Dans le platonisme, mais tout aussi bien dans l’épicurisme et le stoïcisme, la libération de l’angoisse s’obtient donc par un mouvement dans lequel on passe de la subjectivité individuelle et passionnelle à l’objectivité de la perspective universelle. Il s’agit, non pas d’une construction d’un moi, comme œuvre d’art, mais au contraire d’un dépassement du moi, ou tout au moins d’un exercice par lequel le moi se situe dans la totalité et s’éprouve comme partie de cette totalité.\(^1\)

Once again, one of Pierre Hadot’s incisive remarks about the goals toward which sages of antiquity directed themselves has a surprising resonance with the process made visible in the twelfth-century *saturae*. In four of them, the authorial persona is admonished, to varying effect, to distance himself from attachment to ephemeral things and to pursue the true good of virtue intertwined with learning. Situating oneself properly within the larger universe is an important aspect of this pursuit, and these texts attempt to do just that, with varying degrees of success. If, as we saw in the preceding chapter, the interactions among the characters in twelfth-century prosimetra have the effect of undermining the structure of virtue, wisdom, and authority that Boethius had made canonical, where, then, does this leave the narrator, the authorial persona who appears in the role first played by the prisoner Boethius?

A satisfactory answer requires first of all that we give an account of the authorial persona himself. What does it mean when an author writes himself into his text? In reading a didactic text or a philosophical dialogue, the usual practice is to take the authorial persona at his word. Augustine as he appears in conversation with his son Adeodatus in the dialogue *On the Teacher* (*De Magistro*) is most likely a fair attempt at self-representation by the author, and the reader reacts similarly to, for instance, Alcuin in dialogue with Charlemagne, or the *Magister* in

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Conrad of Hirsau’s *Dialogus super auctores.* An author who left too much room for doubt about the authenticity of his self-representation in this kind of text would be undermining its authoritative stance and indeed, the very purpose of the text. But when an author places a simulacrum of himself in a textual context that cannot possibly be reportage—a dialogue with a fantastic apparition, for instance—a wider gap opens up between the author and his textual spokesman. Estimating the size of this gap in poetry and in *prima facie* fictional writing is a puzzle that different generations of readers have solved in different ways.

In 1947 the Romance philologist Leo Spitzer published a “Note on the Poetic and the Empirical ‘I’ in Medieval Authors,” an article that still appears frequently in the bibliographies of medievalists’ literary studies. In it Spitzer provides a practical corrective to the reading habits of his contemporaries, which oscillated between a kind of biographical reading that identified the author very closely with the “I” in his text, and a New Critical insistence on the autonomy of the textual persona. Spitzer offers aid to readers of medieval texts who encounter writing in a first-person voice that seems to have quite a lot in common with the author himself, but that also, often, incorporates the first-person compositions of earlier authors. How can a writer who co-opts another’s self-representation possibly be writing in the first person with any accuracy? Spitzer proposes a solution by identifying the medieval literary “I” as the combination of an empirical first person, to be identified closely with the author, and a more dominant “universal” first person, an everyman. “We must assume,” he wrote, “that the medieval public saw in the ‘poetic I’ a representative of mankind, that it was interested only in this representative rôle of the poet.” The empirical first person, he argues, would not be of interest to medieval readers unless they could appropriate it for themselves, in compliance with the

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2 The dialogue *De magistro* is found in W. M. Green and K.-D. Daur, eds., *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Contra academicos, De beata uita, De ordine, De magistro, De libero arbitrio*, CCSL 29 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1970), 157–203; Alcuin, “Disputatio de rhetorica et de virtutibus,” in *The Rhetoric of Alcuin and Charlemagne* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965); Conrad of Hirsau in *Accessus ad auctores. Bernard d’Utrecht. Conrad d’Hirsau, Dialogus super auctores*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), 71–131. In these as in other medieval Latin dialogues, if an authorial persona appears, it is most often as a teacher. Constrast the prosimeta, in which the persona with the author’s name is the inferior or subordinate participant in the dialogue—an echo of Boethius, to be sure, but also an acknowledgment of a deeply felt uncertainty about the matter under discussion.