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## Briefly Noted: Books, Comics, Music, and More

The fetish art of *Superman's* co-creator, the future biotech farmers of America, and Hank Williams Jr.'s right-wing populism

**Brian Doherty, Ronald Bailey & Damon Root** | July 10, 2009



### Super Porn

Do-gooder psychiatrist Fredric Wertham famously declared that the comics of the 1940s and '50s were rife with sadistic and perverted sexual themes. Craig Yoe's book *Secret Identity: The Fetish Art of Superman's Co-Creator Joe Shuster* (Abrams) shines a strange new light on that theme.

In 1954 Shuster, down on his luck after making a bad deal selling ownership of Superman to DC Comics, illustrated a series of cheap and lurid sex and bondage pamphlets called *Nights of Horror*. Those pamphlets were later implicated in a series of notorious youth-gang murders and then banned and destroyed by New York authorities—an act upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1957.



This book reproduces the drawings and contextualizes them. Some of the characters are dead ringers for Clark Kent, Lois Lane, and Lex Luthor. But as Stan Lee writes in his introduction, while Superman was “positive and morally uplifting,” these stories “cater to the basest of man’s character.” They are a fascinating display of comics history nonetheless.—*Brian Doherty*

### Future Biotech Farmers of America

“The farmer and cowman should be friends,” the cast of *Oklahoma!* famously sang. Now the more vicious conflict is between organic and biotech farmers. *Tomorrow's Table* (Oxford), by Pamela C. Ronald (a crop biotechnologist at the University of California, Davis) and Raoul W. Adamchak (a farmer who runs the university’s student organic farm), tries to bring the two sides together.

Adamchak points out the benefits to soil fertility and water retention that organic cultivation brings. Ronald makes a persuasive case for the safety of biotech techniques. No one has ever been harmed by growing or eating genetically engineered crops, she notes. Since the technology is contained in the seed, biotech crops especially benefit resource-poor farmers. By boosting food production, biotech crops use less land.

Part memoir, part almanac, part cookbook, part scientific treatise, the book shows that farming doesn’t have to be just organic or biotech; it should be both.—*Ronald Bailey*

### A Country Singer Can Evolve

Although he is a wealthy and successful second-generation celebrity, Hank Williams Jr. has long maintained a populist pose. In

addition to his rowdy songs about such popular personal obsessions as sex, drugs, booze, and football, he has praised small-town values, vigilante justice, and generally reactionary politics.

After the September 11 attacks, Williams retooled his agrarian manifesto “A Country Boy Can Survive” into the aggressively patriotic “America Will Survive.” Last fall, he turned his politics partisan by transforming his clever “Family Tradition” (which celebrates marijuana and whiskey) into the clumsy “McCain-Palin Tradition” (which sneers at the liberal media and leers at Sarah Palin).

Along with lamenting high taxes, his latest single, “Red, White & Pink-Slip Blues,” complains about dangerous streets and jobs that “moved to Mexico.” It’s an accurate portrait of today’s right-wing populism, a movement whose central theme is class anxieties, not small government.—*Damon W. Root*

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