

Tony Cosier

from "The Canoe"

RAVEN

A seagoing craft
With a prow as long as the wolfjaw in a Kwakiutl dancer's mask.
The steersman stands in the stern,
Feathered and clawed, far too big for a bird.
A huge eye is round as the sun.
A beak prodigious overrides half the crew,
Sets the shape for the rest.
With a head angled oddly, as though
Creating what he steers at,
The Raven pries with concentration to the right.
They will arrive. Things will change.

MOUSE

Sharp-eared and needle-eyed,
With a nose as thin
As the line of life on the beach,
Qaganjaat
Peers back
At the dwindling coast,
Ruminates on edges, shadows, glistenings
None of the others can know.

STERN PADDLER

The one in the cedarbark cape and spruceroot hat
Has no counterpart.
Unless it is the canoe enclosed in wood;
Or the chief who wears a hat;
Or the woman on the alternate stern;
Or that, like the son of many a father,
He resembles the man who made him.

Being only human sets him off,
And yet his stroke,
Like every other stroke
On either side,
Is at the point just past power
Where going back is mainly coming up,
A sweep toward the next pull,
As though he, too, is bent
On going where they go.