CULTURE HERO, term applied to a figure in the mythologies of many peoples who is said to have originated the customs of the people and even to have created the people and the world in which they live. Although culture heroes appear throughout the world, their forms and the tales concerning them are varied. They may appear in human or animal form, but in either case have superhuman capacities. They may or may not be subject to higher powers. Sometimes they help mankind against the orders of higher powers, as in the case of Prometheus who gave fire to humans. These heroes are not gods, but the cycles of myths concerning them serve to explain the origin of phenomena and to justify sacred institutions. In an Apache myth a hero killed Monster Eagle and declared that eagle feathers should thereafter have medicinal value. In a California Indian tale Coyote and Rabbit stole fire from its selfish owners and brought live coals to the people.

ERIKA BOURGUIGNON, The Ohio State University

See also MYTHOLOGY.

This draft is from Erika Bourguignon's personal records and may not exactly replicate the authoritative published document. See http://www.paulbourguignon.com/Erika.html for more information.