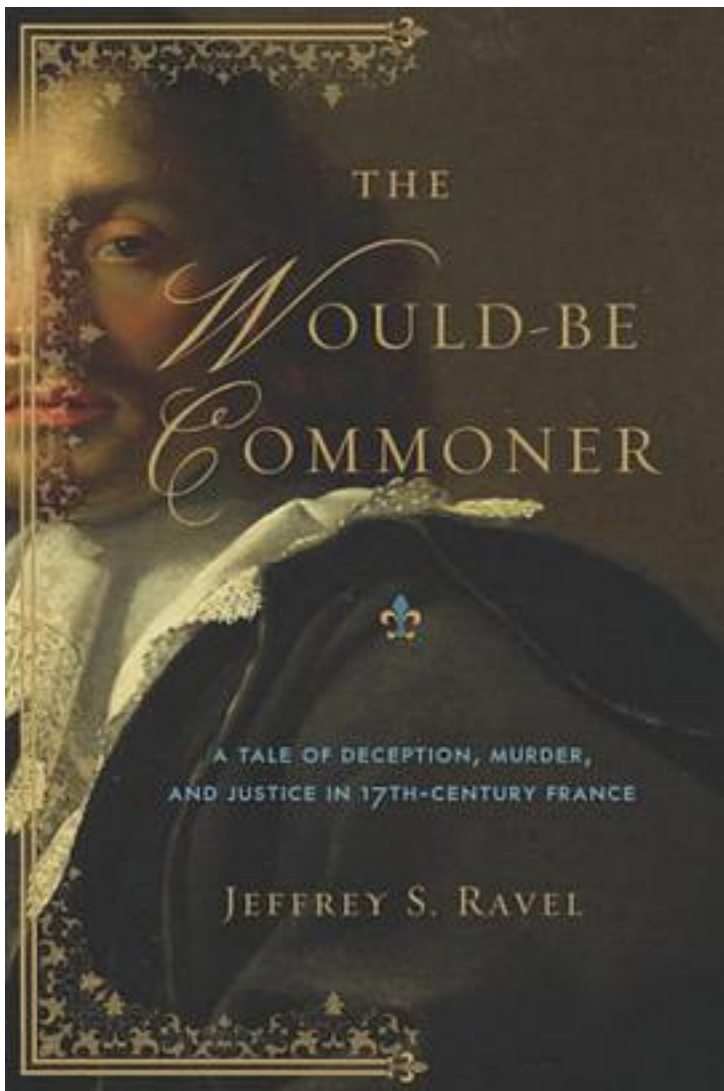


The Would-Be Commoner



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In the tradition of "The Return of Martin Guerre", a dramatic tale of false identity, murder, and bigamy that riveted France during the reign of Louis XIV. From MIT historian Jeffrey Ravel comes a scandalous tale of imposture that sheds new light on French politics and culture in the pivotal but underexamined period leading up to the Enlightenment. In the waning days of the seventeenth century, a French nobleman named Louis de la Pivardière returned from the Nine Years War and, for mysterious reasons, gave up his aristocratic life to marry the daughter of an innkeeper in a remote village. But several years later, struggling financially, he returned to his first wife in search of money. She turned him away, and he disappeared under mysterious circumstances. This led to a murder investigation and the arrest of Pivardière's first wife and her alleged lover, a local prior. Stranger yet, Pivardière finally did come out of hiding but was believed by many to be an impostor conjured up in order to clear the wife of murder charges. The case became a cause célèbre across France, obsessing everyone from the peasantry to the courts, from the Comédie-Française to Louis XIV himself. It was finally left to a brilliant young jurist, d'Aguesseau, to separate fact from fiction, and set France on a path to a new and enlightened view of justice. Masterfully researched and vividly recounted, "The Would-Be Commoner" charts the monumental shift from passion to reason in the twilight years of the Sun King.

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