

Review Written by Kyra Lisse

As Roanoke's Writer by Bus, the amazing Eva Lynch-Comer read from her chapbook *Sonder* at Book No Further. Included in the collection are both poems and short stories—a delightful combination that's reshaped my understanding of what a "chapbook" can be.

Asked what inspired the creation of *Sonder*, Eva said, "I wanted to find a way to make this magical." She's referring to the fact that many of her works contain realism *and* magical realism. In a particularly affecting story, entitled "Yemaya," two Black women, Oshun (the narrator) and Yemaya, board a Roanoke bus in 1955. A white woman tries to force Oshun to give up her seat, but she refuses. Just as a "red-faced officer appears from thin air like an apparition and storms down the aisle," Yemaya rises and, raising her arms, floods the bus "to the brim" with ocean water (8). Oshun finds that she can still breathe, and that all the white people on the bus have been washed away. When Yemaya lowers her arms, the bus is dry, and all Black passengers are still on board. It's a chilling—but also empowering—reimagining of segregation and racism in this very city. Eva noted after the fact that Yemaya is a water goddess from the Yoruban religion. I'm in awe of her ability to seamlessly weave these different registers—the awful reality, redeeming magic, and religious references—into her fiction.

In Eva's titular poem, "Sonder," the speaker is riding the bus and homing in on various sights and sounds. Punctuating the poem is the phone conversation of a woman "with bright pink hair": "Can you hear me?," she says, before adding, a few lines later, "You will come see me today right? (2). These two lines of dialogue capture the melancholiness of sonder, of longing to connect with those around us. "A man with long dreadlocks bends over his phone," Eva writes in the poem's final lines. "I want to reach over                    pull the lint from his hair // but I do not know him, so I fold //                    my hands in my lap" (Ibid.). There it is again: that desire to make contact, limited, as Eva pointed out at the reading, by social convention. I'd argue that where life fails, this chapbook succeeds: it facilitates connections between reader and writer, between writer and page, and between the pages themselves. Which is to say, I'm incredibly thankful to have been brought into the fold.