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January 11, 1956.

Mr. H. Rodney Sharp
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Wilmington, Delaware.

Dear Rodney:

Marion and I were very sorry to learn from your letter of December 21 that you have decided to go to Honolulu instead of coming to Mexico for January. We had looked forward very much to your coming here and I think you will enjoy your stay in Mexico whenever you find it fits in with your plans. I am sure you will have a very pleasant trip to Honolulu and you may find it a bit warmer there than it is this January in Mexico. We have had the most extraordinary weather in Mexico during the last year and up to now. We have had much colder weather in December and so far in January than we expect here. It has not, however, interfered with my getting at least several hours on top of the roof of our house in Cuernavaca during the weekends for a good sunbath without any clothes on. As a place to spend three or four weeks, Mexico City and its surroundings are really interesting any time of the year; so we hope you will keep Mexico very much in mind. We are really disappointed that you are not coming because I know you would have enjoyed the surroundings and some of the people here.

I appreciate your interest in Sypherd's book on "Curses". As you have shown this interest in the matter and have written to Dr. Perkins, I will tell you just a few words on how the situation is. Owen finished this book well over a year ago after having worked on it for a number of years. It is really a very scholarly work but, of course, is of interest only to scholars. As Knopf in New York had published several of Sypherd's previous books, Owen submitted the book on curses to him and Knopf wrote him that he would be very glad to publish it - that is, that his firm would be very glad to publish it - but that its circulation would really be so limited that it would not be a paying venture either for the publisher or for Sypherd. Knopf indicated that they would be ready to publish the book provided Owen guaranteed the cost of publication, which for about 3,000 copies at that time - well over a year ago - would have run about \$4,000.

When I finally learned about the matter towards the middle of last year, I asked Owen if he had any objection to my speaking to Knopf about it in New York as I have known Mr. and Mrs. Knopf over many years quite well. It is one of the really good publishing houses in New York. The fact that they were willing to publish it as one of their books showed what they and their readers thought about the book. Owen said he had no objection to my speaking to Mr. Knopf, which I did when I was in New York in May or June of last year. Knopf said that his firm was still prepared to publish the book as one of their books but that they would have to have the cost guaranteed and that the cost would now run somewhat higher than it did when he had originally indicated to Owen his willingness to publish the book. He said he would have his people go into the matter again and he wrote Owen towards the middle of last year, following my conversation with him, saying that his firm

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was still prepared to publish the book but that for around 3,000 volumes or so it would run between \$6,000 or \$7,000 dollars. The cost of printing books has gone up very considerably as I know from personal knowledge in the last year or so. I told Owen, when he told me about Knopf's letter, that I would see what could be done about two or three of his friends publishing the book - that is, guaranteeing the cost of publication to Knopf. Owen did not like the idea very much because he didn't like the thought of any of his friends, including myself, putting up any money for the publishing of the book although, of course, he was very much interested in seeing that the book was published. I had the matter very much in mind when I got the news of Owen's death.

Owen was really a well known English scholar among English scholars in our colleges and universities in the United States and, in a measure, in England. He wrote some very scholarly books. They all had very small circulation but they were useful to scholars. This book on curses has no value whatever except that it is an excellent piece of research in a very limited field and, of course, it is a useful contribution to scholarly literature on the English language. It would be a very useful and interesting book for libraries and colleges and universities in particular to have, and many English scholars in our country and in a measure in England would be interested in buying it. Now that Owen has passed away a part of my own interest in the publication of the book has gone because I was particularly interested, as one of Owen's longest and oldest friends, to see this book on which he had done such a great deal of work, receive an adequate hearing in scholarly circles, particularly those which knew his name. Now that Owen is gone it does not make a particle of difference to him whether this book is published or not.

On the other hand, the book is one of very real value. Owen's books over the years have, I think, done a good deal to make Delaware College better known and later the University, among other colleges and universities throughout the country. Certainly it was a wonderful thing for the old college and later for the university to have a man of Owen's scholarship and reputation on the teaching staff. I do not know whether the University has funds to publish a book of this kind. It would be a very nice memorial on the part of the University to publish the book - a very nice memorial to one who for so many years made such a valuable contribution to the work of the University. On the other hand, these matters are not only matters of sentiment but whether the University can do such a thing depends upon the funds which it has available and, in spite of the generosity of men like yourself, almost all of our schools, large and small, have financial problems these days.

After Owen's death I wrote a letter to Dr. Perkins to tell him that I had not heard of Owen's death until a week or ten days afterwards and that I would certainly have endeavored to be there for the funeral had I known of his death in time. I asked Dr. Perkins in this letter if he knew what might become of the manuscript for the book on curses, and I

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had a letter from Dr. Perkins several weeks ago in which he said that the manuscript was in the hands of Dr. Sypherd's executor, which is the Newark Trust Company, the Treasurer of which is Mr. Edward F. Matthews. He said that he had had an inquiry from you about the book and the value of its publication and that he had asked several members of the English department to read the manuscript to determine what shape it was in. I am sure that Dr. Perkins will learn from those in the English Department to whom he referred the matter, that the manuscript is in good shape, because at the time that Owen originally submitted it to Knopf over a year ago, Knopf at that time found the manuscript in shape to publish. It would require, I believe, no further editing.

As my own personal means are limited, and as I have naturally less interest in seeing the book published than I did while Owen was alive, I would still be prepared to be one of a number of Owen's friends who would guarantee the cost of publication. If Knopf publishes the book with the publishing cost guaranteed, he would of course handle the sale and distribution through the ordinary channels that his firm uses and, depending on the number of copies sold, a good part of the costs would be recovered.

I have no idea what it will be decided to do about the book, but I shall pass on to Dr. Perkins the comment which I've made about the matter in this letter. There is a possibility that he may find that the University wishes to take an interest in seeing that the book is made available to English scholars in the country.

This is a long letter again, but as you were good enough to mention the matter of Owen's book in your note which I received several weeks ago, I did want to give you this background.

Hoping that you will have a very pleasant stay in Honolulu and looking forward to seeing you in the course of the year, either here or in Wilmington, and with very best wishes from Marion and myself,

Always cordially and faithfully yours,

George S. Messersmith