

Poets Doing Business

Review of
On the Banks of Monks Pond
The Thomas Merton/Jonathan Greene Correspondence
 with Essays and Notes by Jonathan Greene
 Frankfort, KY: Broadstone Books, 2004
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Reviewed by **Paul Quenon, OCSO**

James Russell Lowell wrote: "I hold that a letter which is not mainly about the writer of it lacks the prime flavor." Business letters from Thomas Merton may leave some faint scent in the cask, but that is about all. One must be excessively devoted to the Merton brew to seek it here. The real interest in this brief collection of letters between Merton and his young poet friend Jonathan Greene is context, in particular the context of the publication of Merton's "little magazine" *Monk's Pond*, its gestation and production.

It was thanks to their mutual friends, Victor and Carolyn Hammer, that in 1967 Merton and Greene first met. This led to a couple of visits to the monastery, with picnics and photographic expeditions. Snapshots of poet Robert Lax, Merton and the 25-year-old Greene give immediacy to this chronicle, as does the cycle of letters; most of these have to do with plans for *Monks Pond* and are footnoted with meticulous care. In fact, we learn that Jonathan Green eventually played a sizable part in the production of *Monks Pond*, and without him it might never have happened.

Other points of interest in the collection are a brief introduction by Greene to the *Early Poems* of Thomas Merton, and a review of *Monk's Pond* itself (both reprinted from earlier publications), and finally a concluding elegy that leaves us hankering for more of Jonathan Greene's own poetic brew:

Always selfish in loss,
 I berate you for dying,
 leaving us here
 stranded in life. . . .