

*of equations, others about integral functions. Concerning the theory of equations I have tried to find out under what circumstances equations are solvable by radicals, which gave me the opportunity of investigating thoroughly, and describing, all the transformations possible on an equation, even if it is the case that it is not solvable by radicals."*

*Two days later Galois, aged twenty, was dead, fatally wounded in a duel; yet by the time of his death, he had laid the foundations for the theory of groups, one of the fundamental theories of modern algebra. His mathematical work runs to a mere 100 or so manuscript pages yet these pages herald one of the subject's most influential developments.*

*Today, group theory enters into many diverse areas of mathematics - geometry, mechanics, mathematical physics, etc.- and Galois theory is a customary component of undergraduate mathematics courses. The story of Galois' life is one of the best rehearsed tales in the history of mathematics, even featuring in films and literary fiction. Nevertheless, despite the ubiquity of Galois' legacy, Rigatelli's book is the first thoroughly researched biography to appear.*

*It contains a detailed and cogent account of Galois' childhood and of his subsequent politicisation. It is well known that during his lifetime Galois had more of a reputation as a political firebrand than as a mathematician. In a newspaper article published in Lyon on the day after he died, he is described as a young man who inspired the brightest [scientific] hopes, but whose prodigious fame is only of a political nature. However, exactly what that meant in the context of early 19th century France, and why Galois chose a political path is less familiar territory. Rigatelli helps with these problems. She has undertaken some painstaking archival work in her efforts to unravel some of the mysteries and unanswered questions concerning Galois' life and we have been well rewarded. In particular, the question which has long been the subject of speculation, that of the circumstances leading up to the infamous duel, has been given a thorough treatment. Rigatelli opposes the popular view, that Galois died as the result of an argument over a woman, and argues convincingly that he was, rather, the victim of a plot engineered by government agents on account of his political views.*

*Galois' mathematical life also is fully explored, from his early days at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand in Paris, to his failures of the entrance examination to the Ecole Polytechnique, and his disappointment at the hands of Cauchy and the Académie des Sciences. Rigatelli makes the point that through the publication of three short articles in the prestigious Bulletin de Férussure in the spring of 1830, Galois did receive, contrary to popular belief, some public acknowledgement of his ability during his lifetime.*

*The latter part of the book is taken up with a short but accessible presentation of Galois' principal results. The commentary, which follows Galois's own subdivision of his work as it appears in his letter to Chevalier, is well supported by quotations from the original papers, and contains helpful observations over the uncertainties presented by the terminology.*