

Eating Sugar

Essay: Eating Sugar

In today's society it is not unusual that prejudice and anxiety inhibit us from trying to relate to the different cultures around the world. This narrow-mindedness is created by a tiny knowledge of circumstances. We are simply informed of all the misery, corruption and extremism outside our nation, with only all the appalling facts mentioned in the media world – the distance between nationalities is increased all the time, which makes it hard for people with different cultures to meet and communicate. If a foreigner came to your rescue, while you were in the most need of aid, how would you react? This issue is one of the main subjects in the short story Eating Sugar.

The British short story Eating Sugar is written by Catherine Murrin, and was first published in *Getting a Life* by Honno in 2001. The set of the story takes place in the mountains in Thailand with an omniscient third-person narrator. We are introduced to a married couple, Alex and Eileen, who are on holiday in Thailand to visit their daughter, Suzanne. Alex, the father, is very suspicious of the natives, but in the end he overcomes the suspiciousness. Eileen's anxious behavior makes it possible for Alex to suppress some of his fear, which makes him seem only uninterested. To try to describe his character I find it appropriate to use Duane Hanson's, *Tourist 2*, a sculpture, from 1988. Duane Hanson sketches a typical image of tourists with cameras and Hawaii-shirts. This could be used as a parallel to Alex and Eileen's behavior. They are only in Thailand to visit their daughter. They prefer to be left by themselves away from the natives, just being there to observe and take pictures uninterested in the natives and their culture.

The mood changes in the end of the story, when Alex's behavior switches. The description of the country is taken to another level, which is shown in the following quotation: (150-152) "Huge beach palm trees with gracefully curved trunks, festooned, right to their arching, feathery tops, with white fairy lights." Alex can finally open his eyes and discover the beautiful nature of Thailand when the barrier of all the prejudices has been brought down. All this is shown with a sudden use of adjectives.

Suzanne is 21 years old and teaches English in Thailand. Suzanne is still young and experimental this is suitable in the case of the role reversal where she becomes the parent to Eileen and Alex. She is brave and adventurous. In contrast to her parents, she volunteered to be in Thailand, where Eileen and Alex most likely would not have travelled this far if it was not for their daughter living there. As well the open-mindedness of Suzanne's character makes it possible for her to communicate with the Thais, even though their English is very poor.

(40-43) "Suzanne, their brave twenty-one-year old daughter transformed this side of the world to a competent, patient, encouraging parent. He and Eileen her anxious, fractious, dependent charges." With this quote it is a fact that Suzanne in many ways has learned to be calm and composed. In this kind of situation she seems even more mature than her own parents. As it too is common for younger people to behave brave and without reflection, it was for Eileen and Alex back in the seventies too, when they tried things like LSD. This brings a parallel to Jamaica Kincaid's text *A Small Place* the natives cannot move their banality and depression like the tourist moves it to natives place. It makes the natives envious of the tourists' possibilities. They have the opportunity to escape from reality, like when Suzanne goes to Thailand or the parents took LSD. But in this case it is more a contrast – the Thais does not envy the tourists because they are not poor, so they

behavior of the Thais is different. Furthermore the title refers to the beer the locals drink which is a parallel to the LSD the parents once took. Eileen escaped depression by eating sugar; this beer is the Thais way of escaping.

One of the most important and dominating themes of this story is prejudice. The reserved parents does not communicate with the Thais, this issue is a fact of the prejudice. It almost makes them turn down the offer of aid, because they cannot accept the Thais. I believe this huge problem is a reality of a media world that shows a twisted view of life. They implement the prejudice. Another theme is the role reversal, when the parents suddenly become the scared and apprehensive.