

**ChLA 2019 Conference Abstract**

**Are You There, America? It's Me, Maureen: Maureen Daly, the Catholic-American Community, and Commercializing the American Adolescent WASP**

Many of the scholars discussing Maureen Daly's landmark 1941 novel *Seventeenth Summer* have examined its representations of teenage romance; however, in the years since its publication and subsequent canonization as the titular "first young adult novel," few have addressed the novel's representation of and subsequent impact on the Catholic-American community. Although the novel contains only one scene referencing Catholic worship, its inclusion in such a celebrated novel galvanized the Catholic-American community, who were marginalized in the overwhelmingly Protestant United States. I argue that Daly's Catholic audience not only read *Seventeenth Summer's* popularity as indicative of Americans' growing tolerance of Catholic religious practice, but also that Daly herself granted Catholics a voice on the national stage. I turn to Daly's archives to examine how Catholics from all walks of life, from nuns to missionaries to schoolboys in the throes of their first romance, used Daly's identity as a practicing Catholic to read their lives and concerns into a largely areligious novel. Moreover, many called upon Daly to continue this work, beseeching her for more novels featuring Catholic-American youth and about Catholic-American life. And yet, as I will show, Daly stepped away from activist work on behalf of her religious community to write teen advice columns and run *The Ladies' Home Journal* girls' clubs. I argue that her subsequent work instead focused on universalizing the adolescent experience through ethnographic-style observations of "teenage" culture, which helped drive the commercialization of an adolescent WASP voice.