



# The Book of Jon

*Eleni Sikelianos*

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## **The Book of Jon** Eleni Sikelianos

With a seamless weave of letters, reminiscences, poems and journal entries, Sikelianos creates a loving portrait—and an unblinking indictment—of her father. Jon, a multitalented, eccentric visionary, emerges as a brilliant, charming, irresponsible, frustrating, and ultimately tragic hero.

This is a saga of the rise and fall of family lines—a tale marked by bohemia, Greek poets, intellectuals, drugs and homelessness. It is the story of eccentrics and survivors, the strength of personal vision and the nature of addiction, and what it does to families. An exquisitely rendered exploration of the harrowing and motivating forces of family, history, and individual choices.

**Eleni Sikelianos'** previous books include *Earliest Worlds* and the National Poetry Series winner *The Monster Lives of Boys & Girls*. She lives in Boulder, CO.

## **The Book of Jon Details**

Date : Published October 1st 2004 by City Lights Publishers

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Author : Eleni Sikelianos

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# From Reader Review The Book of Jon for online ebook

## Natalie Villacorta says

I chose to read this book because I was curious about Sikelianos' prose—if it is just as scatterbrained, leaping from thought to thought, posing unanswerable questions, as her poetry. The book provides quick snapshots of her father's (Jon) life, going back and forth through time, and constantly mixes genres and formats—poems, anecdotes, memories, and enumerations. This disparate method of story telling is fitting for a memoir about a person who lived such a scattered life.

I like that the book does not begin with a sweet, untainted memory of Jon. The reader learns within the first few pages that Sikelianos' father is a homeless heroine addict, and that their relationship has been complicated at best since her birth. Her prose serves to realistically and painfully recall images of her father, whereas the poetry and other formats romanticize him—bring out the beauty in a life obscured by drugs, repeated failures, and disappointment. In the poems, Sikelianos also can reflect and explore—zoom in and out of her father's life—say things she always wanted to say or ask him, but never did. The combination of prose, poetry, and other genres helps the reader understand Sikelianos' mixed feelings towards her father and her complicated journey to understand him.

I thought Sikelianos did an excellent job of painting her father's life through her appropriately schizophrenic style. One page contained beautiful details about him—how he loved animals, taught her to play pool, the Christmas presents he gave. But on the next page was a list of the times she wanted to kick his ass or memories of him not showing up, lying, stealing, etc. Constantly she juxtaposes images of his “gleaming muscles” with those of his rotting teeth, wrought iron battered brain, body broken by Heroin. This back and forth chronicle of her father's life, out of order, serves to emphasize how little she knew him, what a tenuous presence, shadow of a father he was. From these pieces of his life, vividly and haphazardly recalled by Sikelianos, her mother, Jon's girlfriends and children—the reader must try to make this man whole from these pieces, and in the process better understands his character. By the end, I feel like I know everything Sikelianos knows about her father, which seems to be the most anyone knows about him.

Throughout the book, Sikelianos asks herself why she's writing it, what she's trying to glean. She even tells her father while he is alive that she is writing a book about him, but by the end of the book he is dead, so I gather that it took her a long time to write the books, slowly collecting pictures, memories, dreams, piecing together a life in an attempt to understand it and to fill the gaps in their relationship.

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## Renee says

A hybrid memoir at it's best.

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## Laurel L. Perez says

This book is less a traditional memoir, and more a piecing together of daily lore and history to try and define a lost father. This is not a play by play of what happened to Jon, more so a grasping at the edges of the stories of him that those who knew him best can recall. This is a book that plays with genre, that loops in and out of poetry, prose, short essay, new clippings, photos, and research. This is unlike most memoirs, and it doesn't leave you with answers, but it cannot help but change the way we see a loved one, how we tell their

stories after they are gone. Reminiscent of "Shadow Man", though investigative in a different way, Sikelianos reaches into the heart of what truth is when you are outside of it, but wanting to be caught up in it.

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### **Cherie says**

B Beautiful language; about Eleni's addict father, the lack of a father figure in her life, but in poetry. Really nice.

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### **Bridget says**

Sikelianos uses poetic form and rich images to portray her torrid relationship with a brilliant yet broken father in such a light and quick way that the reader is pulled in and moved, while never being beaten about the head with emotion. Sikelianos weaves a beautiful tale about fathers and daughters and the pain and beauty that often accompanies those relationships. This is the best memoir-esque piece I have read. There were times when I was wondering whether Sikelianos was telling her story or mine.

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### **Tim Atkins says**

Eleni Sikelianos is a \_\_\_\_\_.

For that, I am very \_\_\_\_\_.

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### **Paul says**

I'm biased because she was my professor, but this teeny collection of stuff is incredible. I must say that it felt like it took a while to get going, but then it became the most moving and intensive memoir I have ever held in my hands. A portrait has never been drawn so ambiguously and perfectly ever. Or at least in the things I have read.

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### **Peter says**

The Book of Jon is vast in its smallness. Writing a memoir about the death of one's father – or the death of any loved one for that matter – that doesn't turn saccharine or personal to the point of alienating the reader is a feat that few achieve. Sikelianos pulls it off by using a collage of stories, poems, photos, dreams, journal entries, and remembrances from other family members. Although the book is a mere 116 pages, this pastiche creates an effect similar to attending a rollicking wake: there is sadness, of course, but there is also laughter and half-remembered stories that float away as they are being told; photos that are passed around and reminisced over; there are family huddles about formal decisions; and there is the bittersweet awareness that old debts will never be paid, coupled with the realization that repayment was unlikely to begin with. In this case, the debts involve Sikelianos' father's lifelong addiction to drugs and alcohol. An addiction that

culminated in three years of homelessness on the streets of Albuquerque and, finally, an overdose in Room 152 of the De Anza Motor Lodge. The room cost \$33.10 a night. Among his possessions were “2 packs of cigarettes (both opened, one pack Camels, one pack Marlboros),” both unfinished.

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### **Reese says**

"Now the snow has melted; light splaying across sage brush, an impossible green, light leaving Mt. Bianco in darkness but draping itself over spike-needed leaves and woody stems and soft brown dirt - as if light loved the ground more than the heights."

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### **Janna Maron says**

A unique take on the memoir. Definitely an eye-opening read for a writer, and a fantastic look at exploring form and a different approach to telling personal stories. Aside from the book being flat out fantastic, I had the privilege of hearing the author at a reading on the campus of CSUS.

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### **Derek says**

A slight but wonderfully evocative book of poetry/memoir/essay/pictures/lists, Eleni Sikelianos' *The Book of Jon* is a striking portrait of Sikelianos' deceased father, a man who struggled with addiction and depression throughout most of his life. What's most successful in *The Book of Jon* is its ability to take what is an extremely harrowing and personal project (her father died alone in a seedy motel room in Albuquerque with no home and no money, just a pocketful of cigarette matches and trash) and somehow make its lessons universal. Not an easy feat, but Sikelianos does it masterfully here. Jon's obituary, written collectively by his family, was perhaps the book's most beautiful passage; its ability to summarize an entire person's life honestly and thoughtfully in just two pages is deserving of our admiration.

Also noteworthy is that the book doesn't fall into the easy trap of weepy sentimentality or cheap greeting card emotional nonsense. This is by all means a warts-and-all sort of book, evocative of the grimmest of episodes of *Intervention*. The reader is left with what amounts to an uneasy understanding of a complex figure, and even if we don't know all there is to know about him (how might any book accomplish such a feat, really?), we know enough to see the care with which Sikelianos has crafted this unique collection.

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### **Christine says**

Just heard a reading from this and a forthcoming book--can't wait to read it. I've been reading Book of Jon and I love it. Structurally and conceptually creative, relevant and unsentimental. I think she said she considers it a novel, but fiction writers and poets don't agree, but I can see the argument for it...multiple threads of one story from beginning to end. I loved it.

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**Timothy says**

decent

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**Sylvia says**

This is not a novel. This is not a poem. This is a book and all of the above. This was my first encounter with Sikelianos prose and have discovered in this author a poignant voice, a blood and flesh voice. This is a memoir and everything fits in a memoir. This is a book about loss and love and again about loss.

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**Anna says**

Perhaps my favorite book of Poetry. It also falls into the category of Memoir, I think. The point is, it's big enough for Everything.

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