A major new study of Percy Shelley’s intellectual life and poetic career, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime* identifies Shelley’s fascination with sublime natural phenomena as a key element in his understanding of the way ideas like ‘nature’ and ‘imagination’ informed the social and political structures of the Romantic period. Offering a genuinely fresh set of perspectives on Shelley’s texts and contexts, Cian Duffy argues that Shelley’s engagement with the British and French discourse on the sublime had a profound influence on his writing about political change in that age of revolutionary crisis. Examining Shelley’s extensive use of sublime imagery and metaphor, Duffy offers not only a substantial reassessment of Shelley’s work but also a significant re-appraisal of the role of the sublime in the cultural history of Britain during the Romantic period.

**Cian Duffy** is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Centre for Eighteenth-Century Studies at the University of York.
This series aims to foster the best new work in one of the most challenging fields within English literary studies. From the early 1780s to the early 1830s a formidable array of talented men and women took to literary composition, not just in poetry, which some of them famously transformed, but in many modes of writing. The expansion of publishing created new opportunities for writers, and the political stakes of what they wrote were raised again by what Wordsworth called those ‘great national events’ that were ‘almost daily taking place’: the French Revolution, the Napoleonic and American wars, urbanisation, industrialisation, religious revival, an expanded empire abroad and the reform movement at home. This was an enormous ambition, even when it pretended otherwise. The relations between science, philosophy, religion and literature were reworked in texts such as *Frankenstein* and *Biographia Literaria*; gender relations in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *Don Juan*; journalism by Cobbett and Hazlitt; poetic form, content and style by the Lake School and the Cockney School. Outside Shakespeare studies, probably no body of writing has produced such a wealth of response or done so much to shape the responses of modern criticism. This indeed is the period that saw the emergence of those notions of ‘literature’ and of literary history, especially national literary history, on which modern scholarship in English has been founded.

The categories produced by Romanticism have also been challenged by recent historicist arguments. The task of the series is to engage both with a challenging corpus of Romantic writings and with the changing field of criticism they have helped to shape. As with other literary series published by Cambridge, this one will represent the work of both younger and more established scholars, on either side of the Atlantic and elsewhere.

*For a complete list of titles published see end of book.*
SHELLEY AND THE REVOLUTIONARY SUBLIME

CIAN DUFFY
for my family
# Contents

Acknowledgements ....................................... page ix
Note on texts ............................................. xi
List of abbreviations ..................................... xii

Introduction: Approaching the ‘Shelleyan sublime’ ............................................................. 1

1 From religion to revolution, 1810–1813 ................................................................. 13
2 Cultivating the imagination, 1813–1815 ................................................................. 49
3 Mont Blanc and the Alps, 1816 ............................................................................. 84
4 Writing the revolution: *Laon and Cythna*, 1817 ............................................. 123
5 ‘Choose reform or civil war’, 1818–1819 ............................................................. 149

Conclusion: ‘Good and the means of good’, 1822 ...................................................... 187

Notes ............................................................................................................................. 202
Bibliography ............................................................................................................... 243
Index ............................................................................................................................ 257
Many people have contributed to the writing of this book. *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime* began life as a doctoral thesis in the Faculty of English at Cambridge University, and my greatest debt is to my supervisor, Nigel Leask, who expertly fanned its ‘fading coals’. Thanks also to Jennifer Wallace, who supervised me during Nigel’s sabbatical term in Michaelmas 1998, and to Peter de Bolla, whose comments on my first year’s work gave it an invaluable early sense of direction. My examiners – Michael O’Neill and Neil Vickers – gave enormous assistance in moving the book beyond its original, doctoral conception. Likewise, it would not have achieved its present scope without the comments of my two anonymous readers at Cambridge University Press. Sincere thanks, too, to Linda Bree and Maartje Scheltens, my editors at Cambridge, for providing such sure guidance throughout the publication process. All contemporary Shelley scholars owe an incalculable debt to the efforts of the Garland Manuscript Facsimile series editors, and to editorial projects in progress on both sides of the Atlantic, and it is my pleasure to acknowledge that debt here. I am deeply grateful to the trustees of the Leslie Wilson Memorial fund at Magdalene College Cambridge, without whose generous financial assistance the original doctoral thesis would not have been written. Equally, I am indebted to the Robert Gardiner Memorial fund at Cambridge, and to the Cambridge European Trust, for their generous financial support throughout my doctoral work. I want to thank my parents, Luan and Mary, and my grandmother, Sarcy, for their continuing love, support and encouragement. And I want to thank Lisbet, for those days ‘under the eye of Mont Blanc’ and for all the other days.

Parts of this book have already appeared elsewhere and are republished here by permission of the editors of the respective publications. Material from chapters 1 and 3 was published as ‘Mont Blanc’s revolutionary “Voice”: Shelley and Archibald Alison’, in *The Bulletin of the British Association for Romantic Studies* 17 (March 2000), and as ‘Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime’ in *Romanticism in the Americas: A New Critical Chronology since 1789*. I want to thank all these editors for their encouragement and permission.
Acknowledgements

Discourse on the Sublime’, in Fiona Price and Scott Masson (eds.), Silence, Sublimity and Suppression (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001); part of chapter 2 appeared as ‘Revolution or Reaction?: Shelley’s Assassins and the Politics of Necessity’, in Keats-Shelley Journal 52 (September 2003); a further portion of chapter 1 was published as “One draught from Snowdon’s ever-sacred spring”: Shelley’s Welsh Sublime’, in Lynda Pratt and Damian Walford-Davies (eds.), Wales and the Romantic Imagination (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005). I am grateful to the editors of these volumes for permission to use this material.
Note on texts

### Abbreviations

#### Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
List of abbreviations

H6WT, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, History of a Six Weeks’ Tour through a Part of France, Switzerland, Germany and Holland . . . (London, 1817).


Journals

ELH English Literary History
ELN English Language Notes
K-SJ Keats-Shelley Journal
K-SMB Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin
MLQ Modern Language Quarterly
MLR Modern Language Review
PMLA Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N&amp;Q</td>
<td>Notes and Queries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PQ</td>
<td>Philological Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RES</td>
<td>Review of English Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SiR</td>
<td>Studies in Romanticism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>