

# NOBLE NOBELS

Christian Dupont unveils Rowan Gillespie's *Four Irish Nobel Literary Laureates* at Boston College.

**B**earing the dignity and authority of marble busts of Roman nobleman, Rowan Gillespie's *Four Irish Nobel Literary Laureates* (2012) confronts viewers eye-to-eye from stalwart square columns engraved with words that brought their authors everlasting fame. Meet Yeats, Shaw, Beckett and Heaney at the ages when they received their prizes, captured by Gillespie in the constancy of bronze at his Clonlea Studio in Blackrock, Co Dublin.

The series was commissioned by

which include significant archival and book collections on all four of Ireland's Nobel literary laureates (to date!) and many other Irish writers – among them, the most famous to have never been nominated for the Swedish honor.

In 2001, Burns purchased a variation on Gillespie's *Ripples of Ulysses* sculpture of James Joyce that stands in the courtyard garden of the Merrion Hotel – a sundial, of sorts, casting a progressive

## GILLESPIE'S FOUR IRISH NOBEL LITERARY LAUREATES CONFRONT VIEWERS EYE-TO-EYE FROM STALWART SQUARE COLUMNS ENGRAVED WITH THEIR WORDS

American collector of Irish art and philanthropist Brian P Burns, who made leading gifts to Boston College to establish the John J Burns Library for rare books, special collections, and archives, where the *Laureates* is displayed. Burns Library is renowned for the breadth and depth of its Irish collections,

shadow over quotations from the 18 episodes of his modernist epic. In the small-scale indoor version in Burns Library, the central figure of Joyce is mirrored in younger and older reflections, and the surrounding quotations ripple outward in concentric circles rather than radiating wedges. Mounted on a pedestal, the elliptical platform swivels, allowing the viewer-reader to wind it, clock-like, through an endlessly recirculating Bloomsday.

It was not the first time Gillespie had encircled a writer with his own words. His larger-than-life bronze of Yeats on Stephen Street in Sligo wraps the poet-statesman in a sail-like garment embroidered with verses from more than 150 of his lyrics.

The Yeats in Gillespie's *Laureates* rehearses 'Easter, 1916'. Shaw pronounces 'Maxims for Revolutions' selected from his play *Man and Superman*. Beckett

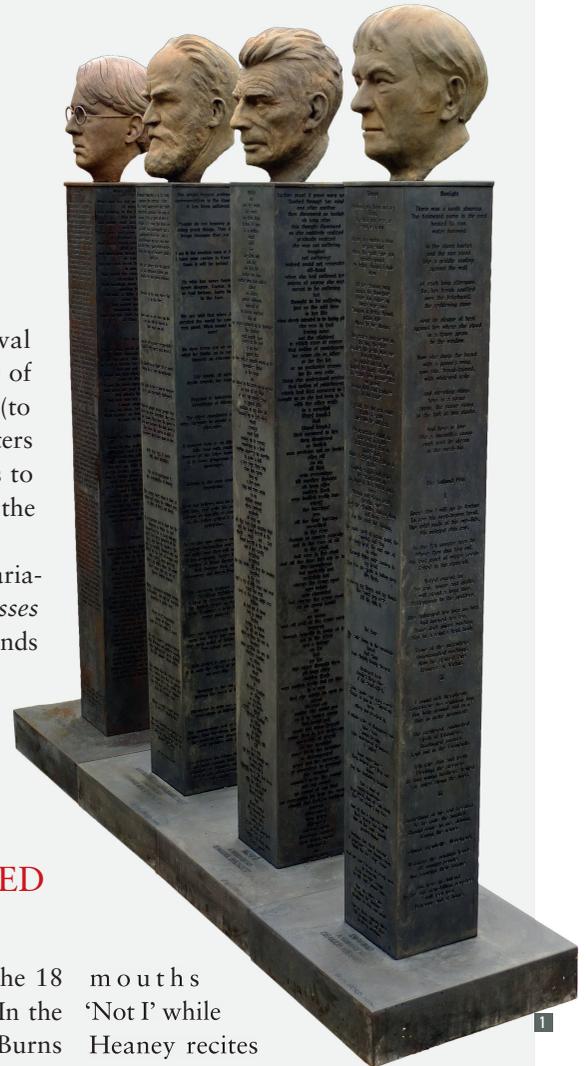
mouths 'Not I' while Heaney recites 'Digging' and several other poems he chose.

They keep good company with other busts of the laureates in Burns Library: Heaney by Ross Wilson, Shaw by Jerome Radin and Yeats by Veronica Curran and John Coll. Coll is also represented by a version of his *Famine Burial* and a depiction of *Mad Sweeney* inspired by Heaney's poem.

Gillespie's figural bronzes adroitly interrelate private and public spheres. His outdoor commissions draw viewers to their subjects' inner vitality, while those for interior spaces stir regard for their communal influence and nobility. ■

This series of articles on Burns Library and its collections attempts to provide context for appreciating the work of Irish artists and their reception in America.

Christian Dupont is Burns Librarian and Associate University Librarian for Special Collections at Boston College, USA.



1 ROWAN GILLESPIE *FOUR IRISH NOBEL LITERARY LAUREATES*, bronze, 2012 45x45x178cm Photo: Roger Kohn

2 *RIPPLES OF ULYSSES II*, bronze, 2000, 26x31x30cm Photo: Rowan Gillespie