

**PAUL LE JEUNE (1591–1664)**  
***ON THE BELIEFS, SUPERSTITIONS, AND ERRORS OF THE***  
***MONTAGNAIS INDIANS (1634)***

I have already reported that the Indians believe that a certain being named Atahocam created the world and that one named Messou restored it. When I questioned the famous sorcerer and the old man with whom I passed the winter on this subject, they answered that they did not know who was the first creator of the world: that it was perhaps Atahocam, but that was not certain; that they only spoke of Atahocam as one speaks of a thing so far distant that nothing sure can be known about it; and, in fact, the word *Nitatchokan* in their language means “I relate a fable; I am telling an old story invented for amusement.”

As to the Messou, they hold that he restored the world, which was destroyed in the Flood. Thus, it appears that they have some tradition of that great universal deluge which happened in the time of Noah, but they have burdened this truth with a great many irrelevant fables.

They also say that all animals, of every species, have an elder brother, who is, as it were, the source and origin of all individuals, and this elder brother is wonderfully great and powerful. The elder of the beavers, they tell me, is perhaps as large as our cabin, although his younger brothers (that is, the ordinary beavers) are not quite as large as our sheep. Now these elder brothers of all the animals are the younger brothers of the Messou.

They recognize two progenitors of the seasons. One is called Nipinoukhe; it is this one that brings the spring and summer. This name comes from *nipin*, which in their language means “springtime.” The other is called Pipounoukhe, from the word *pipoun*, which means “winter”; it therefore brings the cold season. I asked them if this Nipinoukhe and Pipounoukhe were men or if they were animals of some other species, and in what place they usually dwelt. They replied that they did not know exactly what form they had, but they were quite sure they were living, for they heard them, they said, talking or rustling, especially at their coming, though they could not tell what they were saying.

Furthermore, they believe that there are certain spirits of light, or spirits of the air, which they call Khichikouai, from the word *khichikou*, which means “light” or “the air.” The spirits, or Khichikouai, are acquainted with future events. They see very far ahead. This is why the Indians consult them, not all of them but certain shamans, who know better than the others how to impose upon and fool these people.

**Taken from Paul le Jeune, “On the Beliefs, Superstitions, and Errors of the Montagnais Indians,” in *The Jesuit Relations: Native and Missionaries in Seventeenth-Century North America*, edited by Allan Greer (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2000), 28–30.**