Digital media genres, the personal weblog in specific, intensify the challenge that pre-digital genres of self-representation as well as mass media genres already posed to established literary writers concerning the maintenance of their authoritative relation towards the audience. Firstly, it is argued that the shaping of expressions of identity becomes more visible. Here, the challenge is situated at the level of (self-) representation. Secondly, digital media extend the possibility of overcoming the distance between the literary writer and one’s readers through the interactivity that characterizes this online encounter. In this dissertation I intend to understand how (well-) established literary writers in Flanders and the Netherlands make use of these self-representational and interactional affordances of the personal weblog, and what this means for the construction of (literary) authority in a digital culture.

To grasp how the personal weblog as a genre instigates communication as both a symbolic and social practice (cf. Peters, 1999), thus has both (self-) representational and interactional affordances, linguistic ethnography offers the necessary tools for the analysis of particular literary writers’ personal weblogs on the level of the blog posts, the blog comments of both the readers and the writer, the blog photos, and the blog context. Concretely, four cases form the kernel of this study, namely the personal weblog that the Flemish writer Bart Moeyaert maintained on the website of a Flemish literary institution as well as the personal weblogs of the Dutch literary writers Ted van Lieshout, Claire Polders and Arnon Grunberg.

This study shows that established literary authority is in a digital culture not undermined, but constructed in a complex way on the basis of three types of authority: traditional, charismatic and relational authority. The modern types of traditional and charismatic authority relate to the use of narratives through which the blogging writer creates a myth and a veil surrounding literary identity and centralizes oneself by disclosing while equally withholding particular insights about oneself. Furthermore, by keeping the dissemination of one’s voice, as the principal voice, intact, the writer builds an asymmetrical and, thus, authoritative relationship with the blog reader. Moreover, a new type of relational authority emerges. This follows from the observation that the blogging writer represents oneself as a unique person who acts as the pivot in a network of people both inside and outside of the blog, and from the fact that the blog readers to a considerable extent support and mimic the writer’s self-representation through their use of distinct narratives of literary identity. And even in quasi-symmetrical and symmetrical relations of conversations between the blogging writer and a particular reader or all readers is the authority of literary identity underlined, because of the exceptionality of these encounters with the writer as well as of the belonging to a core group of the writer’s blog respondents. Also, relational authority resides in the connection between the writer’s (self-) representation in the blog text and in the blog context. Authority and distance, hence, (re-) appear and are (re-) established in a complex way by both the writer and one’s readers in a digital culture where distance at first glance seems to dissolve.