

# SOCIOLOGICAL & BIOGRAPHICAL CRITICISM

Sestina: Like  
A. E. Stallings

With a nod to Jonah Winter

Now we're all "friends," there is no love but Like,  
A semi-demi goddess, something like  
A reality-TV star look-alike,  
Named Simile or Me Two. So we like  
In order to be liked. It isn't like  
There's Love or Hate now. Even plain "dislike"

Is frowned on: there's no button for it. Like  
Is something you can quantify: each "like"  
You gather's almost something money-like,  
Token of virtual support. "Please like  
This page to stamp out hunger." And you'd like  
To end hunger and climate change alike,

But it's unlikely Like does diddly. Like  
Just twiddles its unopposing thumbs-ups, like-  
Wise props up scarecrow silences. "I'm like,  
So OVER him," I overhear. "But, like,  
He doesn't get it. Like, you know? He's like  
It's all OK. Like I don't even LIKE

Him anymore. Whatever. I'm all like ..."  
Take "like" out of our chat, we'd all alike  
Flounder, agape, gesticulating like  
A foreign film sans subtitles, fall like  
Dumb phones to mooted desuetude. Unlike  
With other crutches, um, when we use "like,"

We're not just buying time on credit: Like  
Displaces other words; crowds, cuckoo-like,  
Endangered hatchlings from the nest. (Click "like"  
If you're against extinction!) Like is like  
Invasive zebra mussels, or it's like  
Those nutria-things, or kudzu, or belike

Redundant fast food franchises, each like  
(More like) the next. Those poets who dislike  
Inversions, archaisms, who just like  
Plain English as she's spoke — why isn't "like"  
Their (literally) every other word? I'd like  
Us just to admit that's what real speech is like.

But as you like, my friend. Yes, we're alike,  
How we pronounce, say, lichen, and dislike  
Cancer and war. So like this page. Click Like.

beginning of the poem  
very much romanticizes  
past & criticizes present  
culture

→ culture has created debased form of Greek heroes

→ Stallings, as a classicist, ironically employs epithets  
"like" a sign of conscientiousness

→ awareness that everything must  
be qualified in modern-day society  
→ feelings, and reality, now subjective

→ Young people claim to care about social activism,  
actually only motivated by money/status (superficial)

→ actually, conscientious people are generally  
more thoughtful, but their circumlocutions cause  
them to be ridiculed

"like" decreases commitment → helps navigate  
identity

→ nothing private in over-exposed internet  
culture

like as a "quotative" → ability to dramatize & add  
tone to narrative → makes sympathy/feelings  
clear

→ Stallings translates modern English & Ancient Greek  
alike

→ Similes → able to create dissonance & comment on  
world w/o editorializing  
→ enjambment creates syntactical distance

→ Stallings discusses in "Moving Van of Metaphor"  
metaphors → "overlaying"/replacing  
→ "we" acknowledges Stallings  
part of culture → true (ironic) strength of simile

→ Ironically, author has devoted her life to studying  
a "dead" language → for all the hyperbole,  
language never really "dies"  
→ similes power for contrast & irony

→ Stallings background in antiquated languages

→ Stallings' belief that poets must work in  
present vernacular, but elevate language  
& respect historic roots

→ Poem ultimately connects virtual and  
actual society (and the poem & audience)

↑ inaccurate belief that use of "like" = stupidity  
↑ "sounds uneducated" → societal judgement of youth & women

Simile  
= similar &  
different  
(according to Stallings)

→ language/vernacular  
as connector of  
humanity → conversation  
key to poetry & poets