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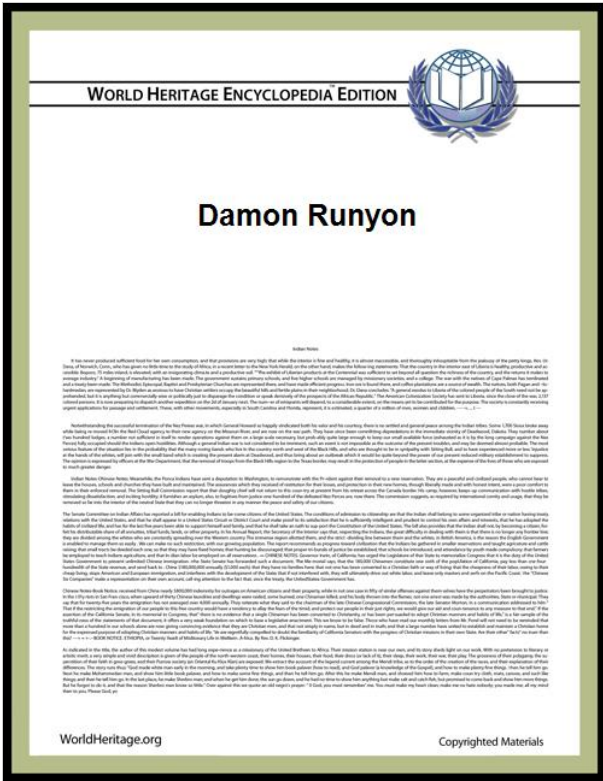
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DAMON RUNYON

Damon Runyon



Born Alfred Damon Runyan
October 4, 1880
Manhattan, Kansas

Died December 10, 1946 (aged 66)
New York City

Occupation Writer

Nationality **American**

Alfred Damon Runyon (October 4, 1880^{[1][2]} – December 10, 1946) was an American newspaperman and author.^[3]

He was best known for his short stories celebrating the world of Broadway in New York City that grew out of the Prohibition era. To New Yorkers of his generation, a "Damon Runyon character" evoked a distinctive social type from the Brooklyn or Midtown demi-monde. The adjective "Runyonesque" refers to this type of character as well as to the type of situations and dialog that Runyon depicted.^[4] He spun humorous and sentimental tales of gamblers, hustlers, actors, and gangsters, few of whom go by "square" names, preferring instead colorful monikers such as "Nathan Detroit," "Benny Southstreet," "Big Jule," "Harry the Horse," "Good Time Charley," "Dave the Dude," or "The Seldom Seen Kid." His distinctive vernacular style is known as "Runyonese": a mixture of formal speech and colorful slang, almost always in present tense, and always devoid of contractions. He is credited with coining the phrase "Hooray Henry", a term now used in British English to describe an upper-class, loud-mouthed, arrogant twit.

Runyon's fictional world is also known to the general public through the musical *Guys and Dolls* based on two of his stories, "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown" and "Blood Pressure".^[5] The musical additionally borrows characters and story elements from a few other Runyon stories, most notably "Pick The Winner." The film *Little Miss Marker* (and its two remakes, *Sorrowful Jones* and the 1980 *Little Miss Marker*) grew from his short story of the same name.

Runyon was also a well-known newspaper reporter, covering sports and general news for decades for various publications and syndicates owned by William Randolph Hearst. Already famous for his fiction, he wrote a well-remembered "present tense" article on Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Presidential

inauguration in 1933 for the Universal Service, a Hearst syndicate, which was merged with the co-owned International News Service in 1937.

LIFE AND WORK

Damon Runyon was born **Alfred Damon Runyan** to Alfred Lee and Elizabeth (Damon) Runyan.^[6] His relatives in Manhattan, Kansas included several newspapermen.^[7] His grandfather was a newspaper printer from New Jersey who had relocated to Manhattan, Kansas in 1855, and his father was editor of his own newspaper in the town. In 1882 Runyon's father was forced to sell his newspaper, and the family moved westward. The family eventually settled in Pueblo, Colorado in 1887, where Runyon spent the rest of his youth. By most accounts, he only attended school through the fourth grade.^[8] He began to work in the newspaper trade under his father in Pueblo. In present-day Pueblo, Runyon Field, the Damon Runyon Repertory Theater Company, and Runyon Lake are named in his honor.

In 1898, when still in his early teens, Runyon enlisted in the U.S. Army to fight in the Spanish–American War. While in the service, he was assigned to write for the *Manila Freedom* and *Soldier's Letter*.

After his military service, he worked for various Colorado newspapers, beginning in Pueblo. His first job as a reporter was in September 1900, when he was hired by the *Pueblo Star*;^[9] he then worked in the Rocky Mountain area during the first decade of the 1900s: at the *Denver Daily News*, he served as "sporting editor" (what would today be called "sports editor") and then worked as a staff writer. His expertise was in covering the semi-professional teams in Colorado; he even briefly managed a semi-pro team in Trinidad, CO.^[10] At one of the newspapers where he worked, the spelling of his last name was changed from "Runyan" to "Runyon," a change he let stand.

After a notable failure in trying to organize a Colorado minor baseball league, which lasted less than a week,^[11] Runyon moved to New York City in 1910. In his first New York byline, the *American* editor dropped the "Alfred" and the name "Damon Runyon" appeared for the first time. For the next ten years he covered the New York Giants and professional boxing for the *New York American*.

He was the Hearst newspapers' baseball columnist for many years, beginning in 1911, and his knack for spotting the eccentric and the unusual, on the field or in the stands, is credited with revolutionizing the way baseball was covered. Perhaps as confirmation, Runyon was inducted into the writers' wing (the J. G. Taylor Spink Award) of the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1967. He is also a member of the International Boxing Hall Of Fame and is known for dubbing heavyweight champion James J. Braddock, the "Cinderella Man". Runyon frequently contributed sports poems to the *American* on boxing and baseball themes, and also wrote numerous short stories and essays.

“ If I have all the tears that are shed on Broadway by guys in love, I will have enough salt water to start an opposition ocean to the Atlantic and Pacific, with enough left over to run the Great Salt Lake out of business. But I wish to say I never shed any of these tears personally, because I am never in love, and furthermore, barring a bad break, I never expect to be in love, for the way I look at it love is strictly the old phedinkus, and I tell the little guy as much. ”

from "Tobias the Terrible,"
collected in *More than Somewhat* (1937)

One year, while covering spring training in Texas, he met Pancho Villa in a bar and later accompanied the unsuccessful American expedition into Mexico searching for Villa. It was while he was in Mexico that he met the young girl whom he eventually married.

Gambling, particularly on craps or horse races, was a common theme of Runyon's works, and he was a notorious gambler himself. One of his paraphrases from a well-known line in Ecclesiastes ran: "The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but that's how the smart money bets."

A heavy drinker as a young man, he seems to have quit drinking soon after arriving in New York, after his drinking nearly cost him the courtship of the woman who became his first wife, Ellen Egan. He remained a heavy smoker.

His best friend was mobster accountant Otto Berman, and he incorporated Berman into several of his stories under the alias "Regret, the horse player." When Berman was killed in a hit on Berman's boss, Dutch Schultz, Runyon quickly assumed the role of damage control for his deceased friend, correcting erroneous press releases (including one that stated Berman was one of Schultz's gunmen, to which Runyon replied, "Otto would have been as effective a

bodyguard as a two-year-old.").

Runyon's marriage to Ellen Egan produced two children (Mary and Damon, Jr.), but broke up in 1928 over rumors that Runyon had become infatuated with Patrice Amati del Grande, a Mexican woman he had first met while covering the Pancho Villa raids in 1916 and discovered once again in New York, when she called the *American* seeking him out. Runyon had promised her in Mexico that if she would complete the education he paid for her, he would find her a dancing job in New York. She became his companion after he separated from his wife. After Ellen Runyon died of the effects of her own drinking problems, Runyon and Patrice married; that marriage ended in 1946 when Patrice left Runyon for a younger man.

Runyon died in New York City from throat cancer in late 1946, at age 66. His body was cremated, and his ashes were illegally scattered from a DC-3 airplane over Broadway in Manhattan by Captain Eddie Rickenbacker on December 18, 1946.^[12] The family plot of Damon Runyon is located at Woodlawn Cemetery in The Bronx, New York.

LEGACY

After Runyon's death, his friend and fellow journalist, Walter Winchell, went on his radio program and appealed for contributions to help fight cancer, eventually establishing the Damon Runyon Cancer Memorial Fund to support scientific research into causes of, and prevention of cancer.^[13]

The first ever telethon was hosted by Milton Berle in 1949 to raise funds for the Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation.

Each year the Denver Press Club assigns the Damon Runyon Award to a prominent journalist. Past winners include Bob Costas.^[14]

CONTENTS

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Damon Runyon Elementary school in Littleton, Colorado, is named after him.^[15]

The Damon Runyon Stakes is a thoroughbred horse race run every December atAqueduct Race Track. Runyon loved horse racing and ran a small stable of his own.

In the mid-1930s, Runyon persuaded promoter Leo Seltzer to formally change hisRoller Derby spectacle from a marathon roller-skating race into a full-contact team sport^[16] an innovation that was eventually revived in a DIY spirit seven decades later.

Alice Cooper makes a reference to Damon Runyon in the song, *Department Of Youth* (from his 1975 album, *Welcome To My Nightmare*), in the lyric, "And we've never heard of Billy Sunday Damon Runyon manners or Couth."

One block of West 45th Street (between 8th and 9th Avenues) in Manhattan's Hell's Kitchen is named Runyon's Way.

The house in Manhattan, Kansas, where Runyon was born is listed on theNational Register of Historic Places.^{[7][17]}

In 2008, The Library of America selected "The Eternal Blonde", Runyon's account of a 1927 murder trial, for inclusion in its two-century retrospective of American Crime Writing.

LITERARY STYLE

Frank Muir comments^[18] that Runyon's plots were, in the manner of O. Henry, neatly constructed with professionally wrought endings, but their distinction lay in the manner of their telling, as the author invented a peculiar argot for his characters to speak. Runyon almost totally avoids the past tense (English humourist E.C. Bentley thought there was only one instance, and was willing to "lay plenty of 6 to 5 that it is nothing but a misprint"^[19] but "was" appears in the short stories "The Lily of St Pierre"^[20] and "A Piece of Pie";^[21] "had" appears in "The Lily of St Pierre",^[20] "Undertaker Song"^[22] and "Bloodhounds of Broadway"^[23]), and makes little use of the future tense, using the present for both. He also avoided the conditional, using instead the future indicative in situations that would normally require conditional. An example: "Now most any doll on Broadway will be very glad indeed to have Handsome Jack Madigan give her a tumble." (*Guys and Dolls*, "Social error"). E. C. Bentley^[24] comments that "there is a sort of ungrammatical purity about it [Runyon's resolute avoidance of the past tense], an almost religious exactitude." There is an homage to Runyon that makes use of this peculiarity (*Chronic Offender* by Spider Robinson) which involves a time machine.

He uses many slang terms (which go unexplained in his stories), such as:

pineapple = pineapple grenade

roscoe/john roscoe/the old equalizer/that thing = gun

shiv = knife

noggin = head

snoot = nose

There are many recurring composite phrases such as:

ever-loving wife (occasionally "ever-loving doll")

more than somewhat (or "no little, and quite some"); this phrase was so typical that it was used as the title of one of his short story collections

loathe and despise

one and all

E. C. Bentley notes^[25] that Runyon's "telling use of the recurrent phrase and fixed epithet" demonstrates a debt to Homer.

Runyon's stories also employ occasional rhyming slang, similar to the cockney variety but native to New York (e.g.: "Miss Missouri Martin makes the following crack one night to her: 'Well, I do not see any Simple Simon on your lean and linger.' This is Miss Missouri Martin's way of saying she sees no diamond on Miss Billy Perry's finger." (from "Romance in the Roaring Forties")

The comic effect of his style results partly from the juxtaposition of broad slang with mock-pomposity. Women, when not "dolls", "Judies", "pancakes", "tomatoes", or "broads", may be "characters of a female nature", for example. He typically avoided contractions such as "don't" in the example above, which also contributes significantly to the humorously pompous effect. In one sequence, a gangster tells another character to do as he's told, or else "find another world in which to live."

Runyon's short stories are told in the first person by a protagonist who is never named, and whose role is unclear; he knows many gangsters and does not appear to have a job, but he does not admit to any criminal involvement, and seems to be largely a bystander. He describes himself as "being known to one and all as a guy who is just around".^[26]

LITERARY WORKS

BOOKS

The Tents of Trouble (poems; 1911)

Rhymes of the Firing Line (poems; 1912)

Guys and Dolls (1932)

Damon Runyon's Blue Plate Special (1934)

Money From Home (1935)

More Than Somewhat (1937)

Furthermore (1938)

Take It Easy (1938)

My Wife Ethel (1939)

My Old Man (1939)

The Best of Runyon (1940)

A Slight Case of Murder (play; with Howard Lindsay, 1940)

Damon Runyon Favorites (1942)

Capt. Eddie Rickenbacker (with W. Kiernan, 1942)

Runyon à la Carte (1944)

The Damon Runyon Omnibus (1944)

Short Takes (1946)

In Our Town (1946)

The Three Wise Guys and Other Stories (1946)

Trials and Other Tribulations (1947)

Poems for Men (Poems; 1947)

Runyon First and Last (1949)

Runyon on Broadway (1950; introduction by E. C. Bentley), Constable

More Guys and Dolls (1950)

The Turps (1951)

Damon Runyon from First to Last (1954), Constable

A Treasury of Damon Runyon (1958)

The Bloodhounds of Broadway and Other Stories (1985)

Romance in the Roaring Forties and other stories (1986)

On Broadway (1990)

Guys, Dolls, and Curveballs: Damon Runyon on Baseball (2005; Jim Reisler, editor)

Guys and Dolls and Other Writings (2008; introduction by Pete Hamill)

A Dangerous Guy Indeed (unknown)

STORIES

There are many collections of Runyon's stories: in particular *Runyon on Broadway* and *Runyon from First to Last* between them provide extensive coverage. The latter is claimed to contain^[27] all of Runyon's stories (i.e. fiction) not included in *Runyon on Broadway*. In fact, there are two Broadway stories not included in either collection: "Maybe a Queen" and "Leopard's Spots", both collected in *More Guys And Dolls* (1950).

Runyon on Broadway contains the following stories, all of which are Broadway stories written in Runyonese:

More Than Somewhat

Breach of Promise

Romance in the Roaring Forties

Dream Street Rose

The Old Doll's House

Blood Pressure

The Bloodhounds of Broadway

Tobias the Terrible

The Snatching of Bookie Bob

The Lily of St. Pierre

Hold 'em, Yale

Earthquake

'Gentlemen, the King!'

A Nice Price

Broadway Financier

The Brain Goes Home

Furthermore

Madame La Gimp

Dancing Dan's Christmas

Sense of Humour

Lillian

Little Miss Marker

Pick the Winner

Undertaker Song

Butch Minds the Baby

The Hottest Guy in the World

The Lemon Drop Kid

What, No Butler?

The Three Wise Guys

A Very Honourable Guy

Princess O'Hara

Social Error

Tight Shoes

Lonely Heart

The Brakeman's Daughter

Cemetery Bait

It Comes Up Mud

The Big Umbrella

For a Pal

Big Shoulders

That Ever-Loving Wife of Hymie's

Neat Strip

Bred for Battle

Too Much Pep

Baseball Hattie

Situation Wanted

A Piece of Pie

A Job for the Macarone

All Horse Players Die Broke

Runyon from First to Last includes the following stories and sketches:

The First Stories (early non-Broadway stories):

The Defence of Strikerville

Fat Fallon

Two Men Named Collins

As Between Friends

The Informal Execution of Soupbone Pew

My Father

Stories à la Carte (Broadway stories written in Runyonese):

Money from Home

A Story Goes With It

Broadway Complex

So You Won't Talk!

Dark Dolores

Delegates at Large

A Light in France

Old Em's Kentucky Home

Johnny One-Eye

Broadway Incident

The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown

The Melancholy Dane

Barbecue

Little Pinks

Palm Beach Santa Claus

Cleo

The Lacework Kid

The Last Stories (Broadway stories written in Runyonese):

Blonde Mink

Big Boy Blues

Written in Sickness (sketches):

Why Me?

The Doctor Knows Best

No Life

Good Night

Bed-Warmers

Sweet Dreams

Passing the Word Along

Death Pays a Social Call

FILM

Twenty of his stories became motion pictures.^[28]

Lady for a Day (1933)—Adapted by Robert Riskin, who suggested the name change from Runyon's title "Madame La Gimp," the film garnered Academy Award nominations for Best Picture, Best Director (Frank Capra), Best Actress (May Robson), and Best Adaptation for the Screen (Riskin). It was remade as *Pocketful of Miracles* in 1961, with Bette Davis in the Apple Annie role (fused with the "raggedy doll" from Runyon's short story "The Brain Goes Home"); Frank Sinatra recorded the upbeat title song (his rendition is not used in the film). The film received Oscar nominations for composers Sammy Cahn and Jimmy Van Heusen and for co-star Peter Falk (Best Supporting Actor). In 1989, Jackie

Chan adapted the story yet again for the Hong Kong action film*Miracles*, adding several of his trademark stunt sequences.

Little Miss Marker (1934)—The film that made Shirley Temple a star, launched her career as perhaps America's most belovedchild film star, and pushed her pastGreta Garbo as the nation's biggest film draw of the year. Also starred Charles Bickford. Subsequent remakes include *Sorrowful Jones* (1949; Bob Hope, Lucille Ball), *40 Pounds of Trouble* (1962; Tony Curtis), and *Little Miss Marker* (1980; Walter Matthau, Julie Andrews, Bob Newhart, Tony Curtis).

The Lemon Drop Kid (1934) — Starring Lee Tracy, remade in 1951 with Bob Hope (and *I Love Lucy* co-star William Frawley as a racetrack tout), it introduced the Christmas song "Silver Bells".

Princess O'Hara (1935) — Starring Jean Parker, remade in 1943 as *It Ain't Hay* with Abbott and Costello and Patsy O'Connor

Professional Soldier (1935) — an adventure story starringVictor McLaglen and Freddie Bartholomew

A Slight Case of Murder(1938) with Edward G. Robinson — remade in 1953 as *Stop, You're Killing Me* with Broderick Crawford and Claire Trevor

The Big Street (1942) — Henry Fonda, Lucille Ball (adapted from Runyon's story "Little Pinks")

Butch Minds the Baby (1942) — Broderick Crawford, Shemp Howard

Johnny One-Eye - (1950) Starring Pat O'Brien, Wayne Morris, Delores Moran, and Gayle Reed

Money from Home (1953) —Martin and Lewis

Guys and Dolls (1955) —Marlon Brando, Jean Simmons, Frank Sinatra, Vivian Blaine, and Stubby Kaye. Blaine and Kaye reprise their roles from the 1950 Broadway production. Adapted from the story "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown". The big crap game is adapted from the story "Blood Pressure".

PLAYS

A Slight Case of Murder(1935) co-written for Broadway withHoward Lindsay^[29]

Guys and Dolls (1950) starring Robert Alda (Sky Masterson), Vivian Blaine (Miss Adelaide), Sam Levene (Nathan Detroit), Isabel Bigley (Sarah Brown), Pat Rooney, Sr., B.S. Pully, Stubby Kaye, Johnny Silver, Tom Pedi. Adapted from Runyon's stories "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown" and "Blood Pressure".

RADIO

The Damon Runyon Theater radio series dramatized 52 of Runyon's short stories in weekly broadcasts running from October 1948 to September 1949 (with reruns until 1951).^[30]^[31] The series was produced by Alan Ladd's Mayfair Transcription Company for syndication to local radio stations. John Brown played the character "Broadway," who doubled as host and narrator. The cast also comprised Alan Reed, Luis Van Rooten, Joseph Du Val, Gerald Mohr, Frank Lovejoy, Herb Vigran, Sheldon Leonard, William Conrad, Jeff Chandler, Lionel Stander, Sidney Miller, Olive Deering and Joe De Santis. Pat O'Brien was initially engaged for the role of "Broadway". The original stories were adapted for the radio by Russell Hughes.

"Broadway's New York had a crisis each week, though the streets had a rose-tinged aura", wrote radio historian John Dunning. "The sad shows then were all the sadder; plays like *For a Pal* had a special poignance. The bulk of Runyon's work had been untapped by radio, and the well was deep."^{[32]:189}

TELEVISION

Damon Runyon Theatre aired on CBS-TV from 1955 to 1956.

Mike McShane told Runyon stories as monologues on British TV in 1994, and an accompanying book was released, both called *Broadway Stories*.

FURTHER READING

Breslin, Jimmy (1991). *Damon Runyon: A Life*. London: Houghton Mifflin. ISBN 978-0-89919-984-9

Clark, Tom (1978). *The World of Damon Runyon*. New York: Harper & Row. ISBN 978-0-06-010771-0

D'Itri, Patricia Ward (1982). *Damon Runyon*. Boston: Twayne. ISBN 978-0-8057-7336-1

Hoyt, Edwin P (1964). *A Gentleman of Broadway: The Story of Damon Runyon*. Boston: Little Brown. ISBN 978-1-199-45217-7

Mosedale, John (1981). *The Men Who Invented Broadway: Damon Runyon, Walter Winchell & Their World*. New York: Richard Marek Publishers. ISBN 978-0-399-90085-3

Runyon, Damon Jr (1953). *Father's Footsteps: The Story of Damon Runyon by his Son*. New York: Random House

Schwarz, Daniel R (2003). *Broadway Boogie Woogie: Damon Runyon and the Making of New York City Culture*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. ISBN 978-0-312-23948-0

Wagner, Jean (1965). *Runyonese: The Mind and Craft of Damon Runyon*. Paris: Stechert-Hafner. ASIN B0007ILK4K

Weiner, Ed (1948). *The Damon Runyon Story*. New York: Longmans Green. ASIN B0007DPA5U

EXTERNAL LINKS

All the stories from: More than Somewhat, Furthermore, & Take it Easy at Project Gutenberg

Text of story "The Informal Execution of Soupbone Pew" at Project Gutenberg

– audio files of the complete series*The Damon Runyon Theatre* at the Internet Archive

Damon Runyon at the Internet Movie Database

Damon Runyon at the Internet Broadway Database

Damon Runyon: A Life interview (December 29, 1991) with Jimmy Breslin on his book,*Booknotes*

Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation and Broadway Theater Service

Zoot Radio, free downloads of Damon RunyonvTheater old time radio shows.

Baseball Hall of Fame Class of 1968

BBWAA Vote

Joe Medwick (84.81%)

Veterans Committee

Kiki Cuyler |

Goose Goslin

J. G. Taylor Spink Award

Damon Runyon

J. G. Taylor Spink Award recipients

Addie |

Angell |

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Brown |

Burick |

Carmichael |

Chass |

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Conlin |

Daniel |

Drebinger |

Durso |

Dryden |

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Gage |

Gammons |

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Lieb |
Madden |
McCoy |
McGuff |
Meany |
Mercer |
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ENCYCLOPEDIA ARTICLE

Walter Matthau, Julie Andrews, Tony Curtis, Bob Newhart, Sara Stimson

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Norman Jewison, Tony Curtis, United States, English language, Disneyland

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Frank Capra, Columbia Pictures, New York City, Spain, Great Depression

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a 501c(4) Member's Support Non-Profit Organization, and is NOT affiliated with any governmental agency or department.

Damon Runyon, Writer: *Guys and Dolls*. Born out of wedlock in Manhattan, Kansas, but grew up in Denver. A close friend of fellow New York sportswriter--and former western gunfighter--William Barclay 'Bat' Masterson, who knew the Runyan family in Denver. In the late teens and early 1920s both Ed Sullivan and Walter Winchell worked as Runyon's leg men. Buried in New York's Woodlawn Damon Runyon, in full Alfred Damon Runyon, (born Oct. 4, 1884, Manhattan, Kan., U.S.—died Dec. 10, 1946, New York, N.Y.), American journalist and short-story writer, best known for his book *Guys and Dolls*, written in the regional slang that became his trademark. At age 14 Runyon enlisted in the U.S. Army and was sent to the Philippines in the Spanish-American War. After the war he wrote for Western newspapers for 10 years.

