



Letters From 'Peanuts' Creator Reveal Bittersweet Romance

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Courtesy of the Claudius family

On Friday, Sotheby's is putting up for auction 44 letters and 35 drawings from Charles Schulz, the creator of *Peanuts*, to a young woman he was courting.

The letters were written during an eight-month period starting in 1970 when Schulz's first marriage was deteriorating and before he met his second wife. During this time, Schulz, 48, wrote Tracey Claudius, 25, poignant, funny, even innocent notes in pictures and words, often using Charlie Brown to stand in for himself.

"On April 22 you squeezed my hand in the dark, remember?" reads one on blue construction paper.

There's also a picture of Charlie Brown with the words "Tracey, Tracey, Tracey" written on the bottom.

Another shows Charlie Brown saying, "You don't miss me," with a forlorn look; in the next drawing, he has a big grin and says, "or do you?"

Among the letters is a two-page original manuscript Schulz sent to Claudius of Snoopy's novel, which begins, "It was a dark and stormy night." It ends with a paw print and came with a cover note that says, "Who else do you know that gets a manuscript from a dog?"

Schulz and Claudius went skating. They had dinner. They spoke on the phone. Schulz signed most letters with his nickname Sparky. He proposed to Claudius twice and she

rejected him both times, perhaps fearing their age difference but also believing their affair would damage his wholesome reputation. So there is a poignant, intimate, even sad character to the drawings and letters.



Courtesy of the Claudius Family

"There's a bittersweetness to it and an innocence about it. He talks about squeezing her hand in the dark and stealing a kiss in a bookstore, the sort of thing that really you would associate more with Charlie Brown and his fantasies about the little red-haired girl than necessarily with a 48-year-old man," says Selby Kiffer, international senior specialist in the manuscript division of Sotheby's.

Kiffer describes Schulz as a very private man, and so these letters and drawings are fascinating, he says, because "he sort of set himself free and let himself express himself."

One book mentioned several times in the letters is *The Great Gatsby*. Here you had this tremendously successful man who created this cultural phenomenon, Kiffer says, "and yet like Gatsby, he was searching for something, he didn't feel fulfilled, and he met this young woman, and at least for a brief time, that void was fulfilled and they had a wonderful time together and he left this record of it."

The collection is being sold by Claudius' family as a single archive. She is apparently ill. The estimated price is \$250,000 to \$350,000.