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Book-writing by computer II

Winging gentle words to us from County Offaly, Malcolm Macdonald displays (as might be expected) a truly Irish logic. He tells us of a writer (let's call him Joe) who, having first invested much of his hard earned capital in a new fangled micro and daisy-wheel printer, thereafter finds disks far cheaper to use than his old companion the typewriter. If, says Macdonald, Joe then persuades his publishers to take the data straight from his disks, Joe will save himself money. He therefore should not expect to receive any special additional payment from the publishers for having led the way in the computer revolution.

Macdonald overlooks a crucial factor. Joe is here acting not only as an author, but also as a typesetter. Thereby he saves his publishers a large expense. Instead of having to pay printers to key the entire work, and proof-readers to scrutinise the product, all the publishers need meet in typesetting is the comparatively small cost of inserting the printing codes.

An author who demands a special payment in such a case is asking his or her publishers to pass on to the self-employed typesetter (i.e. the author) a reasonable proportion of their saving in typesetting costs. Or to put it another way, the author is rightly seeking a share in the cost reductions made possible by new technology. He also aims at some small recompense for having condemned himself to stare all day long at a VDU screen.

Any writer who does not make this fair demand on his or her publishers *is doing a disservice to fellow authors* (if I may borrow a phrase from the excellent letter by Storm Dunlop printed just above Macdonald's effort in the summer issue of *The Author*). I'm sure that on reflection the excellent Macdonald will decide he doesn't wish to be guilty of that.