

single window

by Daniel Sluman



Daniel Sluman is a 34-year-old poet and disability rights activist based in London. Born in Gloucestershire, he gained a first in his BA in English at University of Gloucestershire, and a distinction in his MA at the same institution. Daniel's writing first began to be published whilst studying at University, and in 2012 his debut poetry collection *Absence has a weight of its own* was published to critical acclaim by Nine Arches Press. He was named one of Huffington Post's Top 5 British Poets to Watch in 2015, the same year his second book *the terrible* was released. Daniel has recently co-edited the first major UK Disability Poetry *Anthology Stairs and Whispers: D/deaf and Disabled Poets Write Back* with Sandra Alland and Khairani Barokka. He has previously held editing roles at *Iota* and *Dead Ink*, and he has studied towards a PHD in disability poetics, funded by an AHRC award from Midlands3Cities.

Reviews

'Insightful, poignant and revelatory, *single window* offers us a language of tortured temporality: time accelerates, halts, collapses, marked by shifting patterns of light that 'wash in and out'. Limited by chronic illness, hemmed in and marginalised, events outside the window garner new resonance as the occupants witness the world slipping by. Inside, we journey through scenes of companionship, territories of love, touch and tenderness. Rendered with delicate and gritty word play, husband and wife 'wake in yesterday's clothes' and watch the 'piss-bright sunrise'. Thoughts and observations are scored to the fragmented experience of living with illness—bodies are wrapped and unwrapped, pushed beyond their limits, as the couple leak and love, participating in each other's healing. Love is a comfort, an intervention and important inquiry; time spent in this liminal space provokes an all-consuming intimacy that normative bodies may never experience. Switching between

somatic, psychic and emotional registers, *single window* provides an immersive experience into the erratic, unpredictable and unstable processes of illness. A stunning read.' - Dorothy Lehané

'In *single window* Daniel Sluman gives us a noir view into the world of disability, drugs and pain. Like Larry Eigner from his single post on a front porch, Sluman crafts poems from a singularly restrictive view - the small space that he and his wife shared virtually immobile for a year. Through his skillful use of language the poet draws the reader into a visceral miasma in which the hope generated by love is often only a faint flicker. It is an experience rarely found in disability poetry.' - Michael Northen, editor *Beauty is a Verb: the New Poetry of Disability*

Poem 1 – p 17

half-awake to the noise / of pages flitting
next to you / like a tongue wetting / like a bird
landing / i drink my tea as quietly /
as i can stare / at an invisible spot / beyond
the tv / until my body & mind / finally meet

Poem 2 - p 43

like a saint
you kiss the sickliest part of me

eyes shut

the rings slide carefully
from your fingers

until they spill & settle on the table

ponytail drawn
tight against your scalp

your palms oiled

the fine hair on my stump glowing
as you stretch your hands over all this hurt

the stunted hip-bone
& its crest of thickened scar

your knuckles smoothing knots
from the sluggish muscles

that no longer flex the hip
into a half-smile

i imagine the phantom limb

pouring into your palms like water
all the cruel words & shame

thrown into the space
where my leg should be

pulled out like barbs

this is how it feels
to have your trauma held

i tell you your kindness kills me
your grace kills me

your soft lips pressed against this void
kills me again & again

being loved by you
is like turning the volume up so high

you can't hear yourself breathe.

Poem 3 - p 81

the trousers i will marry you in
spread between your hands
over the living room carpet
needle seized in the corner of your lips
cross-legged & barefoot
you mark with chalk the border
where my body ends
sow the flap of fabric
to tighten the sides into a grimace
& most will never know this intimacy
how you trace every ridge of the lipped pelvis
with the chime of your scissors
making a space in this world for me to fill

rounding the edge to hang off me like a crescent moon
you ply your love seam by seam

Discussion Ideas

- The blurb for this book describes the context of its composition – written by an author experiencing the loneliness, fear and isolation disability can bring in current UK society. He sees the world through ‘a single window’. What is the word ‘like’ doing in the poem on page 17? How far can the creation of a simile go to help a writer escape his constraints?
- What might it mean to compare your partner to a saint, as in the poem on page 43?
- ‘most will never know this intimacy’ – what do you think about this assertion from the poem on page 81?
- *Single Window* takes the form of a poetry journal, documenting the poet’s experiences and those of his wife through the hard year of 2016. What other poetry journals do you know of, or have read – from the classic *Autumn Journal* (Louis MacNeice, 1938) to the bang up to date *100 Lockdown Sonnets* (Jacqueline Saphra, 2021). Ever been tempted to keep a poetry journal yourself? What would writing a poetry journal do for you that keeping an ordinary journal wouldn’t?
- If you had 5 copies of this book and pile of jiffy bags, who would you send them to? Who needs to read it?

Other books by Daniel Sluman

Absence has a weight of its own (Nine Arches, 2012)

The Terrible (Nine Arches, 2015)

If you liked Daniel Sluman, try ...

- Polly Atkin
- Rachael Boast
- Sean Burn

Daniel Sluman online

www.danielsluman.com