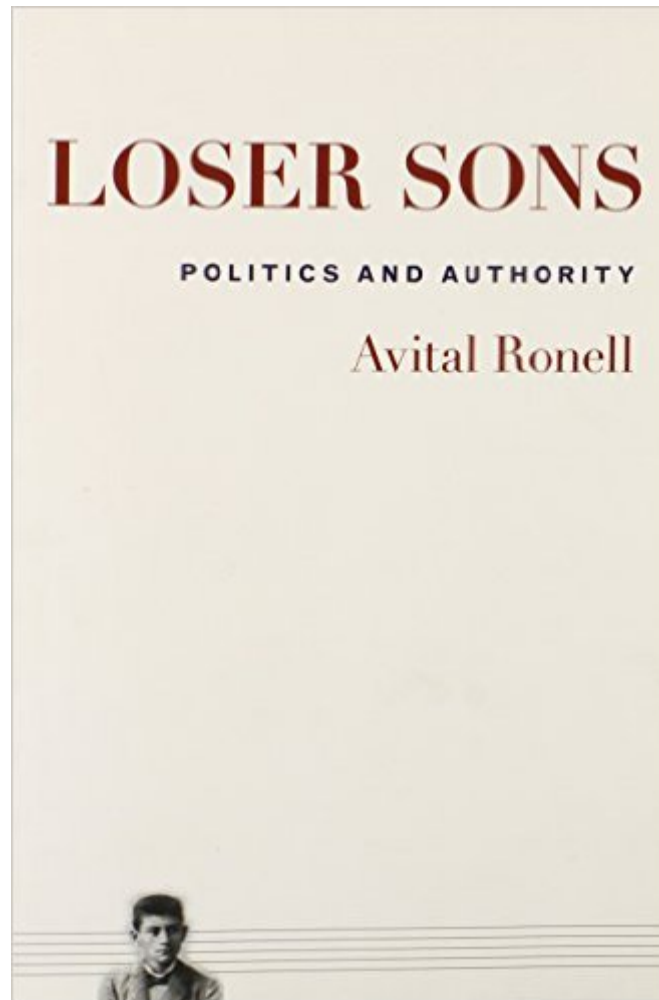


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Loser Sons: Politics And Authority



Synopsis

There are sons who grow up unhappily believing that no matter what they do, they cannot please their fathers. Often unable to shed their sense of lifelong failure, either they give up and suffer in a permanent sulk, or they try with all their might to prove they are worth something after all. These are the "loser sons," a group of historical men as varied as President George W. Bush, Osama bin Laden, and Mohammed Atta. Their names quickly illustrate that not only are their problems serious, but they also make serious problems for others, expanding to whole nations. When God is conceived and inculcated as an angry and impossible-to-please father, the problems can last for generations. In *Loser Sons*, Avital Ronell draws on current philosophy, literary history, and political events to confront the grim fact that divested boys become terrifying men. This would be old news if the problem didn't recur so often with such disastrous consequences. Looking beyond our current moment, she interrogates the problems of authority, paternal fantasy, and childhood as they have been explored and exemplified by Franz Kafka, Goethe's *Faust*, Benjamin Franklin, Jean-François Lyotard, Hannah Arendt, Alexandre Kojève, and Immanuel Kant. Brilliantly weaving these threads into a polyvocal discourse, Ronell shows how, with their arrays of powerful symbols, ideologies of all sorts perpetuate the theme that while childhood represents innocence, adulthood entails responsible cruelty. The need for suffering--preferably somebody else's--has become a widespread assumption, not only justifying abuses of authority, but justifying authority itself. Shockingly honest, *Loser Sons* recognizes that focusing on the spectacular catastrophes of modernity might make writer and reader feel they're engaged in something important, while in fact what they are engaged in is still only spectacle. To understand the implications of her insights, Ronell addresses them directly to her readers, challenging them to think through their own notions of authority and their responses to it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is one of Ronell's strongest books after *The Telephone Book* and *Stupidity*. More personal than the others, Ronell focuses on the diminishment of authority figures from the supernatural (god) to the secular (Daddy). She has an extended reading of Kafka's "Letter to His Father" and moves out from a mention of Ben Franklin that Kafka makes to a brilliant reading of Franklin's Autobiography. Rowell also engages older works by Jean-Luc Nancy and Lyotard that never got the attention from U.S. academics they deserved. Rowell also mentions Kafka's Abraham parable and says it has gotten almost no attention. Perhaps because she is still grieving Derrida's death, she passed over his essay on Kafka's parable, "Abraham, the Other" in *Judeities: Questions for Jacques Derrida* (*Perspectives in Continental Philosophy*). If you like Ronell, read this book. Her lively, witty style is deeply refreshing.

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