

I first heard the name Patrick Hart early in my research for my biography of James Laughlin, publisher of many of Thomas Merton's books and especially of his poetry. I was faced with describing Laughlin's editing of Merton's *Asian Journal* after his accidental electrocution in Thailand, and that led me to Brother Patrick, who had been entrusted with Merton's correspondence during his travels. As soon as I read his advice to Merton on setting out, I knew that I was dealing with a man who combined wisdom and wit: he advised Merton in India not to drink tap water, but to "be content with wine or beer with his meals." Merton promised to follow his advice to the letter! Soon I was the recipient of Brother Patrick's immediate responses to my queries. Editing the *Journal* had been excruciatingly difficult, for in addition to the two main notebooks in which Merton had recorded the details of his trip, he had made numerous notations on scraps of paper as he traveled on trains and buses across India and up into the foothills of the Himalayas to visit the Dalai Lama, notes that he clearly intended eventually to order and amplify, correcting phonetic spellings and quick abbreviations. Because of his familiarity with Merton's handwriting, Brother Patrick was given the task of typing a clean copy of every note and passage Merton had written during his journey. As the book took shape over the course of several years of work by Laughlin, Naomi Burton (Merton's literary agent) and Brother Patrick, the troika of editors met at Laughlin's Norfolk, Connecticut home. "We were having a devil of a time making sense out of a passage that Merton had scribbled down during a bus ride," Brother Patrick told me. "We were baffled. It was late in the day, and Naomi said, 'Do you have any brandy?'" Laughlin rummaged in the kitchen and returned with a dusty bottle. Naomi downed a stiff shot and returned to the passage. This time she turned the book upside-down – and immediately read off the lines that had defeated us!" Not that there was frequent resort to such measures. Laughlin himself was notoriously abstemious, but after a day's work they would stop for dinner, and each person would be served two bottles of beer, never more nor less. Brother Patrick entertained the others by playing tunes from *Fiddler on the Roof* on the piano. My last meeting with Brother Patrick was in 2009 when I accompanied my wife, a Merton trustee, to

Gethsemani for her business meeting with the abbot, Father Elias. Brother Patrick took me in charge and we walked all over Gethsemani. Together we visited Merton's grave and attended a chapel service at which Brother Patrick was singing. I felt the joy with which he embraced his life at the abbey, and, intuitively, I understood why Merton so trusted and valued him. Until his final year, I continued to hear from Brother Patrick, notes written in his fine clear hand.

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