And Still
By Michele Battiste

A coyote walks onto the half-frozen waters
of Waneka Lake, and the winter sun (as startled
as the people circling the shoreline) pauses
its slow creep behind the mountain and stares.
Its last-gasp light, slanted and golden, clings
to the animal's coat, turning her form

to treasure.
Tempting, maybe, to imagine a time when wild
things wandered a landscape not staked or claimed
or platted or mined, before playground and parking
lot, frisbee golf and the *thwok thwok thwok*
of pickleballs. Just *shhhhhhhh*, the susurrant wind
drifting across endless plain, First People's footsteps
breaking tall brittle grasses, and a coyote walks
onto the half-frozen lake

but the past
won't behave, refuses to humor our longing
for a landscape that did not exist and insists
that the lake, like history, is manmade. A spring
dammed in 1865 for thirsty farmland and a coyote
walks onto

the ice. The lake soon wider, deeper, the keeper
of water needed to steam power a plant, electrifying
the night and, again, a coyote walks
onto the ice

and it's easy
to imagine pinpricks of luminescence pushing
back the darkness from Longmont to Denver,
the strength to sustain candescence moored
on the south shore of the lake, *our* lake, its waters
half-frozen. Tempting

to forget the men who hauled
coal from beneath our town to feed the plant, its power,
the progress, a radiance we can't deny

and it's
beautiful, our history. Ugly, too, what we claimed.
Those we exploited, excluded. The slag piles left
behind. Or are they a monument to what we must
remember? And still, as a green-winged teal drifts
the surface, unaware of danger behind him,
not thinking of what comes next, a sun-golden
coyote walks

onto the half-frozen waters of Waneka Lake
like it belongs there, like it did before, like it will
again, like it will outlast the boathouse
and pavilions and people circling the shoreline,
staring in wonder as the sun slips, at last, behind
the mountain.

The past
howls. The now
listens. The future begins
to sing.