



Playing Smart: New York Women Writers and Modern Magazine Culture (The American Literatures Initiative)

Catherine Keyser

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Smart women, sophisticated ladies, savvy writers . . . Edna St. Vincent Millay, Dorothy Parker, Anita Loos, Lois Long, Jessie Fauset, Dawn Powell, Mary McCarthy, and others imagined New York as a place where they could claim professional status, define urban independence, and shrug off confining feminine roles. It might be said that during the 1920s and 1930s these literary artists painted the town red on the pages of magazines like *Vanity Fair* and the *New Yorker*. *Playing Smart*, Catherine Keyser's homage to their literary genius, is a captivating celebration of their causes and careers.

Through humor writing, this "smart set" expressed both sides of the story-promoting their urbanity and wit while using irony and caricature to challenge feminine stereotypes. Their fiction raised questions about what it meant to be a woman in the public eye, how gender roles would change because men and women were working together, and how the growth of the magazine industry would affect women's relationships to their bodies and minds. Keyser provides a refreshing and informative chronicle, saluting the value of being "smart" as incisive and innovative humor showed off the wit and talent of women writers and satirized the fantasy world created by magazines.

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