

Japanese student 'do be' loving the work of John B

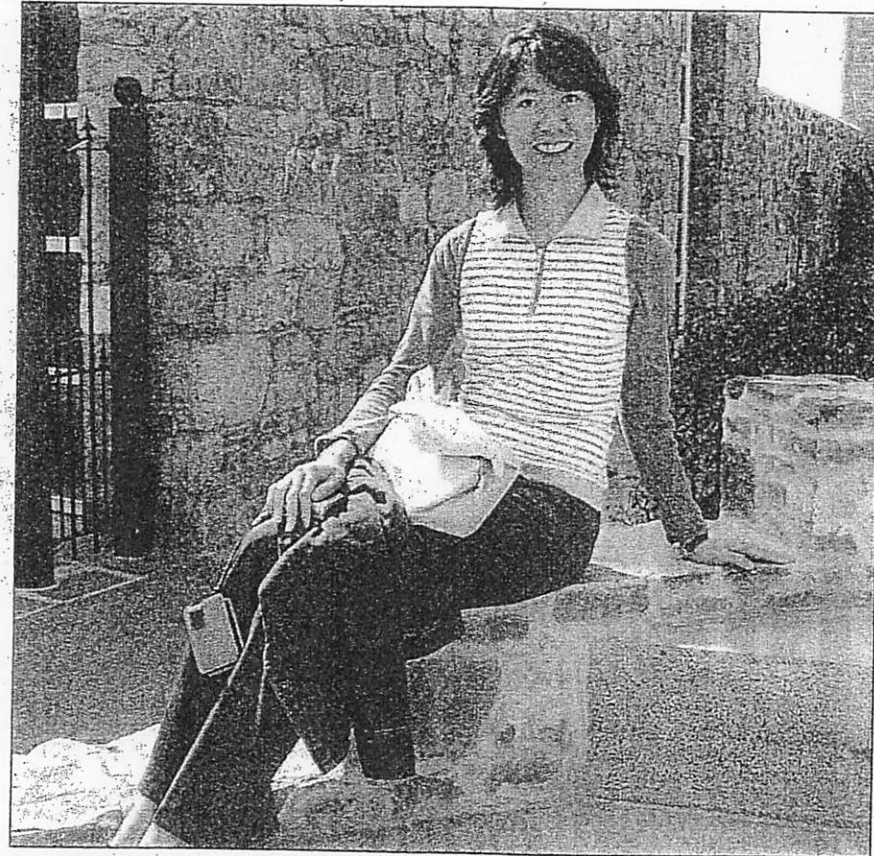
By DÓNAL NOLAN

THE Bull McCabe in a kimono? An unlikely image if ever there was one, but not necessarily an entirely redundant one in this context. Not given the arrival of Japanese native Timada Shimada last week on her fourth visit to Listowel.

It just might help us to marry some of John B's creations in our mind's eye with items of Japanese culture for a second. If only to experience the massive upset that Ms Shimada must have undergone over the past six years in her transformation from a promising Japanese student of English into a John B scholar of some considerable talent.

The University of Kyoto doctoral student fell in love with the works of the Listowel scribe not long after his death in 2002 - during a return visit to University College Cork, where she had studied on an exchange programme some two years previously. It was during her first time in Cork that she came to be completely captivated by Hiberno-English, how it differed from 'English-English' (as she calls it), and how it retains many vestiges of the Irish language.

Indeed, she completed her MA on this back in Japan, based on a questionnaire completed by Irish people. It dealt with the whole question of language and identity. "I received 100 answers, full of information and I felt their sadness at having lost the language, I really feel



Japanese native and John B Keane scholar Timada Shimada who visited Listowel for the fourth time last week.

Irish people love Irish and would love to express themselves through it," she says in her fluent English (incidentally, she speaks rudimentary Gaeilge. "Is mise Tamami," she giggled at one stage).

"Language is a symbol of

ethnic identity and when it is gone, you would think identity would be gone too. But Irish identity has never gone. I am trying to find a stream from the Irish language to Hiberno-English that keeps it alive in language," she explained.

A journey that she began with the help of John B in 2002. The MA behind her it was time for the more rigorous doctoral thesis, which she is currently in the middle of. Back in Cork she chanced a bookstore with a view to finding some con-

crete body of vernacular work that she might grapple with. "Everybody I spoke to said you have to study John B Keane," she laughs. Several bookstores later and she had the complete works.

Today, she is on familiar terms with John B's wife Mary and son Billy, whom she again called into on her fourth trip to Listowel. "I love Listowel and Mary, I met her so many times," she exclaims in her uniquely Japanese way.

As for Billy? Well he took her through the finer points of Hiberno-English. One example of a Hiberno-English construction is the "I do be", as in "I do be eating potatoes," she explained. "Billy told me the story of Mrs Do Be and Mr Does Be," she laughed.

A couple found throughout John B's work, along with their ilk - all of it being coded and fed into a computer back home in Japan at the moment.

And what do her poor parents think of her love for this far flung isle?

"When I was staying with a friends' family in Cork they would ask me questions like do you have potatoes in your country and they asked me about a castle in China. For my mom and dad it is like that. They mix it up with Iceland - 'oh you'll be so cold' they say. My father was worried too because in his mind it's associated with the IRA," she laughs.

Only one thing for it, she reckons: she'll have to bring them to meet Mary and Billy Keane!