

Fall 1986

The Merchants' Song

Roo Borson

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Recommended Citation

Borson, Roo (1986) "The Merchants' Song," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 27 , Article 14.

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The Merchants' Song

after "Foxfire" by Hiroshige

Through the night-blue fields, with lanterns, we go,
under the leafless ayenoki,
and the ghostly foxes
shelter under dry branches and unwinking stars.
Toward the distant houses of Oji,
toward the slopes coated with pine
we make our way,
and we with our lanterns are
flames in air, the burning aether.
We come to collect the unpaid bills,
for the new year is upon us
and those not paid this last night of December
must wait until April.
Here, in the cropped fields of Oji,
among encampments of foxes,
their slender ears and ankles,
the stooks which stand like silent peasants,
we take our rest,
for there are those among us
who have died this year
and must wander tonight, forever,
represented by flames,
collecting bills which will not be paid
in April, or ever.

Roo Borson