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VIEWPOINT

Heather Mallick

A Mighty Wind blows through Republican convention

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By Heather Mallick, special to [CBC News](#)

I assume John McCain chose Sarah Palin as his vice-presidential partner in a fit of pique because the Republican money men refused to let him have the stuffed male shirt he really wanted. She added nothing to the ticket that the Republicans didn't already have sewn up, the white trash vote, the demographic that sullies America's name inside and outside its borders yet has such a curious appeal for the right.

So why do it?

It's possible that Republican men, sexual inadequates that they are, really believe that women will vote for a woman just because she's a woman. They're unfamiliar with our true natures. Do they think vaginas call out to each other in the jungle night? I mean, I know men have their secret meetings at which they pledge to do manly things, like being irresponsible with their semen and postponing household repairs with glue and used matches. Guys will be guys, obviously.

But do they not know that women have been trained to resent other women and that they only learn to suppress this by constantly berating themselves and reading columns like this one? I'm a feminist who understands that women can nurse terrible and delicate woman hatred.

Palin was not a sure choice, not even for the stolidly Republican ladies branch of Citizens for a Tackier America. No, she isn't even female really. She's a type, and she comes in male form too.

John Doyle, the cleverest critic in Canada, comes right out and calls Palin an Alaska hillbilly. Damn his eyes, I wish I'd had the wit to come up with it first. It's safer than "white trash" but I'll pluck safety out of the nettle danger. Or something.

Doyle's job includes watching a lot of reality television and he's well-versed in the backstory. White trash — not trailer trash, that's something different — is rural, loud, proudly unlettered (like Bush himself), suspicious of the urban, frankly disbelieving of the foreign, and a fan of the American cliché of authenticity. The semiotics are pure Palin: a sturdy body, clothes that are clinging yet boxy and a voice that could peel the plastic seal off your new microwave.

'Turn your guns on Levi, ma'am'

Palin has a toned-down version of the **porn actress** look favoured by this decade's woman, the overtreated hair, puffy lips and permanently alarmed expression. Bristol has what is known in Britain as the look of the teen mum, the "pramface." Husband Todd looks like a roughneck; Track, heading off to Iraq, appears

terrified. They claim to be family obsessed while being studiously terrible at parenting. What normal father would want Levi "I'm a fuckin' redneck" Johnson prodding his daughter?

I know that I have an attachment to children that verges on the irrational, but why don't the Palins? I'm not the one preaching homespun values but I'd destroy that ratboy before I'd let him get within scenting range of my daughter again, and so would you. Palin's e-mails about the brother-in-law she tried to get fired as a state trooper are fizzing with rage and revenge. Turn your guns on Levi, ma'am.

Palin has it all, along with being vicious and profoundly dishonest. Just hours after her first convention speech, the Associated Press did a [good fast listing of her untruths](#) and I won't dwell on them.

I did promise to watch the entire convention so you wouldn't have to, but I discovered a neat trick. I switched between the convention and the 2003 folk music mockumentary *A Mighty Wind* on Bravo.

They were indistinguishable. Click on a nervous wreck with deeply strange hair doing a monologue on society today and where it all went wrong. Are you watching Christian belter Aaron Tippin singing *Where the Stars and Stripes and Eagle Fly* in the Xcel Centre in St. Paul or the actors from *Spinal Tap* remixing the 1966 version of *Potato's in the Paddy Wagon*?

Who delivered this line: "To do then now would be retro. To do then then was very now-tro, if you will." Was it Rev. James Dobson of Focus on the Family talking about Bristol Palin's shotgun wedding or was it a flashback to the Kingston Trio?

The conventioners are nothing like the rich men who run the party, and that's the mystery of the hick vote. They'd be much better served by the Democrats. I know Thomas Frank answered this in *What's the Matter with Kansas?*; I know that red states vote Republican on social issues to give themselves the only self-esteem available to their broken, economically abused existence.

Lie works for Palin

But surely they know Barack Obama is not planning to finish off the ordinary hillbilly when he adjusts tax rates. He's going to raise taxes on the top 2% of Americans and that doesn't include anyone at the convention beyond the Bushes and McCains and random party management. So why cheer Palin when she claims otherwise?

Is it racism? I'm told that it is, although I find racism so appalling that I have difficulty identifying it. It is more likely the dearly held Republican notion that any American can become violently rich, as rich as those hedge funders in Greenwich, Conn., who buy \$40-million mansions unseen and have their topiary shaped in the form of musical notes.

When Palin and Rudy Giuliani sneered at Obama's years of "community organizing" — they said it like "rectal fissure" — the audience ewww-ed with them. Republicans dream of a personal future that involves only household staff, not equals who need to be persuaded to vote.

So I'm trying to imagine the pain of realizing, as they all must at some point, that it is not going to happen for them. It's the green light at the end of the dock. It's the ship that never comes in, gals, as Palin would put it. But she won't because the lie works for her. It helps her scramble, without compassion, above all those other tense no-hoper ladies in the audience.

American politics isn't short of smart women. Susan Eisenhower, Ike's granddaughter, who just endorsed Obama, made an extraordinary speech at the Democratic convention (and a terrific casual appearance on *The Colbert Report* as Palin was speaking). The Republican party has already consumed nearly all of its moderate

"seed corn," she said aptly. Time to start again.

Eisenhower, a scholar and journalist, has a point. Or am I only saying that because she's part of the thoughtful demographic that I'm trying to reach here? Think, **Heather**, think like a Republican! The Skeptics, shall I call them, are my base, and I'll pander to them as ardently as the Republican patriarchs tease their white female marginals.

This Week

Mad Men is scaring me (AMC on Sunday nights). What has Matthew Weiner, a writer from *The Sopranos*, created, a period soap opera about reality and façade or a horror series on a localized war between men and women? Was Episode 6 of Season 2 a costume drama about the Madonna/whore complex or the operatic rendition of one simple thing, human cruelty?

Or maybe I'm seeing too much into it and it's just a sexed-up version of the Republican convention.

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