Peanuts and the American Dream

Peanuts, which Charles M. Schulz continued to draw for fifty years (1950-2000), depicts American culture vividly and concretely. In addition, it describes what the average American people really think and feel through the comic characters. Schulz is said to make a picture of people's inner life: their views on religion, their joys, and sorrows. That is why Peanuts is not merely entertaining but instructive. Although he portrayed the world of children, his readers include not only children but grown-ups. He may have wished to criticize grown-ups by vivid descriptions of children.

This is a cultural study. The purpose of the present study is to explore why the American people have been fascinated and attracted to Peanuts. In my opinion, its success can be explained by the fact that Peanuts is deeply concerned with the American dream, which is what the American people have believed to be most important and essential. It is natural that it is much reflected in the world of Peanuts.

Schulz may have believed that people could achieve success, which is one of the meanings of the American dream, more often in America than in the Old World, but he also seemed to think that it is illusory and deceptive. He criticizes the dark side of the American dream. There are countless losers on the wayside of the road leading to it. The achievers of the American dream are limited to a small number of people with uncommon talent.

In my opinion, this is why the author depicts Charlie Brown as Everyman. He may represent those people who are excluded from success. But he has what the achievers of material success sometimes lack: consideration and sympathy for other people. As a result, he is surrounded by many loving friends.
Through depicting the character of Charlie Brown, Schulz is criticizing what the grown-ups think is important in life.

On this point he has much in common with great novelists like Scott Fitzgerald. The hero of *The Great Gatsby* has fulfilled the American dream. He has become immensely rich and his parties attracted a great number of people. But he seems to have lost much in exchange for his success: he has no friends except Nick Carraway.

*Peanuts* is also concerned with the other meaning of the American dream: democracy, liberty or equality. Equality as well as freedom is a keyword in Martin Luther King’s speech “I Have a Dream” (1963). It has resonated with the American people all through the ages. Why is it loved in America even now? It is of course because it has a tremendous appealing power to the American people. But it may be because what he said has not been achieved and materialized: because racial equality is still but “a dream.” For the nation of immigrants, equality has been and will be one of the highest ideal and the most significant challenge.

From this point of view, one of the most important yet hidden messages from the author may be revealed: racial equality. It should be noted that no adult appears in *Peanuts*. The world of children usually has nothing to do with status, honor, and wealth that characterize the world of the grown-ups. Besides we see a variety of children in *Peanuts*, which is meant to reflect America as a melting pot. In *Peanuts* each character treats and respects others as his or her equal, paying no attention to the color of their skin, gender, or age. *Peanuts* is a world where equality, which constitutes one aspect of the American dream, is fully realized. Schulz may be criticizing the American society by depicting the world of children.

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