

Treed: Walking in Canada's Urban Forests

Originally appeared on the LUNA Toronto site at lunatoronto.org, now inactive

I saw this book on a shelf at Type Books on Dundas West and immediately picked it up and bought it. The cover design, title, subtitle, the information that the author is a poet—everything spoke to me. I had to readjust my expectation slightly when I realized that the book wouldn't be about urban forests all over Canada, but mainly about urban forests and trees in Winnipeg, where I've never been. But as I read on, this distinction became increasingly irrelevant. I found myself walking through these forests in my imagination, connecting them to ravines in Toronto, to High Park, to other urban and suburban forests and conservation areas that I've explored around Ontario and elsewhere, feeling a dynamic tension in the similarities and differences.

Treed is a collection of essays that starts and finishes in Assiniboine Forest in Winnipeg. In the chapters in between Ariel Gordon travels in and out of her city and province, weaves between the personal and the political, and balances wide-ranging research and her own intimate observations of landscapes and people. It's not a linear journey, but as someone who often prefers to wander and stop to look closely at things, rather than to walk with the utmost efficiency, I appreciated the detours and serendipities, the feeling of strolling in conversation with someone who cares about so many of the same things as I do.

In *Treed*, Gordon follows her curiosity and her intuition as she searches for answers to her most pressing questions about the urban forest. She reaches back in time for context, particularly in relation to Winnipeg's Indigenous and Métis history, and grapples with the troubling changes she's seeing in the present. She hunts for mushrooms, plays Pokémon GO, cares for her young daughter, mourns trees being cut down, worries about an unseasonably warm fall, weighs conflicting perspectives on managing urban trees, travels to explore the mountains of Northern British Columbia, discovers new layers of awareness through forest bathing, writes copiously, and keeps bringing herself back to her favourite urban woods for solace.

I was moved when Gordon—in response to a surge of anger and sadness from women in her life struggling with the injustices of the world—decides to start leading groups of women on walks through the Assiniboine Forest. It's a response that is both humble and generous, grounded in the belief that trees and movement are always going to help, that we all deserve respite and connection. The women walk and talk, they take shelter from a bitterly cold day under the trees, they let themselves fall into deep powdery snow and gaze quietly at the sky. They leave feeling comforted, recharged, even celebratory.

As someone who spends a lot of time walking, especially in any pockets of green I can find in the city, I loved everywhere this book took me. I felt a kinship with Gordon and all the places her curiosity led her, and with her commitment to working with both the gifts and limitations of the place she lives in. It made me think about all the ways it is possible to engage with urban nature: to tend, to celebrate, to protect, to find nourishment and inspiration.