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## H. M. Bouwman (Heather)

Professor of English, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota  
Author of fantasy novels for kids

### **Describe your career and where you work.**

I'm an English professor at the University of St. Thomas, where I've worked since 2001. Originally hired as an early American specialist, I've since transitioned to writing children's novels and teaching creative writing courses. I love teaching—though this year with the pandemic has been especially challenging—and I love writing. St. Thomas has been particularly supportive of my mid-career switch in focus from early American to creative writing, and I've found wonderful colleagues in the English department and elsewhere on campus. While at St. Thomas, I've published three fantasy novels for kids ages ten and older, and three early chapter books for kids age five to eight. (Apparently, I ignore nine-year-olds!)

### **Share something about yourself not related to librarianship.**

I'm a martial artist—a fifth-degree black belt in the traditional Korean martial art of Kuk Sool Won, which I've studied for more than twenty-five years, and which my two almost-adult kids have also studied for most of their lives. I started it on a whim in grad school (a friend said, "You should come to class with me") and all these years later, it's a huge part of my life.

### **How does your faith inspire or fit in with your work?**

The study of literature should naturally lead readers to consider the moral, philosophical, and religious underpinnings of the text. In my professorial life and in my creative writing, I don't ever try to be a theologian or catechism teacher; that's not my job. I don't think the work of a novelist—or of a college professor—is to provide answers to the big questions of life, but rather, it is to encourage readers—and students—to carefully ponder the big questions in all their messiness.

That said, my three early readers—the Eleanor and Owen series—were published by a Lutheran-owned press and do deal explicitly with issues of faith, but (I hope) without being didactic. These books definitely grew out of my own beliefs as a progressive Christian.

### **When and why did you get involved in the CLA?**

I was delighted to be asked to interview the Regina Medal recipients the last two years for the CLA online conference; it was a joy to interview Kate DiCamillo in 2019 and Christopher Paul Curtis in 2020. (It was also a little scary, because I love their writing SO MUCH!)

### **How has being involved with the CLA been important to your professional development?**

I have become much more aware of the work of the organization—which was not very much on my radar before becoming involved with the conference! And on a relatively minor note, I'm impressed with how well the CLA runs an online conference, excelling at it well before the pandemic forced other in-person conferences to go online. ■

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