

# Intertextual Networks, Recursive Adaptation, and Progressive Politics in John T. McCutcheon's "Women's Work," 1909-1912

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## Intertextuality in Networked Archives

This paper explores the interpersonal and intertextual relationships around John T. McCutcheon's public shift in support of suffrage between 1909 and 1912, tracing his representations of woman suffragists at a time when the *Chicago Tribune* was becoming a nationally dominant media organization, with weekly circulation numbers approaching 250,000. Specifically, I argue that his public pro-suffrage becoming is best understood as a politically pragmatic facet of Theodore Roosevelt's 1912 Progressive Campaign. Despite a dearth of primary materials (other than cartoons) in which McCutcheon mentions suffrage, this transformation is traceable in the conceptual, discursive, and imagistic adaptations of the suffragette that occur among the works of McCutcheon, Jane Addams, and Roosevelt during this three-year period, indicating a moment of unique but precarious consubstantiality. This space of overlapping "concepts, images, ideas, and attitudes" highlights the delicate intertextual network these subjects constructed around the suffrage question moving into 1912 (Burke 21). That network, then, informs the networked archive at work in this special issue, one that complicates the differences between physical and digital archives and implicates us in the historiographical negotiation of women's histories and futures. Here, then, our own ability to make historical claims becomes yet another artifact under investigation.<sup>1</sup>

Our goals range beyond offering new readings of McCutcheon's cartoons, personal relationships, or political contexts (though we nod in all these directions). We explore the articulation of new methodologies for doing a kind of collaborative rhetorical history in networked archives, where linear space gives way to anti-linear interconnections, personal and public, spaces where "[e]lectronic linking shifts the boundaries between one text and another" (Landow 33) and, in the case of this special issue, one project and another. We investigate not just an answer to the question of what suffrage meant to McCutcheon but of what implications its digital extension might entail for future scholars as the networked archive and its intertexts continue to expand through the emergence of ever-new linkages, adaptations, and uptakes.

Intertextuality functions across and among discourse, artifacts, and time to challenge traditional notions of causality, linearity, and authorial presence,

subtilizing the *doing* of history. In this view, the *meanings* of McCutcheon's political cartoons emerge not only from their initial media ecologies but also from their participation in a complex, intertextual system of visual, cultural, and personal relationships, all dripping with sociopolitical implications. Those interpretations produced by archival and networked accounts can be re-produced through metadata, synchronized, located, and, at best, rendered suggestive. This essay attempts to (re)present McCutcheon as a rhetorico-political subject (a subject whose archival presence incites both suasy and civic uncertainties). In so doing, I show that McCutcheon is simultaneously *rendering* and *being rendered by* rhetorico-historical discourse, and I present archival study (both physical and networked) as a venue to explore Frank D'Angelo's concept of intertextual adaptation. Adaptation denotes not just a shared space of consubstantiality but a type of connection between a source and an original text, enthymematically signaling to audiences that a reworking has taken place (D'Angelo 34). It can employ the past in a piecemeal style (nostalgic recycling) (34), or it can offer a new, parodic vision where this fragmentary nostalgic recycling becomes scenic, metafictional, and subject to a larger argument or historical suggestion (11). Therefore, a working definition of the *intertext*—that fluid yet consubstantial space—should suit research in the network by involving “a rejection of linearity in form and explanation, often in unexpected applications” (Landow 25).

In this intertextual network, something analogous to but topically different from Sarah L. Skripsky's macroplots is at work. D'Angelo's operative terms reflect McCutcheon's, Addams's, and Roosevelt's recursive recycling of each other's versions of suffragettes with their intertextual network tightening as the election draws nearer. And while one goal of this study “is to reconstitute as best we can the rhetorical situation at hand” (Solberg 59), another is to highlight the ways in which all rhetorical technologies, intertextuality included, “have politics” (55). In his public shift toward embracing a positive rendering of suffragettes and their politics, McCutcheon adapts his own work as well. He “acknowledge[s] his earlier texts” (D'Angelo 36) by “recasting” in 1912 his previous caricatures of suffragettes “into a new [rhetorical] form” (D'Angelo 34), opting for images underscored by agency rather than docility. As members of this subtle and collective enterprise, the contributors of this special issue draw laterally from McCutcheon and his influences, centrally from one another, and recursively from the network that is becoming and will continue to grow beyond the claims made here.

## Body Politics

By the end of the twentieth century's first decade, McCutcheon had become implicated in promoting the *Tribune's* Republican commitments. From his 1903 arrival at the paper, one such obligation meant embracing

traditional notions of womanhood and distancing the paper from the destabilizing influences of the suffrage movement, which the Republican brass and editor-in-chief Colonel Robert McCormick considered to be political baggage. Hence, when cartooning women characters, McCutcheon claimed merely to consider his readers' often gendered "tastes" and "prejudices," making sure not to "arouse resentment" or "offend advertisers" (*Memory* 200). When "a woman's activities are to be caricatured critically" McCutcheon explains, "a cartoonist shall blunt his barb by somehow flattering her" (200), letting her off the hook but hanging her up in different ways. Two cartoons appear by McCutcheon in 1909 that make use of one stock female character from the growing batch he had been collecting since the 1890s: the dour suffragette. The first, an image from February of 1909, pictures British Prime Minister H. H. Asquith reading *An Englishman's Home* while innumerable and identical middle-aged angry-eyed women stampede toward his windows waving placards scrawled with the words "We Want Votes" and "Suffragette Invasion" ([Gallery Image 1](#)). Asquith, unphased by the spectacle, surmises that "There's No Danger of An Invasion." In this image, McCutcheon's stock suffragette bears stern focus but remains homogeneous, as if participating in the cartoonist's silencing gesture. Her silence is accentuated by her identification as part of a corporeally identical mob of protesters, rather than any one woman with a singular message on the issue.<sup>2</sup>

Though parades and marches were fundamental to the movement, McCutcheon's conflation of the spectacle with its message had a muting effect (Borda 26), as did the sour uniformity of his Jane-Addams lookalikes. Not coincidentally, McCutcheon had been introduced to Addams around this time during the regular Friday afternoon meetings of the Little Room club, which met in Chicago's Fine Arts Building where he kept his studio. Despite much levity and shenanigans in the Little Room, Addams's presence changed the social club's tone and helped to rally other noteworthy women like Elia Peattie, Edith Wyatt, Harriet Monroe, and Clara Laughlin to public support of suffrage. This support became more fervent after 1907, when club co-founder Hamlin Garland absconded with all the men who would follow and started another famous Chicago club, the Cliff Dwellers, ironically named after Little Room co-founder Henry Blake Fuller's 1893 critique of Chicago's business elite. McCutcheon, in the minority, remained a member of both. After the split, the club radicalized to a degree around the work of its feminist cabal, who, among others, served as intertextual resources for and influences upon McCutcheon's developing ideas about the role of public women. By 1909, then, the intertextual dynamic between McCutcheon and Addams had been established, though the reformer's influence on the cartoonist had not yet made it into print.

The second use of this stock character occurred in a more telling instance of McCutcheon's and the *Tribune's* orientation toward suffragettes in 1909, involving two English activists—Emmeline Pankhurst and Marion Wallace Dunlop—who were symbolic of the militant arm of Britain's Women's Social and Political Union. In July of that year, McCutcheon offered a dainty mash-up of Pankhurst and Dunlop as the "Modern Martyr" in a comic entitled "The Modern Martyr Goes to Jail" ([Gallery Image 2](#)). Yet as June Purvis elaborates, the real-life strategies of the WSPU under Pankhurst differed sharply from McCutcheon's representations of WSPU strikers as aging, middle-class dilettantes. Despite the deft attempt to ironically neutralize these women, they were deadly serious (Purvis 209). As Floyd Dell argued in his 1913 comparison of Addams's and Pankhurst's approaches to pro-suffrage agitation, "Let us understand [that in] this suffrage movement ... we have in militancy rather than conciliation, in action rather than wisdom, the keynote of woman in politics" (40). This point was muted by McCutcheon's political obscurantism.

Along with the placard-waving that was lampooned in McCutcheon's first suffrage cartoon of 1909, the WSPU reportedly bombed and torched buildings, including churches. In addition, the WSPU women, upon incarceration, often resorted to hunger strikes, jeopardizing the very internality of "the woman" herself; hence, she jeopardized the bodily and political economies that rested upon her. As Purvis explains, the women suffered distress, humiliation, and forced "instrumental invasion of the body" akin to rape (134). The primness of McCutcheon's "Modern Martyr" reminds us that its intertextual uptake incorporates, at least, "ridicule, incongruity, [and] exaggeration" (D'Angelo 38). In her stock form, the "Modern Martyr" sports pristine feminine apparel and a shiny crown atop her head. Her delicate police escort is trailed by men carrying trunks, presumably filled with domestic finery, two children with a nursemaid, and another female servant, a stark disjunction from the photo published in British newspapers that year of Pankhurst, contorted in rage, being dragged, screaming, to prison. Behind the modern martyr, a small sign reads "To Gaol." From her neatly upswept hair to her jaunty gait, every detail of this image undermines the radical and militant character of its subjects' actions and differs sharply from the gravity with which they were depicted abroad.

In McCutcheon's case, these parodic renderings are derived at least partially from the *Tribune's* sense of political pragmatism within a generally anti-suffrage milieu. Specifically, though, McCutcheon's 1909 drawings function as almost-exhausted adaptations of characters popularized around the turn of the century. In the 1890s, for instance, McCutcheon's close friend and writing partner, George Ade, lampooned the early feminists in his much-lauded stories "The Fable of the Good Fairy with the Lorgnette" and "Why She Got it Good." Ade poked fun at suffragettes' "twinned earnestness and condescension"

(Szuberla 59), envisioning a particular do-gooder as articulating in “breathless prose” that she “decided that she would allow the glory of her Presence to burst upon the Poor and the Uncultured. It would be,” his protagonist imagines, “a Big Help for the Poor and Uncultured to see what a Real Razamataz Lady was like” (59).

## McCutcheon and the Bull Moose

By the spring of 1911, the *Tribune's* suffrage politics—and hence McCutcheon's cartoons—became more complex. The upcoming election posed a problem: Roosevelt was dividing the party, and his division was felt with particular force in Chicago, the location of the upcoming Progressive Party Convention. Sensing a shift away from Taft, McCormick—a staunch Republican—wrote his Aunt Nellie that “[i]n Chicago, at least, the public is unanimous for Roosevelt” (Smith 141). Within days, evidence surfaced of a tectonic shift in the paper's politics when McCormick traveled to New York, “stood upon TR's Sagamore Hill porch and declared flatly that Taft could not carry Illinois” (Smith 141). Upon hearing of McCormick's decision, McCutcheon augmented his cartoons in ways sympathetic to the *Tribune's* new politics, even if it was moving the paper into strange, non-Republican territory. McCormick's transition out of the Republican Party meant that the *Tribune* would be moving away from the business of “anointing Republican presidents” (Smith 141) and would be aligning itself with Roosevelt's Progressive Party.

This is significant because physical archives suggest that McCutcheon had begun an epistolary friendship with Roosevelt in the fall of 1904 by sending him the original drawing of a cartoon entitled “Mysterious Stranger,” detailing Missouri's decision to vote Republican for the first time since Reconstruction—a move that won Roosevelt an easy victory over Alton Brown. By 1912, McCutcheon had garnered several invitations to the White House, and when Roosevelt made the last-minute move to support women's suffrage, McCutcheon's cartoons took on different characteristics, moving from comic caricature to symbolically embellished realism. In short, feminism moved from something for readers to mock to something by which they could become intertextually transformed. For instance, a 1913 cartoon of once-lampooned Pankhurst transforms the innocent martyr into a figure too dangerous to be allowed entry into the United States—under the auspices that she will teach American women to use Liberty's torch. Unlike her other incarnation, the social force of this intertextual Pankhurst is underscored rather than undermined, and the tone of McCutcheon's drawing moves from mockery to support ([Gallery Image 6](#)).

In addition to influencing his suffrage drawings, Roosevelt played an important role in McCutcheon's career more generally. In the decade preceding

the 1912 election, he publicly championed the cartoonist and functioned as a lead character in his 1910 book *In Africa: Hunting Adventures in Big Game Country*. In this book, McCutcheon lays the groundwork for Roosevelt's comeback tale, explaining how he and the President fortuitously met up on an elephant expedition for the Museum of Natural History. Roosevelt had escaped, as relayed by McCutcheon, so that he could not be accused of splitting the party away from Taft. McCutcheon, "[i]n the colonel's tent one day, ... spoke of the possibility of him running again" (*Memory* 246), to which Roosevelt replied in the negative. "[T]he kaleidoscope never repeats," Roosevelt retorted, "A lot of people seem to worry about what to do with ex-Presidents. Well, they needn't worry about this one. I can keep myself busy" (246). The impression McCutcheon conveyed to the public in 1910 was that Roosevelt seemed ready to enjoy a post-political life of ease and adventure.

## The Campaign Orator and the Progressive Mouse

Barely a year after their sub-Saharan rendezvous, Roosevelt abruptly changed course and recruited McCutcheon, *The Tribune*, and McCutcheon's fellow Little-Roomer, Jane Addams, to support him in his unorthodox presidential bid, deftly tightening the network among them. It was, McCutcheon gushed, "one of my proudest experiences to have gone through that Bull Moose campaign as a rapt participant. The *Tribune* threw its whole weight behind T.R. My cartoons were 100 per cent for him" (247). Further, he explained, "I even made my first and last political speech in his behalf" (247). Roosevelt's reversal seemingly necessitated one on McCutcheon's part as well: four years earlier, in a lengthy illustrated piece for *Appleton's Magazine* called "The Campaign Orator," McCutcheon lampooned partisan speechmaking as an unscrupulously opportunistic activity. The political orator was one who creates a "grand and noisy Carnival of Words" after which one is left with nothing "but a ringing in the ears" (296). Considering his previous writing on the subject, evidence shows that McCutcheon approached his Roosevelt speech with a sense of healthy trepidation.

McCutcheon's speech on Roosevelt's behalf is an interesting artifact, and though it is mentioned in his autobiography, it has never been replicated or published. The importance of the speech rests in the metonymic relationship into which he places himself and Roosevelt: both the advocate and the advocated suffer from a public perception that their motives may be impure or politically expedient, a noteworthy moment of intertextual overlap. McCutcheon touts this speech as his one and only moment of political public address, and the physical archives bear that out. None of his subsequent speaking engagements ever again took place on the stump.

McCutcheon's political reticence was due a belief that definitive position-taking or claims-making threatened his aesthetic and editorial dexterity,

undermining his ability to critique an issue from multiple sides. As he laments in his speech, his readers and even close friends assumed his pro-Progressive cartoons were products of McCormick's editorial mandate. "I went to considerable pain," he explains, "to convince them that I sincerely and emphatically was for Roosevelt and therefore in complete harmony with the policy of the paper. Some of these worthy friends looked incredulous" (par. 2). McCutcheon relates, "In vain I tried to convince them I was for Teddy Roosevelt till the cows come home" (par. 3). Perhaps the friends remained unconvinced because they understood McCutcheon's need to operate on all sides of a political issue in order to remain rhetorically supple. He "[f]inally ... reasoned that there was one way of convincing my stand-pat friends that I really and honestly believed in Roosevelt and the principles for which he stood" (par. 4). McCutcheon continues, "I would make a contribution to the Progressive Campaign Fund. It may seem a desperate step to take," he explains, "but I felt sure that it would convince the most skeptical. No man contributed to a campaign fund because the editor orders him to" (par. 4).

Not surprisingly, only two women among a bevy of political men are mentioned in McCutcheon's speech, and the one given highest credence is his club-mate and ally Jane Addams. Her *ethos* serves, again metonymically, to undergird the questionable positions of both the speaker and Roosevelt himself on the suffrage question. As McCutcheon clarifies, leveraging Addams as evidence, "[t]he fact that women like Jane Addams ... support the new party is a high testimonial of its worth" (par. 16). Just as the dubious cartoonist spends the first several paragraphs of his speech freeing his own *ethos* from the residue of secondary motives, he ends the last paragraph of his speech hedging Addams's support to fill the obvious gap left by both himself and the Rough Rider. These metonymic substitutions offer compelling indirect evidence of the ever-tightening intertext operating among McCutcheon, Roosevelt, and Addams.

From his first days at the *Tribune* in 1903 to his reversal on the issue of suffrage in 1912, McCutcheon continuously appropriated and adapted images of suffragettes that were based on Jane Addams and her settlement work in Chicago. Early on, suffragettes and settlement workers were represented in their solemn pomposity and mass homogeneity, often relayed in reference to what Addams called civic housekeeping. This version of the suffragette "cleaning house" was mockingly represented by McCutcheon as late as 1905 (for example, see Figure 1)—the same year Roosevelt began openly lampooning Addams's published work. Addams claimed membership in the first generation of women to attend university but remained dedicated to the belief that women's social-work extended from their essential femininity. She was an ambivalent figure—not by choice but by the political constitution of her age.

When Theodore Roosevelt offered her a spot on the national stage in 1912, inviting her into his intertextual space, the invitation came at a cost.

Roosevelt's motives remained doubtful to Addams and her supporters. After all, this was the man who had, only a few short years before, "dubbed her 'poor bleeding Jane' and 'a progressive mouse'" (Curti 240). He had recently "derided her 'book on municipal problems, which ascribed our ethical and social shortcomings in municipal matters in part to the sin of militarism'" (Carroll and Fink ix). Though united on the party's central plank of trust regulation, the two differed as much as possible on two important issues, roles central to Addams's identity and emergent public persona: the role of the military in international politics and the role of

*Figure 1.*

women in domestic politics. It is on the latter that Roosevelt shifted, adapting Addams's version of suffrage, while he and McCutcheon remained laudatory of American militarism.

The Progressive convention was, after all, in Chicago, and Addams was its best-loved citizen. Despite Addams' support, her "socialist friends saw Roosevelt as a double-dealer [, and h]er pacifist friends wondered how she could overlook Roosevelt's bellicosity" (Joslin 135), she tentatively agreed to discuss the issue. This, much to the chagrin of the Prohibition Party, who "noted dryly that they had always included a platform plank in favor of suffrage," and who were surprised "Addams had never supported their candidates" (Joslin 135). By October of 1911, Roosevelt moved to woo Addams but felt wary about the suffrage question, explaining that he had, "never regarded the cause of woman suffrage as being of really capital moment" (Joslin 133).

If, Addams surmised, she was going to put herself in a difficult position with leagues of her supporters and affiliates throughout the country, she would trump their skepticism by convincing Roosevelt that the politics of suffrage were good for the Progressive party. By July, Roosevelt was back in touch with Addams through their mutual friend, Judge Ben Lindsay. She and Roosevelt were at discord about how the Progressive Party, newly organized and scheduled for a convention at the Coliseum in August, should respond to the issue of female suffrage. She wanted an equal suffrage plank in the party



platform. Lindsey relayed the message to her that Roosevelt was having a “change of heart,” coming to agree with her that the convention might be energized by championing the cause of women. Certainly, he knew that the women in the United States had strong networks of clubs, associations, and committees that might coalesce around his campaign, giving his candidacy the vitality it would need to win male votes (Joslin 133). Noting explicitly his intertextual relationship with Addams, Roosevelt wrote in his 1913 autobiography that it was “women like Jane Addams and Frances Kellor, who ... changed me into a zealous instead of a lukewarm adherent to the cause” (167). Self-hagiography aside, between October 1911 and August 1912, Roosevelt reluctantly let himself be converted by Addams, only agreeing to a suffrage plank the month before the convention. McCutcheon’s cartoons immediately followed suit, depicting his earlier stock suffragettes as agents of social change.

Addams’s compromises colored her interactions with Roosevelt. When, at the convention, he refused to seat the African American delegates from the South, Addams protested but allowed herself to be overruled, a move that for a while soiled her reputation as a founding member of the NAACP. When faced with “two inequalities,” “Addams chose the one closer to her experience” and stood after all “before the convention to second the nomination of Roosevelt” (Joslin 134). Addams’s nominating speech, the first ever by a woman, electrified the audience, stimulating Roosevelt to foreground her participation for the rest of the campaign, knowing “no other female writer in the country had more admiring readers” (136). Roosevelt needed Addams’s *ethos* and intertextual overlap desperately, as “not all proponents of suffrage were convinced at [his] sudden conversion to their cause” (Gould 138). The opposite could be said for Addams: it was “the Bull Moose Convention that [allowed her] ... to redesign herself as a professional woman” and to catapult herself into the national imaginary; “her writing at Bar Harbor during the fall of 1912 did much to establish her identity as a public figure” (Joslin 136).

In a cartoon from early October 5, 1912, McCutcheon consolidates his adaptive, pro-suffrage transition: a sheepish man cowers in a chair while his wife, standing proudly with an assertive comportment, explains, “I have my opinion of any man who hasn’t gumption enough to register and vote, if you don’t register, you mustn’t talk politics around this house,” to which her little white dog (a McCutcheon staple) remarks “Humph! He’s zero in masculinity.” McCutcheon tops off the image with a large title-line: “Have You a Backbone? If so, Register Today.” The contemporary women’s activist, first represented as the stock suffragette in McCutcheon’s “Modern Martyr,” gets adapted and reversed. Her public homogeneity gives way to personal and ethical power. She becomes a real threat to the now emasculated men too fearful or lethargic to turn out to vote (Figure 2). In an October 5, 1912 letter to McCutcheon,

Addams offers her appreciation for his adaptation of the newly empowered suffragette. She writes, "Dear Mr. McCutcheon, The women of the Progressive Party want to thank you for this morning's cartoon in the Tribune. We hope that every man and woman will register today." Under Addams's signature, she had collected the signatures of 11 other female Progressives to underscore her thanks.

McCutcheon's intertextual transformation in relation to suffrage represents a very small period over his long and distinguished career, but it also bears noting that it works against his own self-memorialization as a cartoonist who draws, mainly, "a type of cartoon which might be considered a sort of pictorial breakfast food" (199).

Figure 2.

McCutcheon's suffrage cartoons after the Progressive campaign explicitly violate his firmly stated distaste for political didacticism. In *Drawn from Memory*, he highlights his view that "people want to be amused rather than reformed" (199). He continues, "the prophetic cartoon," as a rule, "falls down with a prodigious flop" (202). After 1912, particularly regarding the women's movement, McCutcheon breaks his own rule, choosing instead to stick with his recursive adaptation of his stock suffragettes as empowered, world-historical individuals.

Though the 1912 convention was a huge success in and around Chicago, the Progressives were "buried under heavy downstate majorities for Woodrow Wilson" (Smith 142). As one editor's suggestion after the election that Roosevelt be offered the editor-in-chief position was summarily rejected by McCormick, the *Tribune* turned back to Republican politics as usual, but, by this time, the women's movement had entered the mainstream.

## Future Networks

On June 22, 1922, fewer than two years after the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, McCutcheon published the image that has served as the impetus for this article, an endpoint of sorts that enamored me with the question of how the cartoonist ended up so boldly aligning himself with the political futures of women. It features, again, his embellished realism, and in it we find a woman, standing tall, holding a flag. This one reads "Women in Politics" (Figure

3). Under her feet unfolds a vertiginous staircase in which each subsequent step looms notably higher than the last. She stands on a middle step, looking upward, reading "U.S. Senate," while below her we see the terrain she has already covered: "U.S. Representative," "Mayor," "State Legislature," and "School Trustee." Her head, tilted skyward, remains fixed upon the highest steps: "Governor," "Supreme Court," and "Presidency." Like the 1922 audience of this prescient illustration, we still anticipate the answer to the question McCutcheon raises: "How High Will She Go?" In addressing this question, the networked archive we have created complicates traditional boundaries between the physical and the digital, between the present and the past, and between [primary data and metadata](#) (Graban 75, this issue), implicating us in both the uncovering of rhetorical histories and their writing. We, in the "hypertextual, decentered" world of digital media, like Robinson Crusoe, wander "across the desert

Figure 3.

finding random objects"—of which our own tellings are a part—and construct worlds out of them (Allen 212). This is unfamiliar but exciting terrain that, as Graban articulates, requires us not to ignore but to negotiate "vexing material gaps in institutional archives" and to work toward the creation of methodologies capable of generating "rhetorical activity" ("From" 172), however provisional—even when traditional rhetorical artifacts and their neatly linear portrayals elude us.

## Notes

- 1 I wish to thank Bailey Romaine and the staff at the Newberry Library, as well as Jan Perone of the Lincoln Presidential library for their archival assistance.
- 2 The image alludes to an incident that occurred the year before, when Asquith became the first victim of the Women's Social and Political Union's window-breaking campaign.

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