

HOKTIWE

(for L. Rain Prud'homme-Cranford)

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This work is a cento, a type of found poetry, composed using David Kaufman's *Atakapa Ishakkoy Dictionary* as well as Gatschet and Swanton's *A Dictionary of the Atakapa Language*. I use Kaufman's orthography here, which conforms with contemporary linguistic scholarship. The correct name for the language is "Ishakkoy" ("Human Being Talk"), as "Atakapa" is an exonym and slur historically directed at the tribe by others.² The primary original source material was gathered in Lake Charles, Louisiana and environs in the 1880's and 1920's. There is but a small corpus of Ishakkoy, consisting of a few paragraphs of narratives in the Gatschet & Swanton dictionary. There are, however, many example sentences therein that aren't included in those texts, which I extracted on notecards, using these to compose additional texts.

Note: All sentences appear as in the Kaufman dictionary, except that some place names have been switched into different sentences. All place names used are found in the published dictionaries of the language.

Katkoš koykit:

"Išak tayš okiān yukit he mon yalpeyulāt."

Šokšoš šokšo waṇšolkīt.

An eagle is speaking:

"Strangers have come and taken our land."

Birds are tearing up the young seed plants.

Cikip tat.

Naw taw walwalštit.

Iti hihwalšat:

A blue heron is poised there.

Many feathers are waving.

I dreamt last night:

Wi šaknoms puškin waṇankamstīt.

Neš ne(y)kin tlop tat.

Išak išat ha(n) huulāt.

My children are playing outside.

A post stands driven into the ground.

They see a headless man.

Cok Taykin išakāt.

He was born near Blackbird River.

Tew Tulkin išakăt.

Kui Taykin išakăt.

He was born at Tail of the Lake.

He was born along Cactus Pear Bayou.³

Nun tixt mon waŋo.

Oce hew šiwtiwkit.

Išakkoy tiwxc koyo.

I walk all over the village.

Snakes slither quickly.

I speak a little Ishakkoy.

Okwaŋš haŋšăt.

Tik kakáwkin polšwaŋkit.

Itans ockawškit.

The war is over.

On the water an arrow floats.

A cloud passes over the sun.

Šaktelšo.

Kakáw taw inikit.

Wi šokatkok akilikišo.

I unfold.

The water comes in.

I soak the cloth.

Šoktol hew wi ke.

Wi Nuŋ Uškin ket ta.

Kultan oktišat.

I'm rather lucky.

I live in Bulbancha.⁴

A long time has passed.

Wiš kewtiukšo ya šokyułšo.

Cit lawkit.

Tanstal tolka makawăt.

I smoke and I write.

The tobacco burns.

The paper falls down whirling.

Pam inululăt.

Ha išak lukin tiktat temakip.

Neš takamš kamkamš.

Many footprints they left.

This fellow goes wading in the mud.

Limbs branch out from the tree.

Hoktiwe.

Hatpeo.

Wi äm (h)inawš.

We are together.

I am ready.

Let me drink.

 Notes

¹ Enrolled member and tribal councilperson, Atakapa-Ishak Nation of Southwest Louisiana and Southeast Texas. This poem was composed during an Adaptations Residency at A Studio in the Woods, Tulane University, Spring 2020. *Hiwew* for comments to Christine Baniewicz, Carolyn Dunn, David Kaufman, Justin Southworth, Russell Reed, and Kimberly Gail Weiser. This poem is recited by me in the 2020 short film *Hoktiwe: Two Poems in Ishakkoy* by Fernando López and myself (<https://vimeo.com/452435309>), commissioned by the Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans for the exhibition "Make America What America Must Become" (<https://www.oc20.cacno.org/>).

² For more on the status of the language, including notes on the tribe itself, see Darensbourg and Kaufman. Other recent writings in Ishakkoy by tribal member Tanner Menard are discussed in Lief and Darensbourg.

³ Tew Tul ("Tail of the Lake") is the original name for Lake Charles, Louisiana. Kui Tay refers to a bayou nearby where an important food source, the prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia humifusa*) may be found. The French assigned a name that is an echo of the original, Bayou Guy. In their dictionary Gatschet and Swanton misidentify the waterway as "Bayou des Gayes" (72). My thanks to Robert Caldwell (Choctaw-Apache Tribe of Ebarb) for helping with the correct identification.

⁴ Nuṅ Uš ("big village") is a postcolonial term in Ishakkoy for Bulbancha ("the place of foreign languages"), which is the original, pre-colonial name for what most call "New Orleans." On the name and its spellings, see Hali Dardar, "Bvlbancha," *64 Parishes*, Fall 2019, p. 22. For more on Indigenous People in Bulbancha who still use that name, including myself, cf. Laine Kaplan-Levinson, "New Orleans: 300 // Bulbancha: 3000," 20 December 2018, in *TriPod: New Orleans At 300*, produced by WWNO, podcast, <https://www.wwno.org/post/new-orleans-300-bulbancha-3000>.

Works Cited

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