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| Watts, Myrtle Eugenia ‘Jim’ (1909-1968) |
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| Myrtle Eugenia Watts, known variously as Jim, Jean, or Gina, was a Canadian foreign correspondent for the Spanish Civil War, theatre artist in the Theatre of Action, and patron of Canadian leftist literary and theatre culture in the 1930s. In her short career, Watts had a significant impact on Canadian leftist modernist culture. |
| Myrtle Eugenia Watts, known variously as Jim, Jean, or Gina, was a Canadian foreign correspondent for the Spanish Civil War, theatre artist in the Theatre of Action, and patron of Canadian leftist literary and theatre culture in the 1930s. In her short career, Watts had a significant impact on Canadian leftist modernist culture.  File: Watts, Myrtle Eugenia ‘Jim’ 1909-1968.jpg  Watts, Myrtle Eugenia ‘Jim’ 1909-1968 1  Source: Portrait of Jim Watts by fellow leftist artist, Frederick B. Taylor. Entitled *Eugenia ‘Jim’ Watts*. Oil on canvas, 1940. Frederick B. Taylor fonds. Library and Archives Canada. Copyrighted under the estate of Frederick B. Taylor until 2037. Author included: This portrait has been included in multiple portraiture exhibitions of Canadian historical figures. To my knowledge, it has never been reproduced in a print publication. Image can be found at <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/portrait-portal/pages/arprofile.aspx?archivalrecordkey=2859421&ensemblecode=1>  Jean Watts was born in Streetsville, Ontario to a wealthy family. By 1920, Watts’s family had moved to Toronto’s Annex neighbourhood, where Watts’s social and artistic circle would eventually include such prominent Canadian cultural figures as writers Dorothy Livesay and Stanley B. Ryerson, and theatre artists Toby Gordon Ryan and Oscar Ryan. Watts and Livesay would spend their adolescences as self-identified bluestockings, attending lectures by prominent feminist Emma Goldman, and reading the literary works of European and British modernists. Beginning in her early adulthood, Watts contributed significant resources to the Worker’s Theatre (later the Theatre of Action) and to the establishment of the leftist literary journal *New Frontier* (1936-38)*,* for which her husband Lon Lawson was editor. In early 1937, after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Watts took up a position with the Canadian Communist Party newspaper the *Daily Clarion* (1936-39) as a foreign correspondent stationed at the Blood Transfusion Unit outside Madrid. Frustrated by her limited mobility as a correspondent, Watts found employment at the Spanish censorship bureau, and then enrolled in the International Brigades as an ambulance driver. After a year in Spain, Watts toured Canada to raise funds for the Spanish cause and then travelled to France in 1939 to aid Spanish refugees. She spent her later years as an ambulance driver in the Canadian Women’s Army Corps and as a personnel officer at the Kingston Army base in Ontario, Canada.  Watts’s largest contribution to Canadian textual production is her body of journalistic work, which balances reportage on international politics with narrative-driven, human-interest stories. Watts’s style aligns her writing with American female journalists such as Martha Gellhorn and Helen Kirkpatrick, who became renowned for their war reporting. As part of the Workers’ Theatre, Watts co-directed the sole production of the infamous leftist play *Eight Men Speak* (1933), introduced Canadian audiences to politically motivated American plays such as Clifford Odets’s *Waiting for Lefty* (1934), and, along with Toby Gordon Ryan, developed highly stylized, politicized dramatic performances that the troupe toured through rural Ontario. Watts’s role in Canadian culture has also been the frequent subject matter of memoirs, in which Watts emerges as a muse, socialite, and public intellectual whose suicide haunts those who knew her. Watts’s upper-middle class background and commitment to leftist, working-class causes has proven divisive, but sympathetic perspectives recognize her bombastic, passionate, and generous personality as a central force in Canadian culture in the 1930s. Works Watts’s journalistic oeuvre consists of over fifty articles contributed to the *Daily Clarion* and *New Frontier*. Watts also produced radio broadcasts with fellow journalist Ted Allan that reached Canada from Spain; the content of these broadcasts is lost. Selected Journalism Watts, Jean. ‘Canadian Finns Take Lead in International Brigades.’ The Daily Clarion 27 Sept. 1937. 5. Microform. The Daily Clarion 3 (1937).  ---. ‘Chamberlain’s Role In Knifing Spain.’ Rev. of Britain in Spain, by Unknown Diplomat. The Daily Clarion 21 Apr. 1939: 7.  ---. ‘Children of Spain Back at Desks.’ The Daily Clarion 19 Oct. 1937. 4. Microform. The Daily Clarion 3 (1937).  ---. ‘Clarion Correspondent Sees Spain Rebuilding in Midst of Warfare.’ The Daily Clarion 5 Mar. 1937. 2. Microform. The Daily Clarion 2 (1937).  ---. ‘Gentleman of the Press.’ New Frontier 2.3 (July-Aug. 1937): 12. Modernist Commons. 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| Further reading:  (Butler)  (Hannant)  (Filewod)  (Rifkind) |