Eat Me

SUMMARY

When I turned thirty, my partner brought me a cake. It had three layers of frosting and was home-made—but the candles were there to mark each stone (14 lbs) of my weight, not my age.

The cake had white frosting with pink lettering that spelled out: "eat me." I did what the lettering said and ate the whole cake, without even tasting it.

Then my partner asked me to get up and walk around the bed. He wanted to watch my belly shaking, and my hips quaking, big as a truck.

He used to tell me that he liked girls to be as big as possible. I like big girls with soft flesh, he'd say, girls that I can tunnel into, girls with many chins and loads of fat.

I was like his warm, comforting bathtub, but he was my feeder, and my only brief joy was gobbling down fast food; his joy was to watch me get fatter, as if I were some kind of ripening, tempting fruit.

I was his tropical breadfruit, or a desert island for him to land on after a shipwreck. Or I was a whale washed up on the king-sidze bed, longing for a wave to come and take me away. Or I was a tidal wave, but made of flesh rather than water.

I was too fat to escape, or even to buy fatty milk from the shops; I was too fat to use my fatness as protection, and I was beyond the size that could be euphemistically called "chubby" or "big-boned."

When I turned thirty-nine, I let my partner stroke my huge, round cheek. Our flesh merged together. He told me to open my mouth, and made me drink straight olive oil.

He whispered in my ear: "Soon you'll be forty." When I heard that, how could I resist rolling over on top of him? He suffocated under my weight. My body muffled his dying words.

I let him lie there dead for six hours, which felt more like a week to me. His mouth was ajar, and his eyes bulged with frozen desire. There was nothing to eat left in the house.

THEMES

SEXISM, OBJECTIFICATION, AND DEHUMANIZATION

In Patience Agbabi's "Eat Me," the female speaker's partner objectifies, devalues, and abuses her, fattening her up to satisfy his own sexual appetite. Her partner can only see the speaker as a sexual object rather than a real person; he treats her as though she's food that exists solely for his consumption. Through this, the poem suggests that men's sexist objectification of women is an act of violence, dehumanizing women and eating away at their sense of self.

The speaker's partner doesn't really care about her health or happiness: he just cares about making her look a certain way in order to conform to his own desires. He likes "big girls, soft girls," the speaker says, and wants to "burrow inside" their "masses of cellulite." He doesn't value his partner as an individual, but just sees her as a means to an end—like a goose to fatten up for a feast. He wants to watch her "broad / belly wobble" and see her wide hips jiggle, essentially forcing her to perform for his own gratification.

Though women often feel societal pressure to be thin rather than fat, the specific desire here doesn't really matter: the poem is about the absurdity and unfairness of demanding that women conform to any ideals imposed on them by a man. The point is that through *expecting* the speaker to look a certain way, her partner strips her of her individuality; what matters is her *body*, not *her*.

This objectification eats away at the speaker's sense of self: she becomes passive and hollow, unable to enjoy her own life. She eats the cake he brings her without even tasting it, for instance—implying that the situation is grinding her down and making her numb. She also calls herself her partner's "Jacuzzi," "forbidden fruit," "desert island," and other surreal comparisons—all of which show that she has come to understand herself as an object, too. She even becomes "too fat to leave" and calls her own body "his flesh," showing that the way his attitude "eats away" at her ability to act in her own interest. Objectification, the poem ultimately implies, is a kind of violence that robs objectified people of their humanity.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 7-9
- Lines 10-12
- Lines 13-24

POWER, ABUSE, AND CONTROL

"Eat Me" explores the complicated dynamics of coercion, power, and abuse. The speaker's partner dominates her by controlling her body, ultimately making her so fat and powerless that she becomes dependent on him. In this way, the poem can perhaps be read as an extended metaphor for the way in which domestic abuse wears victims down until it's nearly impossible for them to escape.

The poem suggests that abuse depends in part on coercion and

manipulation. There are elements of the man's behavior that, on the surface, make it seem like he values the speaker—when in actual fact, he is merely trying to transform her into the ultimate object of his desires. The man buys the speaker a birthday cake at the start of the poem, for instance, and he lavishes attention on her throughout. But this all to serve his own aim: to make her as fat as possible.

This objectification, in turn, is inextricable from the desire to hold power over another person. Because the speaker doesn't really see his partner as someone with wants, needs, and desires of her own, he feels entitled to tell her what to do. And the speaker, her own sense of self whittled down to nearly nothing by abuse, acquiesces.

In fact, the man's behavior erodes the speaker's identity to the point that she can hardly imagine herself outside of this situation, let alone actually escape. She becomes passive and helpless, seemingly resigned to her fate as she declares herself "too fat to late, too fat to buy a pint of full-fat milk." Her partner seems to hold all the cards, making the speaker more and more dependent on him.

The speaker has thus become imprisoned by her abuser and his behavior. And when, at the end of the poem, the speaker smothers her boyfriend with her body, it's not clear if this is a genuine liberation. Much irreversible violence, both bodily and psychological, has already taken place. And there's nothing "left to eat"—an ambiguous final line that might represent the speaker's new start, but just as likely might represent how emotionally hungry and empty she feels despite having "escaped" her abuser.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-30

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-3

When I hit ...
... stone in weight.

In the first stanza, the speaker begins the story of her abusive relationship with an unnamed man. Though the poem may not be a literally true story, the toxic dynamics between the speaker and her partner feel all too real—and the poem's dark humor thus feels especially sinister.

The speaker starts by remembering the day she turned 30, which should have been a joyful milestone in her life. And, right on cue, her partner seems to have thoughtfully made her a birthday cake, complete with "three layers of icing." How thoughtful!

Except, this is *not* a birthday cake. This is a weight-gain cake, celebrating the fact that the speaker is getting fatter and fatter, just as her partner wants her to. Of course, the huge, sugary cake itself is part of this plan. The candles mark, not the speaker's life in years, but her weight in stone (a unit of measure equal to 14 pounds).

Already, then, the speaker is being devalued and objectified—treated like livestock being fattened up for slaughter. Her partner celebrates, not an important moment in her life, but his own selfish glee that her body is meeting his standards.

These first three lines—which establish the poem's tercet stanza form—also put in place the poem's unusual rhyme scheme. Each stanza effectively has three of the same rhyme sound: AAA, BBB, and so on. But these are not full rhymes, but assonant rhymes: that is, they share the same vowel. In the first stanza, for instance, "cake," "made," and "weight" all use a long /ay/ sound.

This subtle linkage of sounds reflects the partner's behavior: the rhyme scheme here shapes the poem in an underhanded way, just as the partner coerces the speaker into "shaping" herself the way he wants through selfish gestures of "love."

LINES 4-6

The icing was ...
... even taste it.

The second stanza describes the cake itself. It's covered in white icing and has pink lettering, playing into traditional (and clichéd) ideas of "femininity": pink for girls, blue for boys. In other words, this is a cake that reminds the speaker that she's a woman—and hints that the partner thinks that women should do what men tell them.

But this sinister cake is still mysteriously tempting. Listen to the way the meter makes these lines sound appetizing:

The ic- | ing was white | but the let- | ters were pink,

This line uses back-loaded metrical feet, starting with an iamb (da-DUM) and moving into anapests (da-da-DUM). This rhythm gives the poem a waltzy, giddy feeling, almost like a nursery rhyme, as though the cake is trying to hypnotize the speaker into eating it.

The lettering on the cake doesn't spell the speaker's name or a birthday message, but the words "eat me." This is an allusion to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the famous story in which Alice, a little girl wandering through a magical underground world, eats a cake labeled "Eat Me" and suddenly grows to the size of a giant. That's exactly what the speaker's partner wants to happen to the speaker! This allusion gives the poem a sinister, surreal feeling: it's as if the speaker has herself stumbled into a world where her own body is out of her control.

And as the poem goes on, it feels more and more as if the

speaker is under a dangerous spell. When the speaker does what the lettering tells her and eats the cake, she is as much following her partner's commands as she is the cake's: he gave her the cake, after all. This is not some innocent fantasy world, but the inner workings of an abusive relationship.

Though the speaker eats the cake, she says she doesn't even "taste it." This implies a kind of emotional numbness that could well be the result of her partner's abusive and controlling behavior. What is meant to be fun, sensuous, and a little bit joyful—the eating of a cake—becomes mechanical. He gives her the cake, she eats it, and that's that.

LINES 7-9

Then he asked ...
... like a juggernaut.

In stanza 3, the speaker describes being objectified by her partner. As the partner demands that the speaker walk around the room so he can admire her body from bed, the reader understands that he is fattening the speaker up in order to make her conform to his idea of what is attractive.

Here, the poem subverts the more typical modern demand on women's bodies: that women have to be *thin* to meet men's sexual standards. By playing with the opposite idea, the speaker makes it clear that it doesn't matter whether men expect women to be fat or thin: the process of objectification works just the same. The woman has to change herself according to externally imposed standards, and the agency and power here are both in the hands of the partner.

The poem's sounds here evoke the speaker's changing body. Take a look at the alliteration and consonance in lines 8-9, for instance:

> round the bed so he could watch my broad
> belly wobble, hips judder like a juggernaut.

The blunt, round /b/, /d/, and /j/ sounds gives these lines a "judder[ing]" quality, mimicking the movements they describe. The words "belly wobble," for instance, feel onomatopoiec, evoking the movement of the speaker's body with their sounds as well as their meaning.

The alliterative "judder like a juggernaut" is a simile, suggesting that the speaker has become as huge as a truck ("juggernaut" is sometimes used to mean "truck" in British English). Or perhaps she's like something even bigger: "juggernaut" can also mean a massive, unstoppable force, or even, originally, a huge wagon on which an image of a Hindu god would be displayed. Though now the word tends to just mean something really big and heavy, this background hints at how the man is turning the speaker into a kind of divine power—an object he can worship sexually, rather than treat as a complete human being.

LINES 10-12

The bigger the ...
... masses of cellulite.

Stanza 4 is full of things that the speaker's partner used to say to her. His attempts to fatten her up are directly linked to his affection: the fatter she is, the more he'll like her. He even has a little saying about his tastes: "The bigger the better."

These three lines consist of short little phrases broken up by caesura. These rushed, broken lines make it sound like the man is getting carried away, almost panting at the thought of the speaker becoming increasingly big and soft as he feeds her.

He likes "big girls, soft girls, girls [he] can burrow inside," he says, showing that his objectification of the speaker is also his general attitude towards the opposite sex. He's not interested in who any one woman is: he just wants a series of "girls" who fit his sexual tastes. (Note, too, that he wants "girls," not women: he sees women as children, not grown, independent people.) His insistent diacope on the world "girls" makes him sound obsessive.

Indeed, the speaker's partner is so obsessed that he wants to lose himself inside girls "with multiple chins, masses of cellulite." This line is packed full of consonance, almost to the extent that it reads like a tongue-teaser. These dense, packed-in sounds evoke the overflowing fatness the partner fetishizes.

This stanza also uses asyndeton, jamming clause after clause together with no "and" in sight. This makes these lines feel as though they are being packed full of as much "mass" as possible, as though there is no space for superfluous word like "and." All the language here evokes the partner's obsessive, objectifying lust for fat women.

LINES 13-15

I was his ...
... like forbidden fruit.

In stanza 5, the speaker zooms out, covering a longer period of time in her relationship with this partner—and evoking the sinister, surreal imbalance of that relationship.

Line 13 evoke the interdependence between the speaker and her partner through parallelism:

> I was his Jacuzzi. But he was my cook,

These similarly-constructed clauses suggest that the speaker was something to the partner, and, even though he treated her terribly, he was something to her—not something good, but something integral to her life. There is something ironically—and unsettlingly—romantic about the sentence construction.

But the metaphors the speaker chooses here have very little to do with the clichés of romance. The speaker remembers being

her partner's "Jacuzzi"—a warm, comforting bath for him to sink into, a vessel for him to fill. This has obvious sexual connotations, but also speaks to the way the partner redefined who the speaker was—hollowing out her sense of self and replacing it with an identity linked solely to her ballooning size (and his own pleasure).

In turn, the partner plays the role of "cook": the insistent provider of food. His assault on the speaker's personality in this role, she remembers, was so successful that her one "pleasure" in life became the hit of sugars and salts that came with "fast food." He, in turn, got to watch her swell like "forbidden fruit."

"Forbidden fruit," of course, is an allusion to the biblical Eden story, in which the first people, Adam and Eve, eat the alluring fruit from the forbidden Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and are cast out of paradise. There's a pretty sharp contrast between "fast food" and "forbidden fruit": the one cheap and unhealthy, the other the most luscious tempting thing one can possibly imagine. Alliteration makes that contrast even clearer: the speaker's one, sad pleasure, "fast food," is nothing compared to the "forbidden fruit" of her body in the partner's eyes.

In other words: the speaker is obviously getting the raw end of this deal. She's a mere object for her partner to fetishize—and, with her sense of self eaten away, all she has in the world to enjoy is a burger or two.

But the allusion to forbidden fruit also suggests that her partner can't stay in his selfish, private "paradise" forever.

LINES 16-18

His breadfruit. His ...
... craving a wave.

In stanza 6, the speaker presents a series of surreal metaphors that describe what she represented to her partner. First up, she was "breadfruit": a nourishing tropical fruit, a delicacy for the partner to consume.

Next, she was a "desert island after shipwreck"—a metaphor that underlines how uncomfortably huge the speaker feels. It's as if the partner is man-sized, but the speaker is the size of an island. The fact the island is deserted highlights the way that the man's abuse has isolated the speaker and stripped her of her own identity.

And given that he's been "shipwreck[ed]" on that "island," he could be interpreted as a kind of colonialist explorer like Robinson Crusoe, seeking to "discover" and dominate the speaker's "land" (her body).

The speaker next transforms into an animal:

> Or a beached whale on a king-size bed
> craving a wave.

The emphasis here is on the speaker's immobility. On the surface, that's because she has become too big and heavy to move, like a whale stranded on the beach. But that bigness is really just a symptom of the way in which the man imprisons her through his abuse and coercion.

The assonance here evokes her suffering. The long /ay/ sound in "whale" and "craving a wave" sounds like a cry of pain. And a caesura in the middle of line 18 ("craving a [...] flesh") slows the poem almost to a complete stop, evoking how trapped the speaker feels in her own body (and her abusive relationship).

LINES 18-21

I was a ...
... chubby, cuddly, big-built.

From the caesura in line 18 up to the end of line 21, the speaker summarizes the effects that her partner's incessant feeding had on her life.

She offers one more metaphor to describe her size: "I was a tidal wave of flesh." Here, the hyperbolic hugeness of a tidal wave suggests the speaker's own vastness.

But tidal waves also have great power as they crash to shore. This aspect of the metaphor might foreshadow the fact that the partner's incessant abuse will bring about his own destruction. Enjambment evokes the momentum and power of this metaphorical wave, making the idea "spill over" from one line to the next.

The seventh stanza uses both anaphora and diacope to create drama and intensity:

> **too fat to** leave, **too fat to** buy a pint of full-**fat** milk,
> **too fat to** use **fat** as an emotional shield,
> **too fat to** be called chubby, cuddly, big-built.

With six mentions of "fat" in three lines, this stanza is quite literally fat with "fat." This relentless repetition demonstrates how the speaker's life comes to be entirely defined by her physical appearance—and the way that the external world's *different* standards of female beauty also oppress her:

- She can't leave her partner, because his abuse had made her dependent on him—and because she has become unacceptably fat in the objectifying eyes of the wider world.
- She can't go to the shops to do something as normal as buying a pint of "full-fat milk," because fat women are stigmatized and judged for their food choices. (There's an irony here, too: even as her partner stuffs her with food, she's not allowed to feed herself.)
- She can't use her large body as an "emotional shield" because she has become so fat that, rather than feeling invisible in the kind of "chubby" body a sexist world deems beneath notice, she feels exposed in

the kind of "fat" body a sexist world actively shames.
- And she is beyond the point at which her fatness can be described euphemistically as "chubby, cuddly, big-built"—all versions of fatness that society has deemed more acceptable.

In other words: the problem here isn't just that the speaker's partner is an objectifying abuser (though that is certainly a major problem). It's that the whole *world* has abusive standards for women's bodies. The speaker is trapped in her partner's abuse, not just because he's worn away at her sense of self, but because his abuse has made her body unacceptable to a judgmental and sexist culture. Whatever she does, inside her relationship or out, she'll find herself reduced to just an object, just a body.

LINES 22-24

The day I ...
... down my throat.

At the end of the poem, nearly a decade has passed since the first lines, and everything is about to change. Initially, the relationship between the speaker and her partner appears the same: she is his object for consumption, fattened as much as possible to satisfy his desires. But notice the subtle shift in language in the first sentence of the stanza:

> The day I hit thirty-nine, I allowed him to stroke
> my globe of a cheek [...]

The speaker "allow[s]" the man to touch her cheek: a verb that suggests she has a little more agency now. Perhaps this hints at confidence growing within the speaker, an inner strength drawn from desperation that will allow her to save herself from her partner's controlling grasp.

Nevertheless, the man is still enthralled by the speaker's fatness, and the speaker is still at his mercy, for the moment. Their "flesh flow[s]" together, which is a metaphor for sex *and* hints at how the speaker feels objectified by her partner: he's taken so much control over her that it's almost as if he possesses her body, like a demon. He instructs her to "open wide" so he can pour "olive oil" down her throat, a grotesque image that suggests just how far his abuse has gone.

LINES 25-27

Soon you'll be ...
... dying sentence out.

In stanza 9, the speaker finally snaps when her partner whispers to her as they lie together in bed. While most people might whisper sweet nothings into their partner's ear, he says the curiously unromantic words, "Soon you'll be forty." This echoes the opening of the poem, when the speaker "hit thirty." The man might just as well be referring to the speaker's weight in stone as her actual age!

But this little endearment backfires on him. Suddenly feeling the loss—and the violence—of the past decade, the speaker impulsively rolls over on top of her partner, "drowning" him in her "flesh" and suffocating him. She even "drowns out" his dying sentence, suggesting that he's lost all his power: his words can no longer reach her.

With this watery imagery, the metaphorical "tidal wave" from back in line 18 finally hits the shore with overwhelming force. The partner's abusive obsession with the speaker's fatness has ironically made her so heavy that her size becomes a weapon she can use against him. Ironically, her flesh—the very thing he has been cultivating—is what kills him.

Round /ah/, /oh/ and /ow/ assonance evokes this dramatic moment:

> could I not roll over on top. I rolled and he drowned
> in my flesh. I drowned his dying sentence out.

Those repeated variations on the /o/ vowel might evoke both the speaker's own suddenly-powerful roundness and the partner's stifled cries.

Though this might at first seem like a victory for the speaker, it isn't a simple, neat resolution. The damage has already been done. The speaker has lost nearly ten years of life to this toxic relationship and those years aren't coming back. The poem's closing lines will explore the new trap the speaker finds herself in.

LINES 28-30

I left him ...
... house to eat.

The poem's final stanza describes the aftermath of the killing. The speaker's partner is now dead, and the speaker is no longer under his control. But she's also not free. She leaves him lying there for "six hours that felt like a week," perhaps indicating that she is pumped full of adrenalin, not sure what to do with the dead body she has on her hands now. End-stopped lines slow the poem down to a near halt, mirroring the way that time has changed for the speaker.

The partner's body seems to behave in death much the way it behaved in life: its devouring mouth hangs open, and its eyes "bulge with greed." This ironic moment reveals what's been true all along. The partner may have been fattening the speaker up, but really, he's been serving his own rapacious "greed" for her body. She may have gotten fat, but he's the one who's really been "eating" her up.

The poem ends on a strange, ambiguous note: "there was nothing else left in the house to eat," the speaker says. This could mean more than one thing:

- On the one hand, the devouring partner can no longer "eat" the speaker, feasting on her as if she were just a piece of meat.
- On the other hand, perhaps the speaker *herself* is left with nothing to eat—no real way to nourish herself. Robbed of her identity—and now guilty of a murder!—she hasn't really solved her fundamental problem by killing her partner. She's still trapped in a world in which women are routinely objectified, and she can still be "starved" for genuine love and recognition.

Either way, the ending is deeply unsettling. It's certainly not a clear-cut victory, a story tied up with a neat bow at the end: the reader doesn't know what happens after those "six hours," but it doesn't seem likely to be anything good.

The speaker has lived through a drawn-out nightmare of violence—and that violence doesn't stop at just this one abusive partner. This poem gestures to the wider horrors of sexism and abuse: objectification, this poem suggests, is a disease that eats at the souls of both the women who suffer it and the men who perpetrate it.

SYMBOLS

THE CAKE

The cake the partner gives the speaker at the beginning of the poem is a symbol of objectification and cruelty.

In the poem's opening, it's the speaker's birthday. Her partner gives her a cake—but that cake has nothing to do with the speaker turning thirty. In fact, it celebrates her weight gain, with a candle for each stone (or 14 pounds) of her weight, rather than for each of her years on the planet!

To understand the symbolism here, think about what a birthday cake *usually* symbolizes. It represents people taking the time to celebrate someone that they love. It shows somebody that people are thinking of them, and that they are worth celebrating. But by giving the speaker a weight-gain cake, the speaker's partner isn't celebrating her: he's serving his own desires. His cake symbolizes how much he objectifies her—how, in his eyes, she only exists in order to fulfill his sexual desires.

The cake thus represents a relationship gone bad: this symbol of caring has turned into a symbol of abuse.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-6:** "When I hit thirty, he brought me a cake, / three layers of icing, home-made, / a candle for each stone in weight. / The icing was white but the letters were pink, / they said, eat me. And I ate, did / what I was told. Didn't even taste it."

POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

The alliteration in "Eat Me" helps to evoke the speaker's appearance, her partner's obsession with her weight, and the difference between their two experiences of this abusive relationship.

The first examples of alliteration appear in the third stanza:

> Then he asked me to get up and walk
> round the bed so he could watch my broad
> belly wobble, hips judder like a juggernaut.

The round /b/ sounds here evoke the speaker's own roundness (and chime with the /b/ in "wobble"); the letter even *looks* like a belly. "Judder" and "juggernaut"—which are also assonant—conjure a picture of a jelly-like wobbling, which is exactly what the speaker's partner wants to see.

Soon after this stanza, the partner talks about his desire for fat women. "The bigger the better," he says in line 10, the alliteration making it seem like a pithy saying that he uses all the time (and chiming with the /b/ in the previous stanza). And the repeated /m/ sounds in "Multiple chins, masses of cellulite" in line 12 feel dense, evoking the "masses" of flesh the partner fetishizes.

Alliteration also draws attention to some meaningful comparisons between the speaker's and her partner's different experiences. For instance, the speaker's "only pleasure," for many years, is "fast food," while her partner likes to see her "swell like forbidden fruit." These two moments of /f/ alliteration invite the reader to notice that, while the speaker can only take pleasure in cheap "fast food," her partner relishes the "forbidden fruit" of her body as if he were in Eden itself. Her life thus feels sad and limited compared to his fantasy-world.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 8:** "bed," "broad"
- **Line 9:** "belly," "judder," "juggernaut"
- **Line 10:** "bigger the better"
- **Line 12:** "multiple," "masses"
- **Line 14:** "fast food"
- **Line 15:** "forbidden fruit"
- **Line 19:** "full-fat"
- **Line 21:** "big-built"
- **Line 23:** "flesh," "flesh flowed"
- **Line 24:** "olive," "oil"
- **Line 27:** "drowned," "dying"

ALLUSION

The allusions in "Eat Me" help to evoke the danger and claustrophobia of the speaker's relationship with her abusive partner.

The first allusion appears on the cake the partner gives the speaker on her thirtieth birthday. This cake is *not* a birthday cake, but a celebration of the speaker's increasing weight: instead of delivering a birthday message, the icing merely reads "eat me." This is an allusion to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll's famous fantasy novel. In this story, the wandering Alice eats a small magical cake that has the same message written on it as the one in this poem. Alice's cake makes her grow incredibly large—which is exactly what the speaker's partner hopes will happen to her.

The other allusion appears in line 15, when the speaker describes how her partner liked to watch her "swell like forbidden fruit." This is an allusion to the biblical book of Genesis, in which Adam and Eve eat fruit from the forbidden tree, feel shame for the first time, and are cast out of Eden. The reference here, apart from capturing the intensity of the man's lewd desire, thus also brings in associations of guilt and shame: after years of abuse, the speaker feels not just numbed and dulled, but shameful.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Lines 4-5:** "The icing was white but the letters were pink, / they said, eat me."
- **Line 15:** "his pleasure, to watch me swell like forbidden fruit."

ASSONANCE

Like alliteration and consonance, assonance brings the poem's images to life, evoking the speaker's swelling body.

Assonance plays an especially important role at the end of the poem, when the speaker finally gets her own back on her partner. She kills him by rolling on top of him, her sheer weight crushing him to death. These lines (22-27) are packed full of round /oh/ sounds that evoke the speaker's sheer size and her rolling motion:

> [...] I allowed him to stroke
> my globe of a cheek. His flesh, my flesh flowed.
> He said, Open wide, poured olive oil down my throat.
> [...]
> could I not roll over on top [...]

These lines feel like they are drowning in this dominant /oh/ sound, capturing the way that the man's desire—his lust for the speaker's fatness—becomes a weapon that the speaker uses against him.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "home," "made"
- **Line 3:** "stone," "weight"
- **Line 4:** "icing," "white"
- **Line 5:** "eat me"
- **Line 9:** "judder," "juggernaut"
- **Line 11:** "girls," "burrow"
- **Line 15:** "pleasure," "swell"
- **Line 17:** "whale"
- **Line 18:** "craving," "wave"
- **Line 19:** "buy," "pint"
- **Line 21:** "chubby, cuddly," "big," "built"
- **Line 22:** "stroke"
- **Line 23:** "globe," "flowed"
- **Line 24:** "Open," "throat"
- **Line 25:** "Soon," "you'll"
- **Line 26:** "roll," "over," "rolled"
- **Line 27:** "drowned," "out"
- **Line 28:** "hours"
- **Line 29:** "mouth"
- **Line 30:** "house"

ASYNDETON

Asyndeton evokes both the speaker's increasing size and her growing desperation. For example, take a look at how line 9 uses asyndeton to give the reader a sense of the speaker's physical appearance:

> belly wobble, hips judder like a juggernaut.

To add an "and" here would make the line feel less weighty somehow (try it!). Just putting one thing after another here, with no connecting "and," creates a feeling of build-up that evokes the speaker's growing body.

The next stanza uses the same effect to capture the partner's obsessions:

> The bigger the better, he'd say, I like
> big girls, soft girls, girls I can burrow inside
> with multiple chins, masses of cellulite.

Here, this breathless accumulation of ideas makes it sound like the partner is getting carried away as he talks about the types of "girls" he likes.

Later in the poem, the lack of conjunctions creates a sense of intensity and drama. Describing herself at rock bottom, the speaker says she was

> too fat to leave, too fat to buy a pint of full-fat milk,
> too fat to use fat as an emotional shield,
> too fat to be called chubby, cuddly, big-built.

This pile-up of things the speaker can no longer do evokes how she's trapped in two different ways at once. On the one side, her partner objectifies her fatness, seeing her as a sexual toy and not a person. On the other side, the outside world *judges* her fatness. There's nowhere safe for her to go. The lack of conjunctions here makes these lines feel claustrophobic and oppressive.

Where Asyndeton appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-3:** "When I hit thirty, he brought me a cake, / three layers of icing, home-made, / a candle for each stone in weight."
- **Line 9:** "belly wobble, hips judder like a juggernaut."
- **Lines 10-12:** "The bigger the better, he'd say, I like / big girls, soft girls, girls I can burrow inside / with multiple chins, masses of cellulite."
- **Lines 19-21:** "too fat to leave, too fat to buy a pint of full-fat milk, / too fat to use fat as an emotional shield, / too fat to be called chubby, cuddly, big-built."
- **Line 23:** "His flesh, my flesh flowed."
- **Line 24:** "He said, Open wide, poured olive oil down my throat."

CAESURA

Caesurae control the poem's pace, working closely with enjambment and end-stopped lines.

For instance, take a look at the way caesurae help to capture the speaker's state of mind here:

> The icing was white but the letters were pink,
> they said, || eat me. || And I ate, || did
> what I was told. || Didn't even taste it.

Notice how the pauses created by the caesurae evoke the speaker's actions: she does what she is told, stage by stage, because that's the life she has become accustomed to through the controlling behavior of her partner. She has become numb to her situation, and the way the caesurae slow down the pace here help the reader get a sense of that numbness.

Later on, caesurae bring the poem almost to a complete halt:

> Soon you'll be forty… || he whispered, and how
> could I not roll over on top. || I rolled and he drowned
> in my flesh. || I drowned his dying sentence out.

Notice how slow this stanza feels to read. All the mid-line full stops here evoke both the speaker's weight and the sudden quiet that comes when she kills her partner, his incessant desire falling silent as he takes his last stifled breath.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "thirty, he"
- **Line 2:** "icing, home-made"
- **Line 5:** "said, eat," "me. And," "ate, did"
- **Line 6:** " told. Didn'"
- **Line 9:** "wobble, hips"
- **Line 10:** "better, he'd say, I"
- **Line 11:** "girls, soft," "girls, girls"
- **Line 12:** "chins, masses"
- **Line 13:** "Jacuzzi. But"
- **Line 15:** "pleasure, to"
- **Line 16:** "breadfruit. His"
- **Line 18:** "wave. I"
- **Line 19:** "leave, too"
- **Line 21:** "chubby, cuddly, big-built"
- **Line 22:** "thirty-nine, I"
- **Line 23:** "cheek. His," "flesh, my"
- **Line 24:** "said, Open," "wide, poured"
- **Line 25:** "forty… he," "whispered, and"
- **Line 26:** "top. I"
- **Line 27:** "flesh. I"
- **Line 29:** "open, his"

CONSONANCE

Consonance runs throughout the poem, working closely with alliteration and assonance to bring images to life on the page.

Take a look, for instance, at what the /t/ sound does in the second stanza:

> The icing was white but the letters were pink,
> they said, eat me. And I ate, did
> what I was told. Didn't even taste it.

In a poem all about eating, it makes sense that the /t/ would crop up! In order to make the sound, the reader has to make a motion with the mouth that subtly mimics taking a bite. The focus on /t/ here shows how much the speaker's life is organized around eating—how eating defines her daily existence, because it is what she is "told" to do.

It's no coincidence, then, that it is also the very last sound in the poem:

> There was nothing else left in the house to eat.

The poem concludes with a final bite, giving the ending a little extra drama and marking the end of an era.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "white but," "I," "etters"
- **Line 5:** "eat," "ate"
- **Line 6:** "what," "Didn't," "taste it"

- **Line 8:** "round," "bed," "could," "broad"
- **Line 9:** "belly wobble," "judder," "juggernaut"
- **Line 10:** "bigger," "better"
- **Line 11:** "big girls," "girls, girls"
- **Line 12:** "multiple," "masses"
- **Line 13:** "was his Jacuzzi"
- **Line 14:** "pleasure," "rush," "fast food"
- **Line 15:** "pleasure," "swell," "forbidden fruit"
- **Line 18:** "craving," "wave," "tidal," "wave," "flesh"
- **Line 19:** "fat," "pint," "full-fat," " milk"
- **Line 21:** "chubby," "big-built"
- **Line 22:** "stroke"
- **Line 23:** "cheek," "flesh," "flesh flowed"
- **Line 24:** "wide, poured," "olive oil"
- **Line 26:** "rolled," "drowned"
- **Line 29:** "slightly," "bulging"
- **Line 30:** "left," "to eat"

END-STOPPED LINE

End-stopped lines (along with enjambment and caesura) help to control the poem's pace, and to create its sinister mood.

For instance, take a look at the end-stop that closes the first stanza:

> three layers of icing, home-made,
> a candle for each stone in **weight.**

The strong pause here lets the weirdness of the opening sink in: the partner has given the speaker, not a birthday cake, but a weight-gain cake, celebrating her growing size.

End-stops do something similar across the poem, slowing the pace down to let a strange or disconcerting image have its full effect. And a lot of the important words that come right before an end-stop—"juggernaut," "cellulite," "forbidden fruit"—actually *feel* heavier because of the end-stops.

At the end of the poem, the speaker's huge body helps get her own back on her partner when she rolls on top of him and kills him. Here, end-stops work with caesura to slow the poem down dramatically. In the last stanza, every line ends with a solid period:

> I left him there for six hours that felt like a **week.**
> His mouth slightly open, his eyes bulging with **greed.**
> There was nothing else left in the house to **eat.**

These end-stops feel firm and final: death has brought an end to the partner's insatiable desire at last. But they also contribute to the unsettling atmosphere of the ending. Yes, the partner is dead, but it's hard to call this a victory: ten years of abuse have taken their toll on the speaker. The end-stops thus also suggest that the speaker doesn't quite know what will happen after this ending: what is there for her to do now?

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "cake,"
- **Line 3:** "weight."
- **Line 4:** "pink,"
- **Line 6:** "it."
- **Line 9:** "juggernaut."
- **Line 12:** "cellulite."
- **Line 13:** "cook,"
- **Line 14:** "food,"
- **Line 15:** "fruit."
- **Line 16:** "shipwreck."
- **Line 19:** "milk,"
- **Line 20:** "shield,"
- **Line 21:** "big-built."
- **Line 23:** "flowed."
- **Line 24:** "throat."
- **Line 27:** "out."
- **Line 28:** "week."
- **Line 29:** "greed."
- **Line 30:** "eat."

ENJAMBMENT

Enjambment works with end-stopped lines and caesura to control the poem's pace. Enjambments often suggest movement, which can then be brought to a crashing halt by an end-stop. This happens in both stanzas three and four:

> Then he asked me to get up and **walk**
> **round** the bed so he could watch my **broad**
> **belly** wobble, hips judder like a juggernaut.
> The bigger the better, he'd say, I **like**
> **big** girls, soft girls, girls I can burrow **inside**
> **with** multiple chins, masses of cellulite.

In the first of the stanzas above, the movement of the enjambment conveys the speaker's own movement as she "judder[s]" around the bed. In the next, enjambment captures the partner's ravenous, overwhelming appetite for "big girls." Notice how the enjambments allow the poem to flow, before two words that focus on fat/size bring it to a stop: "juggernaut" and "cellulite."

As the years go by, the speaker's size increases and a number of the poem's sentences overflow the lines—as though they, too, have grown uncontainably large. This is especially noticeable between lines 17 and 19:

> Or a beached whale on a king-size **bed**
> **craving** a wave. I was a tidal wave of **flesh**
> **too** fat to leave, too fat to buy a pint of full-fat milk,

Here, the poem even enjambs across two stanzas. This overflow mirrors the speaker's ever-expanding, overwhelming body—and the overwhelm of her partner's abuse.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-6:** "did / what"
- **Lines 7-8:** "walk / round"
- **Lines 8-9:** "broad / belly"
- **Lines 10-11:** "like / big"
- **Lines 11-12:** "inside / with"
- **Lines 17-18:** "bed / craving"
- **Lines 18-19:** "flesh / too"
- **Lines 22-23:** "stroke / my"
- **Lines 25-26:** "how / could"
- **Lines 26-27:** "drowned / in"

IRONY

Irony gives the poem its dark, surreal humor.

In line 13, for example, the speaker describes her relationship with her partner. She says:

> I was his Jacuzzi. But he was my cook,

This is a slightly ironic—or satirical—take on romantic language. People in love often have pet names for each other, or use metaphor to describe their connection—e.g. "he is my rock"—but here the chosen images are deeply unsettling. The speaker is an empty vessel for the man to occupy, while he just keeps feeding and feeding her: hardly the most romantic of set-ups.

The greatest irony of all, though, is reserved for the poem's end. For ten years, the speaker's partner has his way, feeding the speaker so that she grows larger and larger. Eventually, though, her size becomes the weapon with which she can get her own back. He meets an ironic end when she senses an opportunity and rolls over on top of him—leaving him dead with "his mouth slightly open, his eyes bulging with greed," like some kind of suckling pig. He's destroyed by the fat he fetishized—irony at its most vengeful!

Where Irony appears in the poem:

- **Line 13:** "I was his Jacuzzi. But he was my cook,"
- **Line 19:** "too fat to buy a pint of full-fat milk,"
- **Lines 25-30:** "Soon you'll be forty… he whispered, and how / could I not roll over on top. I rolled and he drowned / in my flesh. I drowned his dying sentence out. / I left him there for six hours that felt like a week. / His mouth slightly open, his eyes bulging with greed. / There was nothing else left in the house to eat."

METAPHOR

Metaphor gives the reader a vivid sense of the relationship between the speaker and her abusive partner.

The speaker's partner is very candid about his preferences, saying in line 11 that he likes "big girls, soft girls, girls I can burrow inside." Here, the partner imagines his preferred lovers as dirt for him to dig a cozy little rat-hole in. This image makes his objectification of women's bodies clear: he sees them only as matter, stuff for him to use as he sees fit.

This objectification comes across in the other metaphors too. In line 13, the speaker describes being "his Jacuzzi." In other words, she was an empty vessel filled by her partner for his own pleasure.

In the sixth stanza, the speaker compresses nearly ten years of this strange relationship into a series of metaphors that show both how her partner saw her *and* how she came to define herself according to his desires:

> His breadfruit. His desert island after shipwreck.
> Or a beached whale on a king-size bed
> craving a wave. I was a tidal wave of flesh

"Breadfruit" portrays the speaker as a tropical fruit for her partner to devour, while the other metaphors explain more about the ongoing effects of his abuse. As a "desert island," she is the passive recipient of the man, and, of course, large compared to him! This also casts him as a kind of explorer, perhaps hinting at his own tendency to see himself as a superior creature, a colonist of her body. And as a "beached whale," she's obviously large, but she's also in distress—"craving a wave" that might grant her her freedom.

But when she becomes a "tidal wave," there's also a hint that she'll eventually find a kind of destructive power in her size—as, at the end of the poem, she does.

Lines 22 and 23 play into these previous metaphors, too:

> The day I hit thirty-nine, I allowed him to stroke
> my globe of a cheek. His flesh, my flesh flowed.

The "globe of a cheek" reiterates the speaker's size once again, but also casts the man as a kind of explorer. Think about the entitlement of a colonizer, a person who thinks nothing of taking over a newly discovered land (even if that land already has an indigenous population). The partner sees the speaker in a similarly entitled light.

The other metaphor here, describing how the couple's "flesh flowed" together, shows how successfully the partner made the speaker dependent upon him. They became almost like one creature, but one always in his control, and at the service of his desires.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 11:** "girls I can burrow inside"
- **Line 13:** "I was his Jacuzzi. But he was my cook,"
- **Lines 16-18:** "His breadfruit. His desert island after shipwreck. / Or a beached whale on a king-size bed / craving a wave. I was a tidal wave of flesh"
- **Lines 22-23:** "I allowed him to stroke / my globe of a cheek."
- **Line 23:** "His flesh, my flesh flowed."

PARALLELISM

Parallelism helps to evoke the toxic and coercive relationship between the speaker and her partner, suggesting how hopelessly the speaker is entangled in her partner's abuse.

As the partner fattens the speaker up, the speaker comes to feel brief pleasure only in "the rush of fast food" (line 14). The pair thus form a twisted, imprisoning kind of bond, one which parallelism reflects in line 13:

> I was his Jacuzzi. But he was my cook,

The grammatical construction of the sentence captures the couple's interdependence. The two rely on each other, in a strange way. But this isn't a loving, mutually supportive relationship between two equals: it's a feedback loop the speaker can't escape.

This idea reaches its climax in the sexually suggestive second half of line 23:

> His flesh, my flesh flowed.

In this line, the speaker and the partner become one flesh, a grotesque image which emphasizes the exclusively sexual nature of their relationship (the man shows no emotional connection with the speaker whatsoever). Again, the grammar shows how closely connected they are, their two bodies flowing together as one.

(There's more parallelism to find here, too: for the anaphoric parallelism in lines 19-21, see the Repetition section.)

Where Parallelism appears in the poem:

- **Line 13:** "I was his Jacuzzi. But he was my cook,"
- **Lines 19-21:** "too fat to leave, too fat to buy a pint of full-fat milk, / too fat to use fat as an emotional shield, / too fat to be called chubby, cuddly, big-built."
- **Line 23:** "His flesh, my flesh flowed."

REPETITION

The different forms of repetition in "Eat Me" evoke the partner's obsession, the speaker's desperation, and the claustrophobia of their abusive relationship.

In the fourth stanza, for example, the poem uses diacope and polyptoton to give the reader a sense of the partner's greed for women's bodies:

> The bigger the better, he'd say, I like
> big girls, soft girls, girls I can burrow inside

The polyptoton on "bigger" and "big" makes it clear that the partner is interested in women for one reason only: their size. And his insistent focus on "girls" is misogynistic: he sees women as dependent children and as discardable playthings.

Diacope also reveals the abusive imbalance in the couple's relationship. For instance, look at the use of the word "pleasure" in lines 14-15:

> my only pleasure the rush of fast food,
> his pleasure, to watch me swell like forbidden fruit.

This repetition (underscored by the alliteration of "fast food" and "forbidden fruit") invites readers to compare these two kinds of pleasure: the speaker's is sad, cheap, and brief, while the partner's is charged up with intense, fantastical power.

Elsewhere, anaphora and diacope show how engulfed the speaker feels by her partner and his standards:

> His breadfruit. His desert island after shipwreck.
> Or a beached whale on a king-size bed
> craving a wave. I was a tidal wave of flesh
> too fat to leave, too fat to buy a pint of full-fat milk,
> too fat to use fat as an emotional shield,
> too fat to be called chubby, cuddly, big-built.

The anaphora of "His" in line 16 emphasizes the man's perspective at the expense of the speaker's own: she's come to see herself only as an object, there to satisfy his desires. And in the next stanza, anaphora on the words "too fat to"—and diacope on the word "fat" itself—demonstrate how the speaker has come to feel totally defined by her fatness, and utterly dependent on her partner.

Soon enough, though, the speaker uses her size as a weapon, rolling over on her partner and killing him. Repetition in this section (along with caesura and end-stopping) slows the poem right down:

> could I not roll over on top. I rolled and he drowned
> in my flesh. I drowned his dying sentence out.

The polyptoton on "roll/rolled" and diacope on "drowned" make this moment feel dramatic and drawn-out, as if this major scene is taking place in slow motion.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 10:** "bigger"
- **Line 11:** "big girls," "girls," "girls"
- **Line 14:** "pleasure"
- **Line 15:** "pleasure"
- **Line 16:** "His," "His"
- **Line 18:** "wave," "wave"
- **Line 19:** "too fat to," "too fat to," "full-fat"
- **Line 20:** "too fat to," "fat"
- **Line 21:** "too fat to"
- **Line 23:** "flesh," "flesh"
- **Line 26:** "roll," "rolled," "drowned"
- **Line 27:** "flesh," "drowned"
- **Line 29:** "His," "his"

SIMILE

Simile evokes the speaker's experience of her own expanding body, and her partner's obsession with her fatness.

In line 9, the speaker describes how her partner would make her walk around the bed so he could watch her "hips judder like a juggernaut." This simile hyperbolically marks the speaker out as being very large: a "juggernaut" is a type of truck—and a kind of wagon upon which statues of Hindu deities were once paraded through the streets. The word choice here thus evokes the speaker's size, and also subtly hints at the way the man worships the speaker—but only for her physical appearance, and not who she actually is.

The other simile comes in line 15 and compares the speaker to "forbidden fruit"—an allusion to the Garden of Eden in the biblical book of Genesis. In this ancient myth, Adam and Eve (though Eve first, so the story goes) eat fruit from the forbidden Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, feel shame for the first time, and bring about the fall of humankind. This simile portrays the speaker's body as something illicit, tempting, and shameful all at once. This line also hints at a point the speaker will make later: in a culture that fetishizes *thin* women, being a fetishized *fat* woman is also "forbidden."

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Line 9:** "hips judder like a juggernaut."
- **Line 15:** "to watch me swell like forbidden fruit."

VOCABULARY

Stone (Line 3) - A unit of weight equal to 14 pounds.

Judder (Line 9) - To shake or vibrate forcefully.

Juggernaut (Line 9) - This can mean something huge and powerful, or a large truck. Originally, the word comes from Sanskrit and meant a large processional wagon for transporting statues of Hindu gods.

Burrow (Line 11) - To tunnel into.

Cellulite (Line 12) - Dimpled skin caused by fat.

Breadfruit (Line 16) - A potato-like fruit popular in the South Pacific.

Beached (Line 17) - Washed up on the shore; stuck.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Eat Me" is built from ten brief tercets (three-line stanzas). This tight form gives the poem a tense and restrictive atmosphere—as though the poem, like the speaker, is being controlled.

The poem is a dramatic monologue, a kind of poem in which the poet behaves like an actor, taking on the first-person voice of a vivid character. (In Agbabi's book *Bloodshot Monochrome*, "Eat Me" appears in a whole section of "Monologues" in different voices.) Like a lot of dramatic monologues, this one tells a startling story, moving from the speaker's constrained, static life with her abusive partner to the climactic breaking point when she finally fights back.

METER

"Eat Me" doesn't have a strict meter, an effect that makes the poem feel deceptively calm. Because the poem's rhythms feel natural and conversational rather than formal and poetic, the speaker sounds matter-of-fact as she describes the horrors of her abusive relationship. It's as if years of suffering have numbed her. This unassuming tone makes the poem's darkly ironic ending feel all the more striking.

While the poem doesn't have a regular meter, it does use rhythm and sound to make meaning. For instance, the lines get steadily, subtly longer as the poem goes on: the poem slowly swells, just as the speaker does under her partner's abusive diet regime.

RHYME SCHEME

There is a regular—but very subtle—rhyme scheme at work throughout the poem. It runs like this:

AAABBBCCC

...and so on. But these are not typical full rhymes—these are slant rhymes based on *assonance*; the rhyme words share a vowel sound, but that the surrounding consonants are different.

Here is stanza three, for example:

> Then he asked me to get up and walk
> round the bed so he could watch my broad

belly wobble, hips judder like a juggernaut.

This subtle, disguised rhyme scheme mirrors how the speaker's partner keeps an underhanded hold on her, disguising his manipulative feeding as love.

SPEAKER

This poem is a dramatic monologue. Though the speaker uses the first-person pronoun throughout, she isn't the poet herself. Instead, the speaker is a voice for the many women who get trapped in abusive relationships.

The speaker's matter-of-fact voice makes it feel as if she's gotten numb to her partner's cruelty. For instance, when she eats the cake he brings her to celebrate, not her thirtieth birthday, but her weight gain, she eats it without even tasting it, and describes this awful moment in short, straightforward lines.

Later in the poem, she defines herself by her partner's standards, using a series of strange metaphors in which she seems to understand herself only as a huge body (e.g. "His desert island after shipwreck" in line 16). Long years of abuse have clearly eaten away at her sense of self.

But the speaker also reveals flashes of dark humor—especially at the end of the poem, when she ironically triumphs over her abuser. While she certainly doesn't get an uncomplicated happy ending, she does manage, at last, to fight back.

SETTING

The poem is set over the course of roughly ten years, starting on the speaker's 30th birthday and ending when she kills her partner on her 39th birthday. These long years get compressed into a relatively short space, drifting by between lines 13 ("I was his Jacuzzi...") and 22 ("The day I hit thirty-nine..."). That compression evokes the speaker's sense that her life has been stolen, eaten up by her abusive partner.

The poem's physical setting is less specific: all we know is that the speaker and partner share a house. But the speaker doesn't seem to go far *beyond* that house, and her world feels claustrophobic: at her lowest point, she feels "too fat" even to go out to the grocery store. The speaker is trapped in an abusive relationship, a stigmatized body, and an unkind world.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Patience Agbabi (1965-present) is a contemporary British poet. She received her M.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Sussex and now lectures at the University of Wales in Cardiff.

Agbabi's poetry has its roots in the London spoken-word poetry scene of the late 1990s. The spoken word genre takes inspiration from hip-hop as well more old-school forms of poetry, and spoken word artists often perform at poetry slams. While "Eat Me" is a tightly-controlled poem written for the page, its emphasis on sound—particularly in the use of assonant rhymes—hints at Agbabi's involvement in performance poetry.

Agbabi herself cites influences on her own work ranging from older poets like Geoffrey Chaucer (whose *Canterbury Tales* she retold in a 2014 book, *Telling Tales*) all the way to contemporary writers like Carol Ann Duffy.

"Eat Me" appears in Agbabi's third full-length collection, *Bloodshot Monochrome* (2008). The poem is a dramatic monologue, and is drawn from an entire section of "Monologues." Many of the other poems in the book deal with issues related to gender, misogyny, and race. Poems like "Skins" and "Comedown" look at the dynamics of power and marginalization, just as "Eat Me" shows how a controlling individual is able to *eat away* at another person's identity over time.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"Eat Me" focuses on male power over women's bodies—a major topic of discussion when this poem was first published in 2008, and for years before and since.

The poem gestures at contemporary discussions of objectification and women's body image in general. Objectified by her partner, a "feeder" (that is, a person who fetishizes fat and forces their partners to get fatter), the speaker is *also* objectified by a wider world that demands that women be *thin*.

Both of these demands, the poem implies, are violent, reducing women to mere consumable bodies. The poem criticizes the very idea of women being forced to conform to *any* body standard.

These ideas have been important in feminist thought for a long time. Thinkers from Susie Orbach (with her 1978 *Fat is a Feminist Issue*) to Sonya Renee Taylor (with her 2018 *The Body is Not an Apology*) have argued that the objectification of women's bodies is all part of a deeper cultural sexism—a problem that people of all genders need to confront.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Agbabi's Spoken-Word Poetry — Watch a video of Agbabi performing some of her poetry (and get a sense of her rhythmic spoken-word style). (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LIrN12luqu0)

- A Short Biography — Learn more about Patience Agbabi, and hear a couple of her poems read aloud. (https://poetryarchive.org/poet/patience-agbabi/)
- Agbabi in Conversation — The poet talks about her life and work. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJIHXkltvms)
- Agbabi on Writing — Listen to Agbabi discussing her writing process. (https://youtu.be/C9zBcD9TjKI)

HOW TO CITE

MLA

Howard, James. "*Eat Me.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 29 Mar 2021. Web. 17 Apr 2021.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Howard, James. "*Eat Me.*" LitCharts LLC, March 29, 2021. Retrieved April 17, 2021. https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/patience-agbabi/eat-me.