

Owen Bergstein

“The Problem With Comedy”:

Trans Humor, Hannah Gadsby, and the Reinvention of Stand-Up

Though the past decade has seen a boom in cisgender comics making fun of transgender people in their routines, as well as a blossom in the number of transgender comics performing, there has been a stunningly small amount of scholarly work into what trans comedy means and entails. This study aims to amend that by tracing key themes of trans comedy through the repertoire of legendary genderqueer comic Hannah Gadsby. Gadsby’s sheer amount of output makes them the most prolific and influential trans comic today, but also among the most countercultural. By comparing Gadsby’s work and rise to fame with those of other leading genderqueer comics, including Mae Martin and Mx. Dahlia Belle, this study reveals how Gadsby has throughout their career utilized hallmarks of trans comedy to grow and refine their audience. By “trans-ing” or subverting comedic norms, this study argues, Gadsby has been able to avoid self-deprecation and overly political content, finding a delicate middle-ground and building a new pro-trans comedy space. Main sources include Gadsby’s four Netflix specials, their memoir, and reviews of their work.