A question awaiting systematic study concerns the meaning of the simple fact that throughout Rabbinic literature, numerous sayings are assigned to named masters. To understand the issue at hand we have to take account of two contradictory facts. First, all rabbinic documents are anonymous, and all of them include vast numbers of compositions bearing no assignments; none of the compositions of which a document is comprised is assigned to a named author; no document bears a dependable attribution to a specific person. But, by way of contradiction to these facts, every one of the documents of the Judaism of the dual Torah produced in the formative age is characterized by numerous attributions of statements to specific figures. So individuals at the same time play no role and also dominate the representation of discourse. The literary situation is characterized by William Green in the following way:

Most rabbinic documents are unattributed works; all in fact are anonymous...Rabbinic literature has no authors. No document claims to be the writing of an individual rabbi in his own words; and all contain the ostensible sayings of, and stories about, many rabbis, usually of several generations. Selected to suit the purposes of compilers and redactors, the documents' components are not pristine and natural. They have been revised and reformulated in the processes of transmission and redaction, with the consequence that the ipsissima verba of any rabbis are beyond recovery. Rabbinic literature is severely edited, anonymous, and collective.¹

These contradictory traits—exclusion of distinctive, personal traits of style, absolute refusal to recognize an individual in his own setting, e.g., by preserving a book written by, or about, a named authority, and, at the same time, ubiquitous and persistent inclusion of names along with sayings—provoke the question at hand. If the literature were anonymous as well as collective, or if it exhibited the marks of individuality along with its constant references to named figures, we should not find puzzling the definitive trait before us.

Why is the Rabbinic Literature so interested in coupling utterances and decisions with names? The question finds a facile answer for those who take for granted that issues of history govern in the formulation of the Judaism of the dual Torah. If the primary interest lies in what really happened, so that events of a specific, one-time character bear incontrovertible and compelling truth, then names are attached to sayings to indicate who really said them; then the word "really" carries the meaning, which particular authority stands behind a given statement? That premise, at the same time historical and biographical, certainly has much to recommend it, since, in our culture, with its two-century-old stress on the authority of demonstrable, historical fact, if we can show that something really happened or was truly said by the person to whom it is attributed, then much else follows. But for our sages of blessed memory, particularly in the two Talmuds, that premise will have presented considerable difficulty. In fact, when we examine how they explained to themselves the reason for attributing sayings to named authorities, we find that each document answers the question in its own way and for its own purpose, and the answers do not harmonize.

What characterizes all writings, however, is a simple fact. We look in vain in the analytical documents for evidence to sustain the stated premise that people really concerned themselves with the issue of who really said what. That is to say, while sayings are attributed, the purpose of the attribution—what is at stake in it, what else we known because we know it—requires analysis in its own terms. Since, as a matter of fact, a saying assigned to one authority in document A will circulate in the name of another in document B, the one-time, determinate assignment of said saying to authority X rather than authority Y cannot be accorded enormous consequence. If the documents were broadly circulated and