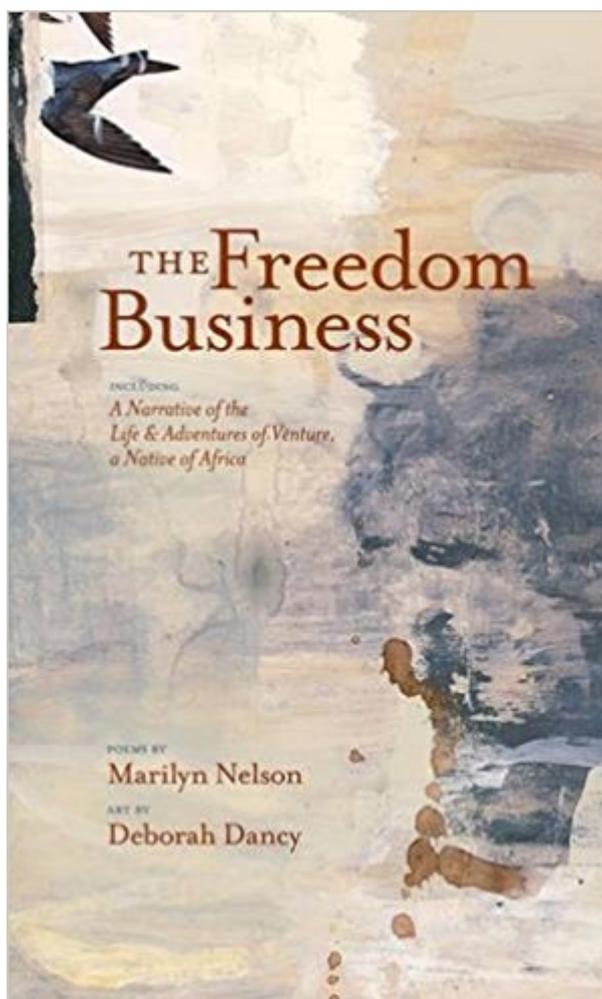


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The Freedom Business: Including A Narrative Of The Life & Adventures Of Venture, A Native Of Africa



Synopsis

The true narrative of a slave from Africa, crafted in verse by Marilyn Nelson. Born an African prince, Broteer Furro was captured by slave traders at age six. As he stepped onto a cargo ship, the vessel's steward purchased the boy and gave him a new name: Venture. He landed in Rhode Island and worked through a lifetime of slavery to buy not only his own freedom but the freedom of his wife and children. Remarkable in his own time for his ambition and physical stature, Venture Smith became history's first man to document both his capture from Africa and life as an American slave. In this breathtaking volume, Marilyn Nelson's poems sit opposite the text of Smith's own narrative. Nelson's controlled verse layers this edition with insight into Smith's stoic eighteenth-century prose. Deborah Dancy's stark watercolor collages highlight the tension between the economical language of the narrative and the turbulent emotion within the poems.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Grade 6 Up
Poems in various forms parallel the reproduced text of *A Narrative of the Life & Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa*, published in 1798. Nelson's depictions and interpretations of scenes from Venture's account bring a musical, emotional, and inquisitive context to the true story of an enslaved African who eventually bought freedom for himself and his family. Similar in format to *Fortune's Bones* (2004) and *Carver* (2001, both Front St), the volume features poems on the right-hand pages, facing the ongoing narrative on the left (amazingly, the two keep pace). Text floats over abstract earth-toned art that lends qualities of light and texture to match the tone of each selection. The poems have both the sense of natural speech and of oratory, giving rhythmic majesty

to intensely detailed physical and emotional landscapes. They are dense but rich, and encourage readers to approach the 18th-century narrative (which may seem oddly narrow-minded or stilted to today's youngsters) in a variety of ways. Respectful of both her audience and her subject, Nelson adds to her unique body of work connecting youngsters to history through a combination of primary-source material and verse.

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Starred Review In an extraordinary slave narrative recorded in 1798, Venture Smith remembers his capture in Guinea as a child; the horrific journey on the slave ship to Rhode Island; 30 years of hard labor; being sold and separated from his wife; and his years of work to buy his freedom and that of his family and to purchase his own land. Smith's original, first-person account, published in 1798, appears opposite Nelson's stirring poems, which are written in Smith's voice and both intensify and comment on his experiences. Some readers may decide to read Smith's whole continuous narrative before they begin again and read it with the poems. As in the book's title, the poem's elemental metaphor is the horror of people as business commodities, investments to speculate on or convert to cash, a workforce bought and sold. But the triumphant climax reverses the business deal: the owner's own self and then Smith earns enough to buy his pregnant wife, rejoicing that their child will be born free. Never intrusive, Dancy's sepia background art in watercolor, acrylics, and collage includes ink lines that evoke chains and ropes and then broken bonds. It's surprising that this essential part of American biography and history isn't more widely known. Suggest this as a crossover title to adults. Grades 9-12. --Hazel Rochman

His name was Broteer Furro, the first son of a prince. He was born in Dukandarra, Guinea in 1729. Broteer's mother left his polygamous father when he was five and left him in the care of a farmer. A year later, his father came to fetch him, but soon after that his father was murdered and he himself was sent on a four hundred-mile march, only to be sold into slavery. In Anamaboo he soon boarded a canoe bound for Rhode Island. He was soon dubbed "Venture," but that was the only thing about Broteer that changed. He remained a determined, fiercely independent person throughout his life. He would go on to raise a family and struggle to buy their freedom. This is his story, a story he dictated for the world to remember him by. It was published in 1798. I was fascinated by Venture's story, having never heard the name even though the author's information claims he was the "first man to document both his capture from Africa and life as an American slave." The biography was

printed on the left-hand page, the poetry on the right. Although both were stunning, I was somewhat distracted by the set up as the story was so interesting and went back to the poetry only after finishing the story.

The Freedom Business is a unique poetry collection, in which each poem is created in response to the true-life memoir of Brothier Furro (1729-1805), later dubbed "Venture Smith", the first African known to document his capture and life as an American slave. As the decades passed he eventually earned his freedom, and that of his wife and children. Poet Marilyn Nelson places pages from Furro's eighteenth-century prose memoir side-by-side along with original poetic works, illustrated by the dark, earthy watercolor collages of artist Deborah Dancy. The whole is a work of art that reveals emotion, determination, and survival; the daily life of a practical man for whom everything had a price - even his life, and the lives of his family. Highly recommended.

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