

When *Riverdale*, a TV series based on ye olde Archie comics released a few years ago, I was quite disappointed. The writing got worse each season, and the show had no humour. It was great as a guilty pleasure for the first two seasons—almost as if Ekta Kapoor had made Archie comics into a TV show, but season three is so badly written that even Cole Sprouse can't keep me hooked.

I assume the reason *Riverdale* does not appeal to me is because it is made strictly for a gen-Y or late millennial audience. Archie comics changed a lot in the 21st century, bringing new characters and storylines, but the only ones I've ever read are from my father and uncle's huge collection of comics from their teenage years.

I grew up thinking words like "golly" and "egad" were still widely used. Archie comics greatly contributed to me learning spoken English, apart from these archaic phrases. I was obsessed with the comics at one point, reading and re-reading till the already battered copies became nearly unsalvageable. A close friend of mine from school shared this obsession, so this is all we would talk about. We'd exchange



KOWALSKI ANALYSIS

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# THE OTHER SIDE OF ARCHIE COMICS

books, and constantly debate on the comics' central plot—who would finally win Archie's love, Betty or Veronica?

Now that I am no longer a naive eleven-year old, this plot quite bothers me. The characters of Betty and Veronica were heavily stereotyped. Betty was good at everything, the perfect girl next door who "deserved" Archie's love, yet he kept running to Veronica, a promiscuous, rich brat who only knew how to spend money. Veronica was stereotyped as a dumb heiress, but in retrospect, I think she had many talents. She was athletic and had an

excellent fashion sense.

Why were two young girls pitted against each other? In a few sketches, Betty and Veronica are supposedly "best friends." Those were some of the most wholesome stories in the comic, in my opinion. I particularly remember one where Veronica goes to Betty's simple, middle-class household and finds coins, coats etc. thrown around the house. Betty constantly apologises, but Veronica says she loves how this house is more humane than her luxurious villa because of the mess.

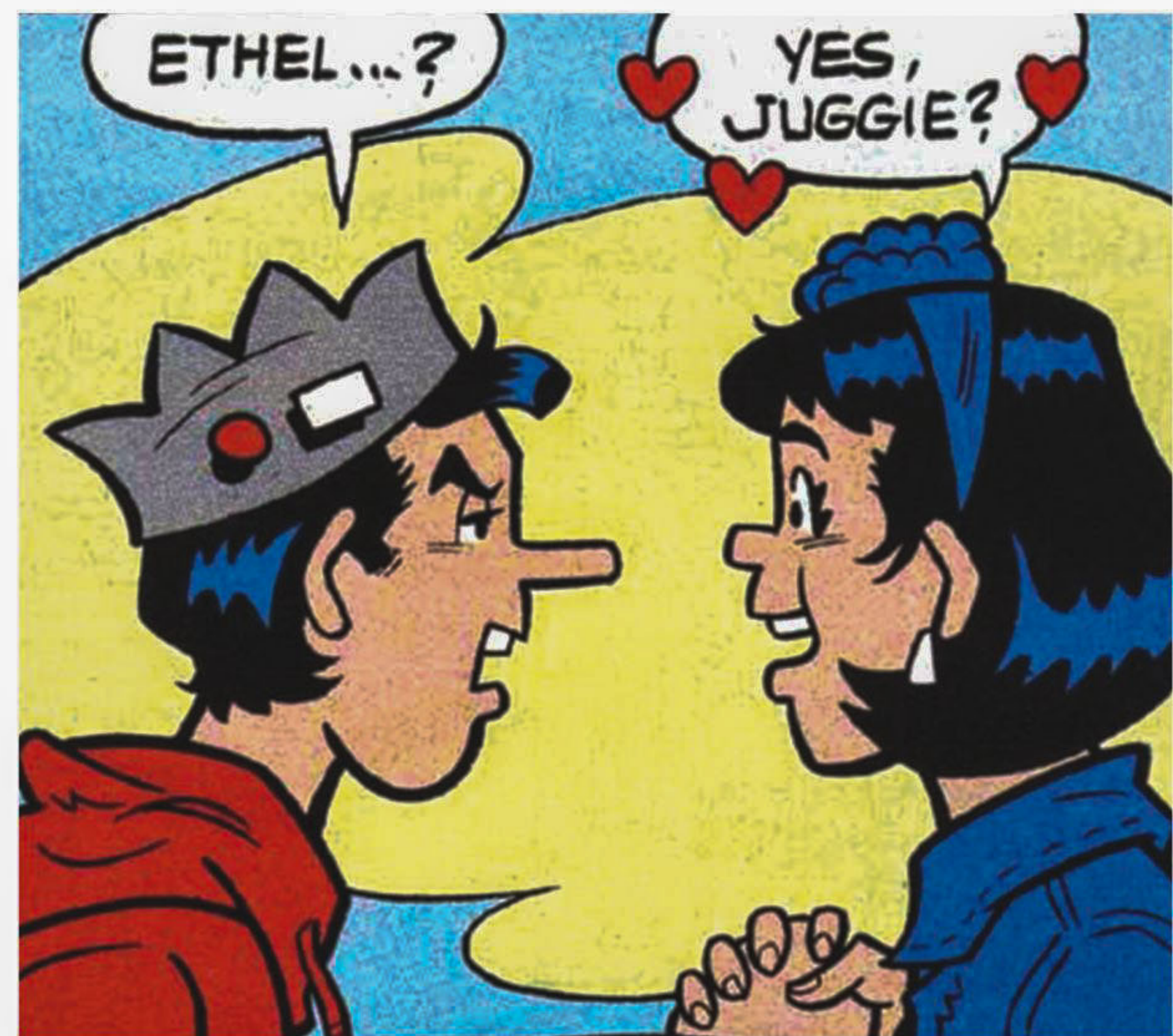
But such stories were rare. Most often, Betty and Veronica's only goal in life was to be Archie's girlfriend. They didn't quite seem to care that Archie was constantly switching between the two.

This storyline is not appropriate for young girls. It almost gives out the

were at least given a bit more personality, Ethel only ever showed up to beg for Jughead's love. He never paid her any attention; but apparently women don't understand the concept of rejection in the world of Archie comics.

The TV show *Riverdale* has changed the sexist themes of the old comics. It no longer pits Betty and Veronica against each other, but rather shows Archie for the dumb jock that he always was. The girls don't let Archie come between their friendship, and in season one they even team up against bullies.

The more empowered female characters and Cole Sprouse's good looks are the only redeeming qualities of the show; the dialogue and storyline let down what could have been an improved version of the comics. My favourite videos on YouTube are the ones along the lines



of "*Riverdale* having bad writing for three minutes." If you're interested, watch Jughead's "In case you haven't noticed, I'm weird. I'm a weirdo" monologue.

Now on its third season, the show has strayed as far from the comics as possible, featuring a cult that murders people and sacrifices babies.

Despite its many shortcomings, I have fond memories with Archie comics. The family collection is still intact. My dad's ones from the seventies had many colourful ads for glow-in-the-dark bracelets and flavoured chewing gums; I really wanted to visit the US to buy those. Me and my friend often planned to visit Nilkhet to find cheap second-hand double digests.

I probably wouldn't like reading Archie as an adult, yet the nostalgia attached with childhood comic books still remains strong. Perhaps this is part of growing up—you learn to accept that some old favourites weren't as great as they once seemed, but you can still cherish the good memories.

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impression that two girls can only be "frenemies," that there can never be unadulterated friendship between them like Archie and Jughead's dynamic. Betty and Veronica always tried to one-up each other, instead of realising that it was Archie who was playing them all along. This storyline implies that the only way to gain validation in life is to get a man.

Another prominent female character in the comics was Ethel—whose only trait was pining after Jughead, an aloof boy who did not care about women (I think he was asexual). While Betty and Veronica