

Plural Identities in Sam J. Miller's *Blackfish City*

Valentina Romanzi

DOI: 10.26379/1545

Abstract

Sam J. Miller's dystopian novel *Blackfish City* (2018) is set in Qaanaaq, a multicultural city built on the freezing waters of the Arctic after climate change and a series of social collapses forced most of humanity to relocate. Qaanaaq is run by a network of A.I.s and ruled by a secretive group of shareholders with the support of local politicians.

In this essay, I explore the polymorphous identities in *Blackfish City*, with particular reference to two characters (Soq and the orcamancer) and the city itself.

Firstly, Qaanaaq's shapeshifting identity lies in the plurality of its people, in the differences and cultural contaminations that echo throughout the novel. It is a 'city without a map,' to paraphrase a podcast recorded in the novel, and thus its identity is a patchwork of different traditions and habits retrieved from lost civilizations.

Secondly, the orcamancer and other members of her family have a direct connection to an animal to which they are 'nanobonded.' They act in unison and influence each other, forming a posthuman unit of two identities bonded for life into one symbiotic organism.

Thirdly, polymorphism can be found in the character of Soq, a person "beyond gender [...] some days butch and some days queen, but always Soq, always the same and always uncircumscribable underneath it all" (42). Soq is referred to with the pronouns 'they/them/their,' a choice which underlines their non-binary gender and adds a layer to their plural identity, acquired when Soq contracts 'the breaks,' an STD which floods their mind with their lover's memories.

Additionally, I argue that Soq's plural identity also encloses the first two cases of polymorphism mentioned above, due to their family link to the Orcamancer and their deep understanding of the city. This makes them the best representative of a new generation of Qaanaaqians, if not of the city itself, and a layered character whose plural identity ensures they will be fit to understand the shapeshifting nature of the ecosystem in which they live and rule it with awareness.