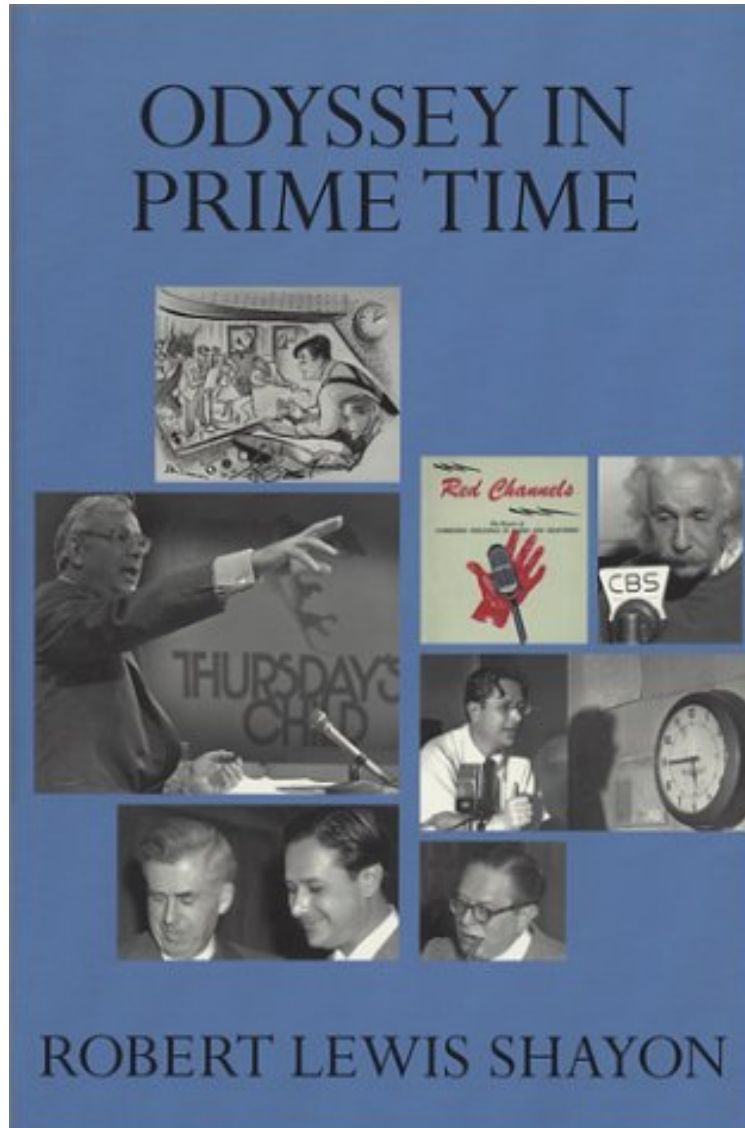


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Odyssey in Prime Time

Robert Lewis Shayon

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Robert Lewis Shayon : Odyssey in Prime Time before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Odyssey in Prime Time:

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A Media Knight's Tale: "You Are There."By Dr. Harvey W. LiebergottWhen one of my daughters was choosing her college major, she had a memorable insight. "Students' lack of interest in the hard sciences may be attributable to their limited experience with them in high school. We think we know what historians do,or writers do, but we do not get enough high school math, or chemistry, or physics to imagine a life in those professions." I think that that observation accounts for the high number of people who fall into the

"family business." Disproportionately, children of actors become actors, children of lawyers, become lawyers, children of physicians become physicians. The next cut would be friends of children of actors, lawyers, physicians, etc., who have had an opportunity to see into those lives. In *ODYSSEY IN PRIME TIME*, Robert Lewis Shayon takes his readers into his life in media. Shayon reminds me of Henry Adams and the Zen master and scholar, D.T. Suzuki, not because their demeanors and personalities are alike, though that may be true, but because they are insightful witnesses of seismic changes in civilization. Adams lived well into the 20th century, but looked back through his grandfather to the 18th. Suzuki was born in Japan, about 1870, and lived to the middle 1960s, i.e., from ox cart to jet. He saw himself as a bridge between East and West, but he was also a bridge between then and now. Shayon was born about the same time as radio, and has been intimately involved in every aspect of electronic and print media in the 20th century: writer, producer, director, critic, professor. I have known Shayon for more than 30 years, and I have had the pleasure of working with him. That gave me pause, when I thought about writing a review, but I realized quickly that everyone of a certain age and experience knows Shayon. Besides, I knew his work first. That was what drew me to him. I was disappointed in the first 50 or 60 pages. It seemed to move too quickly, like a television biography that has to cover a century in an hour. But I realized that I had a double agenda. I was at least as interested in what had formed Shayon's character. Born into a poor and dysfunctional family, he "sprang," like the Great Gatsby, "from his platonic conception of himself:" a loving, polished, intellectual, family man, who drinks tea at four o'clock. Shayon is less interested in his own life story. For the most part, he shows us only the aspects of his life that relate to the development of radio and television. But the book grows more detailed, as radio and television and Shayon become more important. And I could not put it down, from the end of the Great Depression through the war years and the attacks of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, to his time at the Annenberg School of the University of Pennsylvania. Over the course of his odyssey, Shayon sums up the story of communications. Radio comes of age with great potential to inform and educate and elevate the public. But advertisers are more interested in maximizing profits. Television has even more potential, and is degraded even faster. And cyberspace offers "virtually" unlimited information and connectivity, but only to those fortunate people who have the means to buy equipment and access. Some of the hottest new majors for today's college students are in communications and the mass media. But most of the students who sign up for that world have no idea of the costs and benefits and obligations of being in it. The difference between success and failure (personal as well as professional) can hinge on a few decisions. And often we have no one to advise us. Shayon is like the father of your best friend, wanting the best for you and from you, telling you objectively about his failures as well as his success, in hopes that you will profit from his experience. That experience was as varied as it was long. As an eminent critic and professor, he influenced and was influenced (he is a champion listener) by almost everyone who mattered. If I were teaching a course in mass communications, I would want my students to read this book. If I cared about anyone thinking of choosing that life, I would send her this book. And I am planning on sending my present copy to my eighty-five year old parents, who will enjoy reliving its time.

This memoir looks at the development of 20th century media through the experiences of Robert Lewis Shayon who was a player in three areas--as writer-producer-director in early radio television, as an influential media critic of the 1950's and 1960's, and finally as a professor at a leading school of communication. *Odyssey* is of interest to the general reader who wants to understand the communication revolution, its roots and implications for the future.

About the Author Robert Lewis Shayon's media careers have spanned much of the century. He worked in early radio at WOR and CBS in New York, eventually heading the CBS Radio Documentary Unit under Edward R. Murrow. At the height of his career he was blacklisted and unable to continue in radio. He turned to a new avenue of expression as TV-Radio critic at Saturday magazine. In 1964 he joined the graduate faculty of The Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. He sees cyberspace as the dominating media of the future.