

## **ABRAHAM LINCOLN GILLESPIE: 1895-1950**

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Ring the glad tidings of the mind! Sound the tocsin of reason, the big bell of the mind! All the different shades of the brain will pass before you in a review of all the kinds of reason. Now! Everyone sing after me!

- Velimir Khlebnikov, *Zangezi*

Ex! Exex! Exexex! COMMUNICATED.

- James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*

Tis-ohly-a-dreim, - Mevanwv"

Kreymborg plyrch-theavor sleyrtoneman

Nobleo tears, tempchyrrian ksong, styspalteol mime

Worcdsomng

- A. L. Gillespie, *Maurice Evans*

Discoursing before the era of the talk show and tape recorder, Abraham Lincoln Gillespie's spontaneous conversation survives uncertainly in the memory of his contemporaries. But where apparently incessant verbal speculation was transformed into deliberative poetry, essays and prose, it lives as a stubborn rebuke to standard models of communication and ingenious craftsmanship.

Intermittent references to Gillespie in the current literature on the twenties show that he is still remembered, though superficially, as an Ur Bohemian with a strange linguistic method, whose talent was for living rather than art. George Antheil's chapter in *Bad Boy Of Music* is still the best portrait of Gillespie in print; but though it is sympathetic to him as a human being it avoids the larger question of his merit as a writer. In *Being Geniuses Together*<sup>2</sup> the late Robert McAlmon encourages the myth that Gillespie was bizarre in appearance and makes a pedestrian effort to re-

create his cogitative language. Of the three expatriate Americans, only Samuel Putnam, in *Paris Was Our Mistress*<sup>3</sup> moves beyond mythification. Nor has Gillespie been seriously remembered by either Gil Orlovitz or Cyril Connolly, two contemporary novelists: Orlovitz's *Ice Never F*<sup>4</sup> contains a caricature of a bisexual expatriate, with little or no talent save for talk, cadging food and drink and smiting the bourgeois in the pocket-book, who has returned to the ancestral city; and Connolly, in his novel *The Rock Pool*,<sup>5</sup> set in the French Riviera and published in the mid-thirties, writes journalistically accurate paragraphs describing Gillespie's tactics in coaxing meals from cafe proprietors.

The following is a factual account of Gillespie's life, based on the recollections and reminiscences of his contemporaries, all of whom have either never read his scattered work or have forgotten it almost completely.

Abraham Lincoln Gillespie, Jr. was born in South Philadelphia's Twenty-Sixth Ward on June 11, 1895 to Abraham Lincoln Gillespie, Sr. and Lillie Bendix. His father was a plumbing contractor whose business was located at 622 South Broad Street. The South Philadelphia of the early 1900's was still a habitat for older Anglo-Saxon families, but Eastern European and Italian immigrants were settling there in increasing numbers. By 1905 the Gillespies, responding to the growth of the immigrant population and an urge for upward mobility, moved to the more exclusive residential Germantown section and settled in a large three-story stone house at 332 Manheim Street. The house was built around 1860 and still stands, with a brown porch and large yard, in a neighborhood that is now largely black with a mixture of younger whites, some of them students.

Lincoln, as he was customarily known, was one of five children. There was a brother, John; two older sisters, Freda and Kathryn; and a younger sister, Isabel. The Gillespies are remembered as a rather conventional Quaker family, not rich but fairly prosperous; among their neighbors on Manheim Street were the Powells, a wealthy shipbuilding family, and William Fulton Kurtz, a president of the First Pennsylvania Bank. With the single exception of Freda, the Gillespies were never

sympathetic with Lincoln's unconventional life style or his writing ambitions. Although he resembled his father, temperamentally Lincoln seemed closest to Freda, who later married Frederic Douglas, a wealthy patron of the arts, and moved to Denver. The friction between Lincoln and his family, and, in particular, between him and his brother, John, seems to have lasted throughout his life; at the funeral Gillespie's center city friends stood apart from members of the family.

There was nothing outwardly in Gillespie's student years that pointed toward the events that were to follow. He is remembered as an honor student at Germantown Academy, a private school located in a fairly exclusive section of the city. Early school pictures show a young suburban American, rather slender, one of many who were being groomed for a professional career, a comfortable life and a substantial contribution to the alumni fund. He entered Germantown Academy in 1904 and graduated in the Class of 1912. He was Class Prophet, Editor-in-Chief of the Academy Monthly, a prize essayist and debater, and a member of the tennis team. Active in the Mandolin Club as a guitarist and with the Glee Club and School Quartet, these interests were to continue throughout his life.

From 1912 to spring of 1915, Gillespie attended Pennsylvania State University, in the first two years as an electrochemical engineering student, switching to Liberal Arts in his third. In August 1915 he transferred from the State University and enrolled as a member of the Sophomore Class in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, University of Pennsylvania. He was admitted into the College Courses For Teachers subdivision, and was dismissed from the University by the Executive Committee in June 1916. No reason was given for this action, but his college advisor was an Assistant Professor of Greek and Gillespie was excessively absent from his class. He enrolled at nearby Haverford College in September 1917, where, within a General Science course, he continued to concentrate in English literature and began to take courses in French and Spanish "for a business career or for literary work." In February 1918 he returned to the University of Pennsylvania and finally graduated with the Class of June 1918 with a B.S. in College Courses For Teachers.

The five years that followed his graduation were to see him attempt, unsuccessfully, to conform both as a breadwinner and a married man. Dismissing academic gentility and protocol, Gillespie sought ideological controversy. Joseph Cottler, a retired Philadelphia school teacher and biographer, remembers Gillespie during a Ludwig Lewisohn lecture on German Expressionism in 1924 arguing vehemently for Shakespeare as the first real expressionist.

Like his teaching career Gillespie's marriage was brief. He became an instructor in French and Spanish at the West Philadelphia High School For Boys. In August 1923, after a long friendship, Gillespie, who was then twenty-eight years old and had been transferred to the South Philadelphia High School For Boys, and Ruth Irwin Breslow, who was nineteen years old and an orphan who had been living with her grandmother in North Philadelphia, eloped and were married in New York City. But by February 1924 he had stopped teaching at the high school and by the summer he was in George Antheil's Left Bank apartment as a single guest, supported by a family stipend. By December 1925, while he was still overseas, Ruth Breslow Gillespie had sued him for divorce, charging desertion.

On August 16, 1920, not long after he had begun his teaching career Gillespie was involved in a serious automobile accident which impaired his vision, giving him the cross-eyed aspect that both Antheil and McAlmon mention in their reminiscences; permanently injured his left leg; and which, according to many who knew him, considerably altered his personality. William C. Blood's widow remembers that her husband, who had also attended Germantown Academy and who was the owner and driver of the automobile which had been overturned by a car that had abruptly shot out of a street, always felt guilty about the accident because he believed that it had changed Gillespie's character, transforming him from a stable school teacher into an erratic bohemian. Gillespie's deteriorating marriage, his crucial decision to leave school-teaching and make a creative assertion, the lingering metabolic effects of this earlier accident, the diabetic condition that had already surfaced and may have been a side effect of the accident, and incipient alcoholism may have combined to give him the intensity that so many acquaintances remember him for.

Gillespie's period of expatriation began in 1924 and ended in 1932. There is some evidence that he returned to the United States at least once during that time.<sup>7</sup> Harry Fuiman, a Philadelphia lawyer who knew Gillespie well during the twenties, remembers consulting with him on passport matters circa 1926-27 and recalls that he returned to Paris with Anne Atkin who lived with him for four or five years in Paris, Cagnes-sur-Mer and Nice.

Mrs. Verna Herbest, who worked briefly as an art critic for the New York Herald Tribune's Paris edition, remembers that in 1927-28 Gillespie would frequent The Dome and other Left Bank cafes, and recalls that he would compare himself favorably with Joyce and Shakespeare on the ground that he telescoped more drastically than they did. Even toward the end of his life when he was all but swallowed by obscurity, Gillespie, in his rare social appearances, would draw himself up suddenly and announce: "Of course you know I'm the greatest writer in the world!"

By 1929 Gillespie had shifted from Paris to Cagnes-sur-Mer on the Riviera where he became active in a small colony of American and European expatriates. Antheil's chapter in *Bad Boy Of Music*,<sup>8</sup> "La Vie de la Boheme," is the longest segment of any book which makes reference to Gillespie and promptly became a bible to his small coterie of friends and admirers. These anecdotes taken together with Samuel Putnam's in *Paris Was Our Mistress* give a fair picture of Gillespie's enterprise and ingenuity when it came to cracking the middle class code and ensuring both his survival and that of his friends. Antheil's sketch, like Robert McAlmon's passing snapshot in *Being Geniuses Together*, is generous but misleading, however, presenting Gillespie as a "character," a genial rogue, a man who had no malice in him and could not comprehend money or the idea of private property; the composer shows almost no understanding of his friend's more serious mind: his work, his speculations about language, his views on literature and art. All the more surprising because Antheil, like Gillespie, began his work in music as a modernist.

But whereas he retreated into traditionalism, Gillespie worked doggedly, quietly and, toward the end of his life, anonymously, to develop a challenging aesthetics.

This description of Gillespie's strange stone house at Cagnes-sur-Mer typifies Antheil's concerns: "Outside nothing, but inside accumulated into the maddest atmosphere into which a human being has ever stepped. The artists who from time to time Linkey had housed, had decorated it, their imagination exceeding the limits of any surrealist or non-surrealist; for instance, in one room they had attached the furniture to the ceiling, it was the 'dance hall'. Another room's otherwise white plaster was decorated al fresco with pictures no cabaret of my acquaintance could ever boast without police interference." <sup>9</sup> The physical exploits he fondly recalls but the linguistic exploits he politely brushes aside. Reading between Antheil's lines one senses that he took a condescending view of his friend's verbal behavior. He mentions, as does McAlmon, the significant fact that Gillespie could speak the way he wrote without effort. He quotes directly from Gillespie's essay "Antheil and then miscalls it conversation." He does not attempt explication or clarification, beyond the comment that you cannot read his work with understanding until you solve his grammar, though Gillespie must certainly have spoken often to him about his work. And he tells us that young Gillespie in 1924 wanted to rival *Ulysses*,<sup>12</sup> an attitude that he dropped in his maturity.

Robert McAlmon joins Antheil and Henry Miller <sup>13</sup> in remembering that Gillespie could use his idiosyncratic language at will in casual social conversation. In *Being Geniuses Together* he depicts Linc as still another eccentric with literary pretensions. No sooner was Gillespie introduced to McAlmon, who had once moved in the Joycean orbit, than he said to him: "I am Lincoln Gillespie and find you the only form packing, symbol realicator, tuckfunctioning moderncompactly." <sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Samuel Putnam, who knew Gillespie in Paris, Greenwich Village and Philadelphia, and who was an integral part of the expatriate literary scene in the late twenties and early thirties, notes that Eugene Jolas was genuinely excited when he first discovered Gillespie's idiosyncratic work in 1927: "With his highly personal verbal experimentations which had in them no little of the psychotic, Gillespie was

to become one of transition's more sensational exhibits. It was undoubtedly the linguistic aspect that appealed to Jolas, who was soon to announce his revolutionary theories with regard to language, and there were others as well who saw in Gillespie's prose something more than an affectation or a psychosis.<sup>15</sup> Putnam further recalls that Kay Boyle and her friends in Germany were very interested in Gillespie's linguistic expression in the late twenties and early thirties, though his source for that impression was Gillespie himself.<sup>16</sup>

Gillespie came to transition, never as a featured contributor but always as a respected one, when the magazine was relatively young. The first issue came out in 1926 when *The Little Review* was in decline. By November 1927 Gillespie's first essay "Music Starts A Geometry",<sup>17</sup> had appeared and he continued to contribute with some consistency until March 1932. In the fall of 1928 Gillespie was one of several Americans contributing to the transition symposium: "Why do Americans Live in Europe?",<sup>18</sup> But by 1934 transition seems to have become more ornate and academic, despite the presence of Joyce's work in its pages. By this time Gillespie was back home in Philadelphia's Washington Square.

The impact of the depression was to force Gillespie home sooner than some of his contemporaries but he returned to America unwillingly. The social malaise that Samuel Putnam expresses in *Paris Was Our Mistress* was not part of Gillespie's psyche; for him the homeward pull was a cattle call.<sup>19</sup> A valuable glimpse of Gillespie as he was toward the close of his expatriation and the years that followed is afforded by Sam Heller, a veteran Philadelphia painter and entrepreneur. Heller is among those who view Gillespie as an unfulfilled talent of large potential and he does something to clarify Gillespie's reaction to the Old Left.

"Linc Gillespie was part of the crowd. I first met him in 1924 and then again in the thirties when we were both involved in the New Theater group, which amounted in those years to an offshoot of the Communist Party. The Party had organized 'fractions' which were supposed to activate artists and intellectuals. Gillespie came around as a poet and may have done some acting. Through the New Theater group

he came to know Clifford Odets and also Harry Kurnitz, who later went to Hollywood to write the Thin Man scripts.

"I saw Linc Gillespie in Paris in 1931. I always thought him very talented, an extremely capable critic who liked to help his contemporaries with suggestions; he was not interested in self-containment and discipline and began to see himself as an influence. Rather than apply himself he would go off on drinking binges with Arthur B. Carles, a Philadelphia painter who taught at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts until he was fired for his avant-garde convictions.

"When Gillespie was under the influence of liquor his humor was dry and sharp. He had tremendous wit and a marvelous command of language. I met James Joyce through him at the Cafe Du Dome. I remember that Joyce drove up in a Rolls Royce. It was 1931 and he was in the money. Gillespie seemed on friendly terms with Joyce but they kept their conversation light. I seem to remember their talking about a show or some singers who were studying voice. Gillespie also knew Ezra Pound and had become friendly with the brother of Gene Tunney, a young man who was trying to find himself and who would take on fights in Southern France for five dollars a throw.

"Linc would not accept the idea of knocking out a poem, a story or a play. He would never accept the idea of being a craftsman. He was too inventive; he would not settle for the accepted. His whole life was non-conformist.<sup>20</sup>

Though he seems to have located himself in Left Wing Bohemia, Gillespie never became a political activist. He saw in left wing groups an opportunity for communicating with intellectuals, some of whom were involved in the arts. At home in France, he became an exile in Philadelphia; and in his domestic expatriation he sought out the company of political radicals, with whom he could not agree aesthetically. "Gillespie wasn't the type who would parade on May Day," Heller recalls. "He was always close to political activists but never became part of any political body. He was not a member of the John Reed Club because he was never

involved enough to go out to sell the Daily Worker or help organize workers' cells. He would never attend classes in dialectics but would always show up at parties. Yet, he was for the masses, he was for the working man. He sympathized with the class struggle but was not part of its essence."

Depressed Philadelphia's closest approximation to a Left Bank cafe was a Horn and Hardart cafeteria, known to the local underground as "The Heel," which stood in the early thirties across from the Academy of Music. David Madison, who became the Philadelphia Orchestra's associate concertmaster in 1940, remembers Linc Gillespie as a literary philosopher and conversationalist, thoroughly at home there. He recalls that Harry Kurnitz, who was soon to become a Hollywood script writer, a playwright and friend of George Antheil, knew Gillespie well although his own career was in sharp contrast to Gillespie's uncompromising and increasingly unrecognized literary activities.

In 1936 Kurnitz left Philadelphia and went to Hollywood on a seven year contract awarded him by MGM. He was eventually to write scripts for such films as *Once More With Feeling*, based on his memories of Leopold Stokowski, Eugene Ormandy and Fritz Reiner, and *Shot in the Dark*, which became a Peter Seller's film. The fact that Gillespie could remain friends with commercialized talents like Kurnitz and mainstream playwrights like Odets attests to his wide range of capacities, his incessant concern with the art of writing and his persuasiveness as a language speculator at "The Heel."

Following his return to Philadelphia, Gillespie entered the literary life of the city. The monthly family remittance continued to sustain him although generosity and alcoholism combined to deplete it. Social consciousness, the political militancy of the American working class, the consolidation of Stalinism within the Soviet Union and the rise of European Fascism were important to Gillespie but the politicized literary circles were not interested in Gillespie's particular verbal speculations and supposed hermeticism. In an effort to break through the isolation Gillespie made frequent trips to Greenwich Village, where he occasionally lived for short periods of

time and frequently met with the writers, painters and musicians of his Paris and Riviera days.

When Gillespie returned from Paris to his native city in the winter of 1932-33, he moved first to the Old John Singer house located on South Seventh Street near Washington Square; and then moved constantly, restlessly from one apartment to another, all of them in the city's Washington Square section. The "ginginabulations of the glasses, glasses, glasses"<sup>21</sup> made Philadelphia more tolerable. He frequented gatherings yet ordinary social communication did not interest him. Occasionally he would dance, though he wasn't always sure of his legs, and rarely he would recite his own poetry. Among Gillespie's local literary acquaintances were Richard Aldridge, a poet and scholar who eventually left for the Himalayas; H. H. Horowitz, a writer and bookstore proprietor who died relatively young; Bill Kozlenko, who began as a music critic for the local press, went to New York to edit an intellectual magazine titled *Europa* and eventually to Hollywood, where he became a writer of fiction, a TV editor and an editor of one-act play anthologies. Lou Jacobs, a film historian and critic who wrote *The Rise of American Cinema* and was a contemporary of Gillespie's, observes that in the twenties and early thirties Gillespie did not seem to be aware of film culture, which only began to develop in Philadelphia during the thirties.

Philadelphia did have a literary culture, with an underground, and a crystallizing radical wing. One of Gillespie's contemporaries and a fellow Philadelphian was the late Harry Alan Potamkin, whose occasional poems and film criticism were also published in transition. Potamkin returned to the States from Paris in the early thirties with a leftist orientation. When the staid Nine O'Clock Club, a Philadelphia literary group, fragmented in the early depression years Potamkin gathered some remnants together and in 1931 he formed a local chapter of the John Reed Club. Located at 136 South Eighth Street, the John Reed Club published several issues of *Red Pen* and *Left Review* but went out of business in 1936. Gillespie never joined the Club but attended meetings frequently and submitted manuscripts for publication. The Potamkin group saw an emerging proletariat as the most

significant fact that American writers had to confront in the thirties, but Gillespie would argue a formalist aesthetic line descended from the twenties. In the years 1935-36 Gillespie wanted to participate in the local WPA Writers' Project but neither his tweeds, his cigarette holder, his inimitable language nor his arrogant aesthetic stance appealed to the politicized intellectuals who dominated the project.

Maxwell Whiteman, now an ethnic historian and a Union League archivist, comments on one of Gillespie's ideological counterattacks at the local John Reed Club: "I remember the words but not the content. He did hold the audience with his linguistic acrobatics, though.

"To understand Gillespie you need to understand what his contemporaries were doing. It was not so much what he himself wrote but that he belonged to a group in the twenties that was experimental in nature and had something that was never able to emerge."

The Great Depression, with its breadlines, its labor unrest, its permanent unemployment, its student pacifism and its WPA projects, proved a provocative climate for Philadelphia's bohemian colony, which centered then around Washington Square, not far from those symbols of the literary overground J. B. Lippincott and the Curtis Publishing Company. One focal point in the colony which developed during the thirties was the studio home of Martin Hyman, a newspaper photographer and the first cameraman whose works were exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Located at 919 Locust Street, the Hyman home became an intellectual, cultural and social exchange. Among the frequent visitors at the Hymans' were Gillespie, who was known superficially as a follower and friend of James Joyce; Charlie Ogle, a Philadelphia photographer and his wife, Verna, a former art critic for the Paris edition of the New York Herald Tribune; the late Harry Kapustin, a Philadelphia short story writer; the late S. Beryl Lush, a failed poet turned philanthropist-businessman, who became a friend of Gillespie's; Vladimir Kitchikoff, a Russian known for his caricatures, and Harry Kurnitz and Clifford Odets before their reputations were acquired.

Writing in Philadelphia magazine, Bert MacCarry gives this description of Hilda Hyman, known during the depression years as "The Angel of Washington Square": "Hilda Hyman was properly adored by all Philadelphia bohemians who visited the home, for it was she who was responsible to a great extent for keeping the body and soul of many a starving artist together. Mrs. Hyman... could perform miracles with a piece of meat and a few potatoes. If a hungry man had only a few cents for a loaf of bread, he brought that and contributed it to the meal. <sup>22</sup>

The Hyman studio left its mark on the intellectual life of the city and actually survived Pearl Harbor. However, the post-World War II years nuclearized Philadelphia's Bohemia and its remnants scattered to Greenwich Village, to Hollywood and to the suburbs.

A retired photographer whose work has been widely exhibited in the Philadelphia-New Jersey area, Hyman still lives with Hilda today in Northfield, New Jersey. \* "We would meet on the roof of our home and talk about art and philosophy," he recalls. "The depression had brought many Philadelphians back from Paris and some even came from Greenwich Village, where the rents were getting higher as non-artist types moved in. Linc Gillespie showed up in 1932 and became part of the group. Linc was very kindly. I can remember that he was crazy about Pogo, the comic strip, and liked to talk about it. He was wonderful with children and had the ability to get down to their level. He was also good with the people he liked. No one ever felt my photography as much as Linc did."

The Hymans have an image of Gillespie on the move. In the throes of his frenetic residential changes, he would wind around his neck a scarf so long that it might circumscribe him twenty times and still trail on the sidewalk. While he was in Paris a Japanese artist, Foujite, \*\* had made a bust of him, which Gillespie favored. Replete with strangulating scarf and bust, Gillespie would pile all his belongings, which consisted mostly of books, into a pushcart and direct the movers with his cane.

One of Mrs. Hyman's last memories of Gillespie was his Emil Janningsesque participation in a poetry reading at the Village Vanguard, a cellar hangout for intellectuals.

"It was in 1947. Linkey sat on a chair with a spotlight trained on him. He was only one of several entertainers that night. I wouldn't say he had a booming resonant reading voice. Linkey was no Dylan Thomas. He seemed to be reading his poetry in a casual conversational tone that could hardly be heard above the tumult when the three of us walked in. The crowd, which was hardly listening, began pitching pennies at him. Linc probably needed the money very badly and he couldn't have cared less for applause. Anne Heller, Bob Muchly and I found the spectacle so painful that we had to walk out."

Toward the end of his life Gillespie lived at one of Maxwell Bodenheim's Village residences for a time, an apartment owned by the fabled landlord, Stronsky, who was favored by Village artists. One of his last Village sojourns almost ended in disaster. A diabetic attack, precipitated by alcoholism, caused Gillespie's collapse and friends had to send him back to Philadelphia. It was shortly after this episode that the Gillespie family put the poet in a North Philadelphia apartment and gave him a nurse. During his final years friends remember that at parties Gillespie would keep popping cheese and bacon crumbs into his mouth to keep from blacking out and going into a diabetic coma.

It is as an ailing bohemian legend and a show, a local anachronism from the Parisian and Greenwich Village days who had had it but was still unaccountably around, waiting for the end, that some contemporaries best remember Gillespie. "Linc would come around every. Saturday night in those years (1948 to 1950) along with artists, writers, singers and dancers," recalls Joe Zinni, a World War II photographer, a free-lance writer and a center city business man. "There was this tenor, that baritone, this scholar and that pianist. And sometimes Joe Gould would come in from Greenwich Village or Jasper Deeter would come from Hedgerow<sup>23</sup> to

put on skits for us. Linc would talk knowledgeably about Gertrude Stein, who had been his neighbor in Paris, and James Joyce, whom he respected as a pioneer."

The Gillespie that Zinni and others seem to remember is a bohemian stereotype who had lived through a disruptive period in our cultural history. He had been an American in Paris who had turned first into a legend and then into a curio. George Antheil and Samuel Putnam had commemorated him as an arch romantic rebel who had returned to lecture at The Heel and Greenwich Village, to drink, and to be gaped at. It is doubtful that any of Gillespie's social acquaintances during these last years of his life knew the poem "Maurice Evans," which appears in the winter issue of *Iconograph*<sup>24</sup> as a companion piece to "Marlene Dietrich" under the collective title "Portraits Skulpursune." An appended note tells us that Gillespie had been working on both pieces between 1941 and 1947 and a quick reading convinces us that we are no longer dealing with a poet whose aesthetics are Joycean.

"Skulpursune" equals mind pursues sun or light or meaning. Gillespie's single-minded pursuit of meaning, resulting in writing that moved far beyond conventional syntax, would not have found empathetic listeners in the social circles he resorted to in order to combat his growing physical isolation. For these party-going acquaintances his writing was not the point. They made a place for him in their lives as a living artifact who in exchange for a few drinks and a couch or floor to collapse on could furnish good incoherent conversation. Though they are kinder and somewhat more perceptive, even Antheil and Putnam have this view.

On October 20, 1949 Gillespie, whose mobility had been drastically reduced by illness, made one of his last public appearances in downtown Philadelphia. Leo Rodgers, an office manager for Paramount Pictures Distributors, and Benson Dooling, a book reviewer for Philadelphia dailies, had arranged a special lecture appearance for Joseph Ferdinand Gould, author of the then unpublished *Oral History Of Our Time*. Gould had worked on the New York City Federal Writers' Project during the depression years and was one of Gillespie's close Greenwich Village contacts. Rodgers gave Gillespie cab fare and asked him to go to Greenwich Village and come back with the featured speaker in time for the lecture, which was

scheduled for the Sylvania Hotel in center city. Gillespie performed the errand graciously and delivered a stirring introduction to Joe Gould's speech in his customary neologistic style. Rodgers remembers that the Gillespie introduction was better than the featured performance. During the course of the evening the literary polemics became exacerbated and Gillespie grew mildly disorderly. His remarks were applauded by the young people in the audience but they probably knew him as a flamboyant personality rather than as a man of letters.

Eleven months later Gillespie was dead. Since unmistakable physical decline had been visible for a decade his death was not unexpected but it came abruptly. Early in September 1950 he was admitted to the University of Pennsylvania Hospital with a chronic diabetic condition and on September 10 he went into a coma. John Gillespie, who signed the death certificate and made the funeral arrangements, characteristically listed his brother's occupation as "none." Funeral services were private and burial was at the Mount Moriah Cemetery in the southwestern section of the city. Following the brief ceremony Marty Hyman walked over to the Gillespie family and lectured John on his brother's literary importance. The surviving Gillespie listened impassively and said nothing.

Paul J. O'Brien had been a close friend and confidant during the last decade of Gillespie's life, and was among the bohemians who attended his burial. O'Brien came out of the old Sinn Fein movement in Boston during the early part of the century and used to sell *The Call To Reason* in Scollay Square. He knew many Fenians who were active in the Easter Rising and the 1922 insurrection, and he later became a Socialist, living first in Greenwich Village and then in downtown Philadelphia. O'Brien first met Gillespie at a New York City night club in the early nineteen twenties when Linc was teaching Romance Languages at West Philadelphia High School. He remembers the Gillespie family as thoroughly bourgeois.

"Linc and I were very close. Linc was a sweet, kind guy. He said he was going to die when he was fifty-five and he did that. Linc's family had put him in the University of Pennsylvania Hospital. A couple of days before the end I phoned him and he

sounded all right. He said he was coming over soon but the next time I saw him he was laid out at Oliver Bair's Funeral Home. Lying there dead like that he looked like someone imitating himself. It didn't look like Linc; it looked like his cousin. They had cut his stomach out and it was flat. In life Linc had a pot belly. They buried him in Darby, I believe.

"The Gillespie family never said a word to me. Maybe they thought I was the man who was giving their son the booze but it wasn't so. Linc always brought the booze bottle here.

"No one ever hated Linc because Linc never interfered with people. He had no enemies.

"Toward the end of his life his family kept him in the house. They wouldn't let him out. If he went out they said they would hold up his legacy. Linc never discussed his family much. When his health declined they had two nurses for him but later they transferred him to an apartment on North Broad Street where he was freer to come and go when his nurse let him.

"Linc wouldn't talk about his own work. He'd show it to you. He'd say, 'Here's something I want you to read'. Linc wrote like he talked and talked like he wrote. He was a shorthand writer. He wrote shorthand, he thought shorthand. Often when he was talking people stood there laughing at him and grinning.<sup>25</sup>

Toward the end of his life Gillespie's musical horizons narrowed. He would sometimes say that George Antheil was the only composer worth listening to. Among contemporary authors he valued Joyce and Kafka most.

"Linc was a fine gentleman. He was always manufacturing words while he was speaking. He never stumbled in his speech. He would combine words, break them up, re-combine words and take them all apart again. I think the American

expatriates thought he was cracked. He wrote letters just the way he talked. He was manufacturing words all the time.<sup>26</sup>

It remained for Gillespie's sister, Freda, to think of a fitting evocation. Shortly after her brother's death Mrs. Frederic Douglas\* of Denver asked the American composer, Norman Dello Joio, to write an orchestral work dedicated to his memory. Dello Joio began to work on the commission in Weston, Connecticut, where he was living at the time. The ensuing score, *Epigraph*, was in no sense programmatic but was shaped by impressions the composer collected from some of Gillespie's friend S.<sup>27</sup> The work was first performed in Denver by Saul Caston and the Denver Symphony Orchestra on January 29, 1952. On October 15, 1954, Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra presented the seven-minute work to Philadelphians and it was twice performed by the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra that same year. Since that time there have been at least thirty additional performances of *Epigraph* by various orchestral groups throughout the country and in 1953 the work was recorded by the American Recording Society.<sup>28</sup> In the recorded version Dello Joio makes this observation: "Epigraph is musically in form a three-part song. I did not feel compelled to write a dirge-like type of music, but a music that sang, maybe roughly at times, and maybe with humor because I suspect that is what A. Lincoln Gillespie would have wanted."

## FOOTNOTES

1 George Antheil, *Bad Boy of Music* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1945), pp. 156.

2 Kay Boyle and Robert McAlmon, *Being Geniuses Together. 1920-1930*. Rev, and with supplementary chapters by Kay Boyle (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1968), p. 310.

3 Samuel Putnam, *Paris Was Our Mistress: Memoirs Of A Lost and Found Generation* (New York: Viking, 1947), p. 224.

4 Gil Orlovitz, *Ice Never F* (London: Caldor and Boyars, 1970), pp. 182-93.

5 Cyril Connolly, *The Rock Pool* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), pp. 76-77.

6 Antheil, op. cit., pp. #156.

7. Mrs. Blanche Alexander, who moved in Gillespie's orbit during the twenties, remembers that his Philadelphia friends helped finance his first ocean crossing in 1924 and that he returned to Philadelphia in 1926 with a copy of *Ulysses*. She also calls Gillespie's marriage to Ruth Irwin Breslow an act of gallantry on his part and an insignificant episode in his life, noting that Ms. Breslow had other personal involvements and no real intellectual interests. From a personal interview with Mrs. Alexander at the Beaver Hill Apartments, Jenkintown, Pa., January 1977.

8 Antheil, op. cit., pp. #56-64.

9 Antheil, op. cit., p. #58.

10 A.L. Gillespie, "Antheil and Stravinski," *transition*, No. 13 (Summer 1928), 142.

11 Antheil, op. cit., p. 161.

12 Antheil, op. cit., p. #58.

13 Henry Miller, personal correspondence, Pacific Palisades, California, August 28, 1975.

14 Boyle and McAlmon, op. cit., p. 310.

15 Putnam, op. cit., p. 224.

16 Kay Boyle, personal correspondence, San Francisco, California, April 5, 1976. Kay Boyle writes from San Francisco that while she valued Gillespie as a friend, she was not interested in his work as such. She adds that his personal letters, which were written in the same style as his poetry, had meaning but his work did not for her. Kay Boyle was with Gillespie one of the sixteen signers of the famous *transition* (No. 16-17, June 1929) Proclamation.

[Kay Boyle also writes that Gillespie's letters were among her papers which were all lost during the German occupation of France. Personal correspondence, Cottage Grove, Oregon, January 15, 1981. Ed. note.]

17 A.L. Gillespie, "Music Starts A Geometry", *transition*, No. 8 (November 1927).

18 Gillespie's contribution to the symposium was entitled "Expatriation." *transition*, No. 14 (Fall 1928), 103-105.

19 A.L. Gillespie, "wOWde to COWL-oe," *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (April 1975), 782.

20 Samuel S. Heller, personal interview at his Philadelphia studio, 2037 Delancey Street, December 18, 1974.

21 "ginginabulations..." is Gillespie's own phrase as recalled by Maxwell Whiteman in a personal interview, Philadelphia, November 4, 1974.

22 Bert MacCarry, "Lost Bohema Some Nostalgic Notes on Washington Square," *Philadelphia*, Vol. 33, No. 5 (May 1946), 46.

\*Marty Hyman died in Northfield, New Jersey in December 1976, leaving his widow, Hilda.

[\*\*See *Tuz* [1931], *TN*, 31, pp. 177-178.]

23 A Little Theater located in Moylan, Pa., that was nationally known during the thirties.

24 A.L. Gillespie, "Portraits Skulpursune (A) Maurice Evans," *Iconograph*, No. 4 (Winter 1946), 12.

\*Freda died May 1, 1979 in Denver, Colorado.

25 Paul J. O'Brien, personal interview at this Philadelphia residence, 2223 Spruce Street, January 7, 1975. O'Brien is now living in Dedham, Massachusetts.

26 O'Brien, *ibid.*

27 Norman Dello Joio, personal correspondence, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, December 13, 1976.

28 Marked "To The Memory of A. Lincoln Gillespie," Epigraph is scored for a standard large orchestra. The three sections are marked slow, fast, slow and are scored for two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, tympani, percussion, celesta, harp and strings. The work is in the style of mainstream American neoclassicism that dominated the thirties and forties and reflects the influence of Paul Hindemith with whom Dello Joio studied at Yale.