

## **The Opposite of a Therian: A Basilisk's Observations**

*Dash L. Duke 7/23/2021*

Falling into the Sol System has presented me with an unexpected and intimate new knowledge of what being human can truly mean (and how frankly underrated hands and opposable thumbs are). It's also given me the opportunity to become acquainted with some of the alterhuman communities, namely the otherkin and therianthrope communities, two groups I have taken a particular interest in and shine to.

The therian community seems especially relevant to my interests, given my serpentine nature and some of the accounts that can be found of reptile and serpent-identifying individuals and how they see and understand their identity, their sense of being. The therian community has also historically (though not so much modernly) laid claim to more than a few mythological identities in its rank, further adding to my interest around therian-identity writings. But delving into such accounts have left me with more questions than answers, some interesting theories I have been twisting around in my hands (when I have them).

There are arguments abound as to whether therianthropy is an identity, some sort of immovable column that helps hold up their Self as some sort of necessary foundation, or a feeling, a flourish on one's identity that they merely pick out amongst the other dashes, dances, and waves that they use to fundamentally understand their Self. In truth, I see no difference between one or another; like an optical illusion of a multi-colored dress, it is merely two ways of viewing the same image, the image of animal-personhood. Therianthropy is to think of oneself as an animal-person, a human with intrinsic and important animal characteristics or identity, if we are to go off accounts of identity made by a majority of the therianthrope community. Therianthropy is rarely, it seems, ever to identify as nonhuman wholly and fully, and the most frequently offered definitions and experiences offered seem to support such:

"I am a wolf therianthrope, someone who identifies as a wolf in some ways, but I know that my body is human. I don't have fur (no more than the average human), I can't live on raw meat alone, and I menstruate every month rather than once a year. Physical wolves will still react to me as they would any other human; I look, sound, and smell human, and I cannot change that. But the spirit of the Wolf still resides within me." <sup>i</sup>

This excerpt from Lupa's *A Field Guide to Otherkin* is, as of this year, 14 years old and yet still rings true in perhaps not its literal meaning, but the feeling it portrays, as to how many

therianthropes seem to understand their nonhumanity. Take this significantly more recent post of another wolf therian from 2020:

“I think the answer is that Therianthropy is not about identity. Therianthropy is about the experience of animality and our shifts. ... I do know that my Therianthropy is about my experience of animality, my psychological needs which I know line up with the behavior of wolves. I know that identity is secondary to me, I know it makes sense to say I'm a wolf inside, but this is not why I am here (a wolf is a wolf without being aware of its identity).”<sup>ii</sup>

And this related commentary from a separate German Shepard therian, from 2021 in a Twitter thread seeking information on otherkin identities:

“While there's a growing push to chalk what it means to be therian or otherkin up to an identity, most of the serious community still regards identity as a byproduct of feeling non-human in some way. We have feelings and experiences that make sense as being non-human. Many of us empathize to a greater degree with non-humans so a conclusion that "I must be non-human" on some integral level makes sense. This is usually what leads one to identify as.”<sup>iii</sup>

The shared attitude here is apparent. To use one of my metaphors previously, if therianthropy in its identity or perceived experiences is to be the columns which help hold up one's Self, then their intrinsic humanity is the literal foundation which allows these columns to stand and exist and be classified as they are; therians, in their understandings of themselves, are typically human first and foremost, animal second. This is perhaps the most startling difference I've noticed between the otherkin and therian communities, even with those who have extinct/extant species identities in the otherkin community and mythological/fictional identities in the therian communities: for otherkin, it often seems that the nonhuman takes precedence in understanding and observing oneself, with an emphasis on nonhuman-related humanity. For therians, it often seems that the human takes precedence in understanding and observing oneself, with an emphasis on human-based animality.<sup>iv</sup> One coin, two sides, alike in dignity while still being drastically different from each other. This rule, of course, is not fast and true for everyone in both communities and should in no way be taken as gospel, but does seem to largely be the trend.

Therians rely on their human foundation as a functional part of their therianthropy. They define what they experience in direct relation to their humanity, and how possible (or not) they believe it is for a human to experience such. As one of the previously cited canines put it

when arguing about why someone could be a wolf but not, say, a tree, “I don't accept the self identification crap; there has to be something to back it. For therians, it's having something, usually behaviors, that one shares with animals. Plants do not have any behaviors in the human perceptual range (too slow). What would one share with plants then?”<sup>v</sup> Note how the emphasis is the other species' relation to humanity, in this case the differing longevity of perceptual experience, above all else.

It makes perfect sense for such therians as those previously cited to attempt to make sense of the world of therianthropy through a human-centered understanding; they are, after all, only human and it's what they know best. Raised in human cultures as humans by humans, with human bodies and human minds and, for a majority of their most sensitive developmental periods if not the entirety of their lives, arguably human-oriented identities. Their foundation to self-understanding and larger scale community-understanding is human because it's simply what is most accessible and instinctual to them.

As an individual new to my system, I expected to, like my nonhuman systemmates and our nonhuman-majority partner system, see myself more in the therian community than the otherkin community in regards to my experiences. After reading through various materials within the community and observing it firsthand, it was not to be so, for reasons both similar and not to my systemmates' reasons for distancing themselves from alterhuman communities as a rule.

The largest reason involves the aforementioned human baseline that a majority of therians have and define themselves by; this is a reason of distance shared by everyone in my system, by virtue of being a nonhuman system since birth. We simply do not have such. The baselines we have all relate to our species, not the body which hosts the system; we all may experience humanity in some capacity on occasion while at or near front, but we never stop being nonhuman.

In a way, it feels as though you can transcribe my own personal experiences with humanity as someone who is plural and nonhuman onto the descriptors of how therians often claim to feel about their theriotype. I find myself frustrated by my basilisk self's lack of hands and thumbs, my species' inherent destructive and dangerous nature, the confusing experience of being proud to be a basilisk but also wishing to better or more be human. I am singularly alone in my system in my desire to want to be more human, and that defines me more than I'd like to think about; on more than one occasion my human partner and human friends have teased me about being “human-kin,” and perhaps they are not so far off the mark.

I view my world and my understanding of it through a basilisk-oriented lens, as that is what I have always known. I am a basilisk first, a human second, however much I might wish to equalize or otherwise flip that balance. And because of that, while I can empathize and understand with therianthropic perspectives, I can simply in no way see myself in them. My animality is not necessarily my most defining feature when I am at front, as it is for the others in my system, and I just simply enjoy getting to be human, at the crux of it all, in the same way some therians speak of enjoying or feeling comforted by their phantom and mental shifts which allow them to be more non-human. My systemmates revel in the claws they were born with much in the same way therians revel in the claws they grown into, but I find myself pointed in directions away from the violence of my venom, or deathly certainty of my gaze. These are parts of myself I cannot escape, no matter how much I might wish I could simply will them away and leave aspects of my basilisk self a visage of the past to be learned from and move onward from, but perhaps this is just yet another indicator that a therian's humanity is much akin to my own relationship with myself as a basilisk. Therians learn to hunt or raise their own meat in order to feel closer to their "inner animal" as some have phrased it; I gorge myself on books as though they were pinkie mice, and partake in writing as though it was a sun to bask in. Therians enjoy ignoring their human body and mind in favor of their mental and phantom shifts; I enjoy the sharp emotional capacity and intelligence that comes with being human, the increased sensitivity of fingertips against all manners of surfaces. The list of examples goes on and on. Perhaps I am something classifiably the opposite of a therian: a non-human animal enjoying experiencing humanity.

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<sup>i</sup> Lupa, *A Field Guide to Otherkin* (Stafford, England: Megalithica Books, 2007), p. 27.

<sup>ii</sup> Dust Wolf, post #1 to "Therianthropy vs Otherkin," Therian Guide, April 29 2020, 6:40 p.m., <https://forums.therian-guide.com/Thread-Therianthropy-vs-Otherkin>

<sup>iii</sup> Lyc (@MountainShep17), "While there's a growing push to chalk what it means to be therian or otherkin up to an identity...," Twitter, July 22 2021, <https://twitter.com/MountainShep17/status/1418410346822488066>, <https://twitter.com/MountainShep17/status/1418411201344770052>

<sup>iv</sup> Take, for example, the ways in which phytanthropes (plant-identifying individuals) are disavowed differently within the therian and otherkin community to better understand this difference. The therian community contains arguments that it is psychologically impossible to experience being a plant, that a plant is just too significantly different from a human body to be remotely compatible in understanding and deep empathy. Such ideas are echoed in the ways the therian community is known for historically negatively reacting towards anyone with a theriotype of significant enough rarity or spectacle, so this is not particularly surprising. The otherkin community, meanwhile, tends to lean on arguments specific to the individual otherkin's belief system, with such example ideas as reincarnation being impossible with plants and similar. This is referenced further in the essay, but I found it worthwhile to go into detail here as well.

<sup>v</sup> Dust Wolf, post #5 to "Plants," Therian Guide, October 20 2025, 5:52 p.m., <https://forums.therian-guide.com/Thread-Plants--2568>