Anglesey) – a refuge for British rebels and a stronghold of the druids – the Iceni conspired with their neighbours the Trinovantes and others to revolt. Boudica was chosen as their leader, for, as Tacitus said in the *Annals*, 'the Britons make no distinction of sex when they choose their leaders.' Boudica and her people destroyed Camulodunum (modern Colchester), Londinium and Verulamium (St Albans). Suetonius returned and regrouped his forces in the West Midlands; before the battle against him began, Boudica spoke to her troops from her chariot, with her daughters beside her. If the men wanted to live in slavery, then that was their choice, she declared: but she, a woman, was resolved to win or die.

Sadly, this time around the Romans won the battle, and it was said that Boudica poisoned herself after the defeat. More was lost, of course, than just a battle. The Romans remained, and the people were weakened. There were no more tribal queens: the Romans considered female power to be a sign of barbarism. The Anglo-Saxons came, the country converted rapidly to Christianity, and the patriarchy took firm hold. And yet, and yet . . . Boudica may have lost, but still she fought, and still she led. A woman from my culture, out of my history. I allowed myself to develop a fantasy. What if women rose again? Not in battle, but what if we could reclaim, somehow, that power and respect which women had lost? What if we could somehow dismantle this planet-destroying patriarchy, and recreate a world in which we lived in balance?

It was a lovely fantasy, but I was young, powerless and poor. I slipped back, as we all do, into the needs and strictures of my own life. I slipped quietly into the system, settled for safety and security. It was a long time before I thought again about Boudica, and the lost power of Celtic women.

The world which men have made isn't working. Something needs to change. To change the world, we women need first to change ourselves – and then we need to change the stories we tell about who we are. The stories we've been living by for the past few

centuries – the stories of male superiority, of progress and growth and domination – don't serve women and they certainly don't serve the planet. Stories matter, you see. They're not just entertainment – stories matter because humans are narrative creatures. It's not simply that we like to tell stories, and to listen to them; it's that narrative is hard-wired into us. It's a function of our biology, and the way our brains have evolved over time. We make sense of the world and fashion our identities through the sharing and passing on of stories. And so the stories that we tell ourselves about the world and our place in it, and the stories that are told to us by others about the world and our place in it, shape not just our own lives, but the world around us. The cultural narrative *is* the culture.

If the foundation stories of our culture show women as weak and inferior, then however much we may rail against it, we will be treated as if we are weak and inferior. Our voices will have no traction. But if the mythology and history of our culture includes women who are wise, women who are powerful and strong, it opens up a space for women to live up to those stories: to become wise, and powerful and strong. To be taken seriously, and to have our voices heard.

While the stories of Eve, Pandora[15] and other 'fallen women' may be the stories that have been foisted upon us for the best part of 2,000 years, they aren't the only myths we have inherited, those of us who have Celtic roots. Refusing to confine itself in the whalebone corsets of national borders, the 'Celtic fringe' – made up of specific regions of the countries which stretch along the western oceanic coastline of Europe – binds together richly diverse populations with a strong thread of collective cultural identity. That thread isn't founded on tribalism or nationalism, and nor is it about genetics. These entanglements emerge from shared history, mythology and common belief systems; they arise out of a common landscape and environment which brought about a highly distinctive pan-Celtic culture that is rooted in intense feelings of belonging to place.

And so, rising high up on the heather-covered moorlands of Cornwall, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man and Brittany, seeping through our bogs, flowing down our streams and into our rivers and out onto the sandy strands of the rock-strewn Atlantic seaboard, are the old Celtic myths and stories. Our own stories, no one else's. Stories steeped in sea brine, black and crusty with peat; stories that lie buried beneath our feet, which spring directly out of our own distinctive native landscapes, and which informed the lives of our own ancestors. These are the stories we will visit in this book.

For women particularly, to have a Celtic identity or ancestry is to inherit a history, literature and mythology in which we are portrayed not only as deeply connected to the natural world, but as playing a unique and critical role in the wellbeing of the Earth and survival of its inhabitants. Celtic myths for sure have their fair share of male heroism and adventure, but the major preoccupation of their heroes is with service to and stewardship of the land. And once upon a time women were the guardians of the natural world, the heart of the land. The Celtic woman who appears in these old tales is active in a different way from their heroes and warriors: she is the one who determines who is fit to rule, she is the guardian and protector of the land, the bearer of wisdom, the root of spiritual and moral authority for the tribe. Celtic creation stories tell us that the land was shaped by a woman; Celtic history offers us examples of women who were the inspirational leaders of their tribes. These are the stories of our own heritage, the stories of the real as well as the mythical women who went before us. What if we could reclaim those stories, and become those women again?

In this book, I'll share with you the story of how I reclaimed my native myths and traditions, for the stories of women today need to be told. We begin with the stories which tell of our sufferings, of the age-old violence that has been committed against us and against the planet. But the journey doesn't end there. Once our

old stories have been told, we need to find and claim the new stories which will inspire us to move forward. It took me a long time to find my own guiding stories: stories which not only captured my imagination, but which reminded me that there are other ways of belonging to the world than those that were handed down to me. Each of us travels that road for ourselves, each of our journeys is unique, and all of our learnings and insights are valuable. For all my railing against the patriarchy, my own journey wasn't one which made men the enemy; it was a journey in which men and women could become allies, and the stories which guided me arose from a culture in which both men and women were valued for the different things they brought to the world. My journey was a pilgrimage: in making it, I discovered how it might be possible to become an authentic, rooted woman in these challenging times. During the long, winding course of it, I learned how to find my place in the world, and then take responsibility for it, I learned how to uncover and then employ the unique gift which I could offer.

Several decades ago, American mythologist Joseph Campbell developed his well-known and tremendously influential outline of the 'Hero's Journey'.[16] The basic plot of all the world's great stories, Campbell declared, involves a Hero who happens to be a person of exceptional gifts, which may or may not be recognised by his society. He and/or the world in which he lives suffers from a symbolic deficiency (in a fairy tale, for example, it may be something as simple as the lack of a specific golden ring); the Hero must set out on a great adventure to win the missing treasure and bring it back to the world. Campbell argued that there are three key phases of these symbolic journeys, beginning with the phase of separation, or departure, in which the Hero hears the 'Call to Adventure' and sets out. In the second phase, 'the trials and victories of initiation', the Hero passes along a 'Road of Trials' and is tested. During the third phase, 'the return and reintegration with society', the Hero brings back his gift to the world and so saves it, or himself, or another. Campbell believed that those three

phases and the sub-stages which he outlined within them are common not only to the structure of the myths themselves, but also to the structure of our own individual journeys through our lives.

This model may well explain the features which many myths and fairy tales from around the world have in common, and may also, as many Jungian psychotherapists who followed Campbell have suggested, offer up a template for a real-life Hero's Journey and a metaphor for personal spiritual and psychological growth. But it has little to offer women. It does not reflect the full reality of women's lives, either inner or outer. In it, women appear either as the Temptress, there to test the Hero and lead him off-course (there goes poor Eve again . . .); or in the guise of the Great Goddess, who represents the 'unconditional love' which must be won by the Hero to give him the courage to go on with his quest. In other words, at their very best, women can be no more than the destination: we represent the static, essential qualities that the active, all-conquering Hero is searching for. Maureen Murdock, one of his female students, reported that Campbell told her: 'Women don't need to make the journey. In the whole mythological journey, the woman is there. All she has to do is realize that she's the place that people are trying to get to.'[17]

I respectfully disagree. Women absolutely do need to make the journey; we do not, however, need to make the same journey which the Hero makes. Our journey is different; our stories are all our own. It's more than time we told our own stories, outlined our journeys for ourselves. We don't need Heroes to tell us who to be.

Campbell's Hero's Journey, along with later adaptations of it by a variety of Jungian therapists and other writers, is entirely focused on an individual's spiritual growth and personal transformation – the process which Jung called 'individuation'. But the journey we need to make today is one which rips us out of the confined spaces of our own heads and plants us firmly back in the world where we belong, rooted and ready to rise. Yes, if we

want genuinely to contribute to the world, if we want to change it, we need to do some work on ourselves first. We need to understand our dysfunctional ways of being, to confront the beliefs and values we have subscribed to which caused both women and the planet to be in this mess in the first place. We need then to discover our own authentic values and ways of being in the world, to wake up to our own creative power as women, conceive our own individual vision for what we might offer to an ailing Earth. But this work on ourselves is not an end in itself, and neither is it work we should do in isolation. We are not separate from this Earth; we are a part of it, whether we fully feel it in our bodies yet or not.

The Heroine's Journey we'll follow through this book is a journey to understanding how deeply enmeshed we are in the web of life on this planet. It is a journey which leads us firmly back to our own sense of belonging to this Earth – but after that, it is a journey which requires us to step into our own power and take back our ancient, native role as its guardians and protectors. The Heroine's Journey we need to make today is, above all, an Eco-Heroine's Journey.

It's an idea that has come of age. A growing number of contemporary women's movements are focusing on a new and strongly felt desire to actively re-root ourselves in the land and in our communities, to take responsibility for shaping the future, to bring back awareness of and respect for deep feminine values in a world dominated by the masculine. It's a revolution of belonging, and it goes far beyond simple environmentalism.

More and more, women are taking the lead in the environmental movement. Nobel Prize-winner Wangari Maathai launched the Green Belt Movement,[18] which has planted millions of trees in Kenya and transformed women into powerful advocates for their rights, good governance and democracy, and natural resource protection. London barrister Polly Higgins founded the growing global Eradicating Ecocide movement.[19] Vandana Shiva[20] is India's

best-known ecofeminist, environmental and anti-globalisation activist, promoting the idea that a more sustainable and productive approach to agriculture could be achieved through reinstating systems of farming that are more centred on women.

Even more radically, Canada's Idle No More movement[21] took the world by storm in 2013, when what began as a simple resistance campaign against a pending bill in Saskatchewan, spilled across the border to the United States and spread its influence across the world. The movement – which inspired solidarity actions around the globe – was founded by four women, three of whom were from Canada's Indigenous nations. Idle No More's vision 'revolves around Indigenous Ways of Knowing rooted in Indigenous Sovereignty to protect water, land, and all creation for future generations'. It is a vision that is deeply rooted in the old ways of being, the old Indigenous mythologies which reveal an inextricable bond between the living world and the feminine. 'It's time for our people to rise up and take back our role as caretakers and stewards of the land,' a spokeswoman for the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nations proclaims on the Idle No More website.

In our own Western societies we are seeing more calls for a return to native wisdom, but we cannot live by the worldviews of other cultures, which are rooted in lands and histories that have little relationship to our own. And yet, so often we try to: we look for our spiritual practices to the East – to Taoism, for example, and to Buddhism; we look to the West for guidance on how to live in harmony with the land – to indigenous stories and traditions from the Americas. But fine as all of those traditions are, we don't need to look to the myths of other cultures for role models, or for guidance on how to live more authentically, in balance and harmony with the planet on which we depend. We have our own guiding stories, and they are deeply rooted in the heart of our own native landscapes. We draw them out of the wells and the waters; beachcombing, we lift them out of the sand. We dive for

them to the bottom of deep lakes, we disinter them from the bogs, we follow their tracks through the shadowy glades of the enchanted forest. Those stories not only ground us: they show us what we might once have been, we women, and what we might become again if we choose. 'The world will be saved by the Western women,' the Dalai Lama once said.[22] And, if we stand with our powerful and inspiring native sisters from around the planet, together we all might just have a chance.

If women remember that once upon a time we sang with the tongues of seals and flew with the wings of swans, that we forged our own paths through the dark forest while creating a community of its many inhabitants, then we will rise up rooted, like trees.

And if we rise up rooted, like trees . . . well then, women might indeed save not only ourselves, but the world.