# Fiction, Dialogue, Otherness: Self Criticism and Rabbinic Anecdotes

Ishay Rosen-Zvi

In this essay, I return to a subject discussed extensively in rabbinic scholarship: the treatment of Others in rabbinic literature.[[1]](#footnote-1) This time, however, I will not treat this within the framework of classical Talmudic scholarship, but rather by engaging a thesis coming from contemporary epistemology. I will use this theory as an exegetical tool, while at the same time examining it through the lens of the Talmudic material.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In their book *The View From Within* (Notre Dame, 2011), Fisch and Benbaji present an insistent and courageous quest for the various possibilities for transformations of normative commitments. The authors are determined to overcome the subjectivism, even solipsism, apparent in certain recent philosophical positions (Harry Frankfurt for one) and to reconstruct a rationalist worldview. They attempt to do this however without foregoing their commitment to epistemological relativism and without assuming an independent normative reality. They achieve their dual goal with the help of "the Other". In a nutshell, their argument is that, in a relativist worldview, self-criticism can be achieved *only* through dialogues with the Other. Since one cannot step outside of oneself and adopt an external, objective point of view, contact with others is critical, indeed mandatory, to allow self-criticism, evaluation and change. Although another person’s critiques cannot in and of themselves lead people to reject their own convictions and commitments, acknowledging that the Other sees us in a different manner than we see ourselves shakes our certainty in these convictions. It creates the self-distancing required to facilitate the self-evaluation that can transform existing stances, including the most basic ones: "Despite being powerless to convince, trusted normative criticism can still be highly effective in provoking their addressees to reconsider and subsequently replace heartfelt normative commitments" (251).

This thesis is vivid and insightful, and it stands on the foundation of a conversation with a wide range of both ethical and epistemological positions. I do not intend, nor am I qualified, to examine its philosophical validity. Instead, I wish to examine whether such a conceptualization can be useful to describe premodern discursive communities, whose worldviews were radically different than our own.[[3]](#footnote-3)

My analysis will concentrate on the corpus known as Rabbinic literature, created in later Antiquity in both Roman Palestine and Sasanian Babylonia. I justify this choice not only through my own training, but also by the fact that Rabbinic Literature is an explicitly dialogic corpus in both its legal (halakhic) and homiletic (aggadic) parts. Fisch and Benbaji's struggle to bring back the Socratic dialogue, which philosophy has long deserted in favor of internal dialogue and reasoning,[[4]](#footnote-4) brings them particularly close to rabbinic dialogic culture.[[5]](#footnote-5) The juxtaposition thus seems, on the surface of it, fully justified.

The transition from contemporary philosophic discourse to ancient Jewish literature requires bridging some serious gaps and overcoming several methodological obstacles. Most prominent among these are the literary qualities of the rabbinic texts, and their collective and anonymous character. Can we talk in any meaningful way about self-criticism and reflection in the context of such compositions? Is there a "self" in this enterprise? In her *Textual Mirrors: Reflexivity, Midrash and the Rabbinic Self* (Philadelphia 2012) Dinah Stein proposed a new model for talking about self-reflection in rabbinic literature, in a manner that is compatible with the corpus's characteristics but does not devoid this concept of meaning. "The question of self-reflectivity, of how one sees oneself when one becomes the object of inquiry has […] expanded beyond the realm of individual psychology" (3); "[T]he self I address is an emergent entity that results from rabbinic discourses and discursive processes. These processes […] produce moments of cultural subjectivity"; "the text's self-reflexivity operates, in my view, as a self that is reflected on in a wider, cultural, sense (but not as a specific social group)" (8).[[6]](#footnote-6) According to Stein, this "imagined rabbinic self" constructs two different kinds of reflection: a general one, which she defines as an "awareness of their linguistic constitution" encoded in the very "intertextual quality of rabbinic texts" (4), and a specific one, in which fictive figures in aggadic anecdotes function to question and destabilize rabbinic conventions. Here I will focus on these latter moments of specific reflection.

Erich Gruen's *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Princeton 2011) is also helpful for my project here. Gruen offers a nuanced model of the role of Others in constituting collective identities in the Hellenistic (including Jewish Hellenistic) world. He strives to transcend the simplistic model of identity constituted by negation alone: "the expression of collective character in antiquity [...] owes less to insisting on distinctiveness from the alien than to postulating links with, adaptation to, and even incorporation of the alien” (352). Not all kinds of aliens, to be sure. Rabbinic literature loses much of its plurality when facing non-Jews, collapsing all peoples into a monolithic image of the *goy*.[[7]](#footnote-7) But the constitution of rabbinic identity is wider than the binary Jew/gentile divide. Many Jewish others – heretics, apostates, ignoramuses, prostitutes or *matronae*, to name a few – feature in the corpus. Can *they* serve as the desired dialogic partner?

An example of the multiple roles of the Other in the constitution of the self can be found in the Pauline epistles, a corpus not very remote in time, place and worldview from the rabbis. Paul's opponents appear in various places in his letters and to several ends. First, the opponents often serve as an explanation for Paul's situation: why did he visit this church, and not that? Why was he compelled to discuss certain issues? (see e.g. Rom 15:20; Gal 1:16-17; 2:4; 1Cor 1:12; 2Cor 3:1). Paul also deploys his opposition rhetorically to position himself as the true apostle, opposed to the false “apostles” who pursue nothing but honor and riches (Gal 3:1; 6:2; 1Cor 9:5-6; 2Cor 11-12). Paul's opponents however might have yet a more complex role. Several scholars claim that the public standoffs between Paul and his opposition in Jerusalem, Antioch and Galatia can explain several significant differences between the letters to the Galatians and the Romans, written no more than five years apart.[[8]](#footnote-8)

But how can we make the move from the rhetorical, self-affirming use of the *character* of the opponents in Paul's Letters to the historical role they might have played in the development of his thinking? Which traces in the Letters can affirm the opponents' role in modifying Paul's thought, or hint to this role? Could imaginary opponents have brought about this historical shift, or can these changes only be effected by real opponents? Pauline scholars debate these questions continuously, and we shall try to engage with them from the prism of the Talmudic dialogues.

Rabbinic literature is famously replete with literary representations of dialogues with people outside the house of study. But not all of it equally. Tannaitic literature (formed around the 2nd century) has only a few such dialogues. Sadducees (as well as one "Galilean *min*")[[9]](#footnote-9) are portrayed in polemic with the Pharisees (e.g. Mishnah *Yadaim* 4:6-8).[[10]](#footnote-10) Rabban Gamaliel and his successors in the Patriarchy are portrayed as conversing with philosophers and imperial functionaries.[[11]](#footnote-11) Amoraic literature (3rd-5th centuries) is richer with such dialogues: there are numerous anecdotes in which sages converse with bureaucrats, heretics, *matronae*, prostitutes and gentiles. This corpus however is far from monolithic. Most notably, there is a marked difference between Palestinian and Babylonian literatures, as we shall see below.

Scholars have tended to approach these dialogues in one of two ways. The first was to assume that these were actual dialogues.[[12]](#footnote-12) This gave rise to an open ended debate regarding to the identity of the interlocutors, especially the elusive *minim*. Were they Christians?[[13]](#footnote-13) Gnostics? Samaritans? Sadducees? Or do they represent a general, none specific (and thus unidentifiable) otherness? [[14]](#footnote-14) Many scholars today accept Yaakov Sussman's assertion that different groups are lumped together under the heading of *minim*.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Frustrated by this line of thought, scholars increasingly approach these dialogues as rhetorical devices.[[16]](#footnote-16) Indeed, interpreters of dialogue stories often try both options out for size. Richard Kalmin for instance wonders whether the differences in the treatment of *minim* in early and late sources reflects changes in the actual heresies the rabbis confronted or belies a shift in the rhetorical techniques used to deflect heretical claims.[[17]](#footnote-17) As a compromise of sort, scholars tend to attribute realism to earlier sources and rhetoric to later ones, especially the Babylonian Talmud. [[18]](#footnote-18)

But perhaps we can offer a way to transcend this dichotomy. We might read the stories neither as mirroring real events nor as mere rhetorical devices, but as part of an epistemological quest. In this way, the rabbinic Other can be understood, in at least some of these dialogues, as a reflective tool.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Another rabbinic genre, the *mashal* or “parable,” is a good example for this line of thought.[[20]](#footnote-20) Scholars emphasized the rhetorical function of rabbinic parables in mediating complex and bold theological, ideas.[[21]](#footnote-21) *Meshalim* however can be also shown to play an epistemological role. The following two successive parables from the Tosefta (Sukkah 2:6) are a case in point:

When the sun and moon are eclipsed, this is a bad sign for the entire world. **A parable**: a flesh and blood king built a palace, furnished it, made a meal and then brought in the guests. When he became angry with them – he told the butler to take the candles away from them. Thus they all found themselves sitting in the dark.

R. Meir was in the habit of saying: when the sun and moon are eclipsed, this is a bad sign for the haters of the Jews [a euphemism for: the Jews], for they are used to [receiving] afflictions. **A parable**: a teacher comes into a classroom and says, 'get me the strap.' Who worries? The one [student] who is used to being beaten.[[22]](#footnote-22)

The different opinions marked by the two parables – a bad sign for the Jews or for the entire world – hint that there is more at stake here than different illustrations.[[23]](#footnote-23) It seems that the parables, more than explanations for divine providence, are part of the attempt to realize it. Eclipses, like other natural phenomena, were understood as divine signs.[[24]](#footnote-24) But what is it that the divine is trying to tell us? The *mashal* helps us understand what these occurrences would signify if they were the result of mundane activity, produced in this world by a human authority, a king or a teacher.[[25]](#footnote-25) The mundane analogy is thus an epistemic, rather than simply didactic, device.

Perhaps so too in the case of dialogues? The sages were certainly capable of self-criticism.[[26]](#footnote-26) The question is whether they use the Others, and dialogues with them, as a tool for such criticism. Christine Hayes seems to underplay such a possibility. According to her reading of Bavli Sanhedrin 90b-91athe questions of the *minim* (or Sadducees, as in some MSS) serve as a sounding board for internal difficulties; sublimations of anxieties which the sages projected – "means by which a group can explore its own internal ambiguities, experiment with alternative possibilities, embrace negativities".[[27]](#footnote-27) The Other here is merely used as a foil to externalize inner tensions. Dina Stein, on the other hand, reads "reflective figures" as representing "possible selves," which help the text imagine other possibilities, thus problematizing its own. For example, Rabbi's handmaid functions in Bavli Meg 18a as "the other within" which "plants seeds of ambiguity" (117).

Jenny Labendz, in a recent study on rabbinic dialogues with gentiles, claimed that such anecdotes function in an exemplary dialogical manner, designed to import new knowledge from the outside. "The introduction of an outsider allows the rabbis, just as it did for Plato, to articulate their ideas more fully and more clearly than if they expressed them as entirely internal discussions".[[28]](#footnote-28) But, as Eva Kiesele pointed out, these texts can as easily be read as agonistic polemic, meant to discredit opponents, rather than as "true" dialogues intended to attain their unique perspective.[[29]](#footnote-29) Labendz's readings tend to systematically underplay the polemical and ironic tone of the narratives. Thus, for example, she reads R. Simlai's statement "wherever the *minim* find a source for their heresy, its refutation is nearby" (y. Berachot 9:1 [12:4]; Gen Rab 8:9) as an example of intellectual openness, an attempt to answer the *minim* "in a way that will satisfy them in particular" (178). But the polemical context of Rabbi Simlai's answer is apparent by his students' comment on his refutations: "you have pushed them aside with a reed."[[30]](#footnote-30) Polemic is not dialog.

I would also like to distinguish between the dialogue we are looking for and Bakhtinnian dialogism, realized by juxtaposing conflicting, incommensurable languages. In his *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago 2009) Daniel Boyarin claims that the biographical narratives in the Babylonian Talmud problematize and subvert the legal, monolithic *sugiot* which make up the bulk of the Talmud. These stories use heteronomic voices to subvert the hegemonic one. Their incorporation into the *sugiot* "call into question the very seriousness and authority of the practice of the intellectuals themselves" (26). But we are here casting for a more direct critique; an external gaze which allows for reflection on the issues which are discussed in the study house. For this end it is not enough to integrate an incongruous "second accent." We need a second opinion.

Would representations of dialogues serve in this manner? At least not inevitably. For dialogues, Boyarin justly warns us, should not be confused with dialogism. Literary representations of dialogues can serve monologic ends, as he demonstrates in the context of both Plato (30-31) and the Talmud (141-146). But what about the dialogues in rabbinic narratives and *aggada*? How dialogic are they?[[31]](#footnote-31)

And before the texts, a final warning. I am concerned with literary "Others," the rabbis' ability and need to imagine others for their own scholastic goals. The relationship between imaginary and real is never simple or one-sided. The literary encounter can preserve and internalize actual encounters, but, at the same time, constitute future relationships with real persons. This complex relationship is even more problematic to grasp in light of the solipsistic nature of rabbinic literature.[[32]](#footnote-32) It is notoriously hard to learn anything about the rabbis' neighbors – whether pagan, Christian or non-rabbinic Jews – from their texts, which seldom mention them, and then often in a stereotyped manner.[[33]](#footnote-33)

After these introductions we are ready to face some actual narratives and see what comes of them:

1. Sifre Deuteronomy 344 (MS London 341)

The government once sent two *strateiotai* (Roman functionaries) and told them: go pose as proselytes and see what is the nature of Israel's Torah. They went to Rabban Gameliel at Usha and read scripture and memorized Mishnah, Midrash, laws and homilies. When they turned to go, they told them: all of your Torah is well and praiseworthy, except one thing: "stealing from a gentile is permitted and from an Israelite is prohibited", but this we will not reveal to the government.

This may well be the quintessential exampleof rabbinic self-criticism, at least the way it was read in scholarship.[[34]](#footnote-34) The nature of this self-criticism is, however, unclear. In its reworking of this story, The Palestinian Talmud (y. Bab. Kam. 4:3; 4a) reads it as an impetus for legal change ("at that time Rabban Gamaliel decreed that a stealing from a gentile is forbidden"), but this is clearly a later addition to the Tannaitic narrative, intended to reconcile it with the known halakha which forbids stealing from gentiles.[[35]](#footnote-35) But even according to the original story, imagining the view from the outside allows for the exposure of the inequality of the legal system, even if specific laws do not change as a result. Although the laws themselves are well known in the house of study, the exercise allows insiders to see themselves as others see them.

The imagined gaze of the outsiders is thus more significant than their specific claims. It is not the content of the dialogue that has the transformative power, but the narrated situation itself. Even when the content itself is trivial, the story has the ability to affect its audience in a way that an inner dialogue cannot. This is the very same estrangement that we use often to understand and communicate our own reality, from the outside.[[36]](#footnote-36) And in this case it is quite clear that there is no use in trying to decide whether this is a rhetorical *or* epistemological device, whether it is used for comprehension or for communication. The same mechanism that allows the audience of this story to see the discrimination built into the law may have allowed the authors to see it.

In its original iteration,[[37]](#footnote-37) this story however is also exceptional in that it gives the last word to the Roman functionaries. In most dialogue-stories it is the rabbinic interlocutor that is given the last response, refuting the claims of the others. After the final refutation, how much remains of the original problematization?

A more typical corpus might provide the answer: the Roman matron stories in the Amoraic (3th-5th centuries) Midrashim. A useful case study for our concern is the seven dialogues between R. Jose and a *matrona* in *Genesis Rabbah*.[[38]](#footnote-38) The *matrona* was traditionally identified as a Christian, Gnostic or Epicurian,[[39]](#footnote-39) but Tal Ilan[[40]](#footnote-40) cast her as a Jewish woman capable of holding her own in scriptural debates with a rabbinic sage. Ilan goes so far as to read "Matrona" as the woman's first name.[[41]](#footnote-41) Although I am not convinced by the last suggestion, Ilan is certainly correct in pointing out that these dialogues are indistinguishable from other rabbinic debates on biblical interpretation, and that this explains the inability of scholarship to isolate any identifiable "heresy" common to all seven dialogues. She also demonstrates that the rabbi's answers to his female interlocutor are no different from answers other rabbis give in non-polemical contexts. [[42]](#footnote-42)

If both questions and answers exist in the rabbinic world, why employ the *matrona* as a character at all?[[43]](#footnote-43) I think an answer can be found in the last of R. Yose and the Matrona dialogues:

1. Genesis Rabbah 87:6 (according to MS Vatican Ebr. 30; ed. Theodor-Albeck, 1070)

A *matrona* asked R. Jose: could it be possible that Joseph, seventeen years old, in all his [sexual] heat, would do this thing [run away from Potiphar's wife and not succumb to her temptations]? He took out the book of Genesis before her, and began to read the story of Reuben and Bilhah, the story of Judah and Tamar. He said: If scripture did not cover the deeds of these ones, who were fully grown, and *in manus* of their fathers; all the more so for this one, who was a minor and on his own.

The *matrona*'s question can be read in various, conflicting, ways. She may be trying to embarrass the sage, or cast doubts on the veracity of scripture.[[44]](#footnote-44) She might however simply be bothered by a real, interpretive quandary.[[45]](#footnote-45) The sage's answer seems to reinforce the last option. And yet, this is not a discussion between two sages. Why? Was it simply too much to ascribe such a doubt about Joseph "the Righteous" to a sage? As the subsequent homily shows, the rabbis are certainly capable of sexualizing Joseph’s character.[[46]](#footnote-46) But here the *matrona* is casting doubts on the veracity of the story itself.[[47]](#footnote-47) Is it this "heretical" point of view that requires the recruitment of an external interlocutor?

It seems that the key to the usage of the figure of the Matrona in this corpus of dialogues in that she is an outsider with whom rabbis can have a serious conversation. While *minim* deserve "pushing aside with a reed," and not much more than perhaps a jeer or a joke, the Matrona is different. Through the mouth of a Matrona, the Midrash can discuss thorny and provocative issues without being compelled to reject them on the spot.

A more systematic treatment of the subject requires us to make some finer distinctions, including an important geographical one: the Palestinian *matrona* is recast in the Babylonian Talmud as a *matronita*. The difference between the words is dialectical, but the semantics are a world apart. While the *matrona* is an upper class woman,[[48]](#footnote-48) engaged in learned discussions of scripture, the *matronita* is a foreign and dangerous enticer.[[49]](#footnote-49) But statistics can only tell part of the story. The *matronita*'s image in the Bavli is more complex than a list can indicate. A good example is a story embedded in a cycle of three similar tales about rabbis who were miraculously saved from seductions in Bavli Kiddushin 40a-b.

1. Bavli Kiddushin 40b (according to MS Vatican 111)

*Heroes of strength who do his will* (Ps 103:20) – Such as R. Zadok and his companions. A *matronita* propositioned (תבעתיה) R. Zadok. He said: I am hungry (literally: weak; חלש לבאי), is there anything to eat? She said, there is something impure [i.e. non-kosher]. He said: what difference does it make? He who does this [illicit sex] can eat this [non-kosher food]. There was a flame in the oven and she placed it [the dish on the oven]. He went and sat in [the oven]. She said: what is this? He said: He who does this will fall in this [oven]. She said: if I had known, I would not have caused you anguish.

Several scholars discussed the poetics of this rich anecdote.[[50]](#footnote-50) For my purposes, the crucial feature is the manner in which the ending undermines the beginning. Just like the two stories which precede and follow it,[[51]](#footnote-51) this is a classic tale of the righteous man being saved from the snares of the seductive *matronita*. But what began as an act of spiritual heroism ends as no more than a humble gaffe; a simple misunderstanding. She simply thought he was interested. Noam Zion aptly shows that this shift is only made possible through the dialogue. The other two stories in the cycle, which have no dialogue, end as they began – by miraculous redemptions from sin. But our narrative's ending compels the reader to reread these other stories too. Could *their* heroes too talk the issue through with their temptresses and diffuse the tension – sexual or otherwise?

This story is not just a parody on the genre of heroic resistance of temptation,[[52]](#footnote-52) but a sophisticated and effective reflection on it. And this reflection is not only on the sages' behavior, but on the manner in which it is represented in rabbinic narratives. The dialogue clearly functions here as the vehicle of the reflective, subversive move. However, the location of this narrative in the middle of this cycle, surrounded by more "orthodox" redemption-from-temptation stories, hints that the redactor was either blind to this subversive potential or sought to neutralize it.

Τhe Babylonian narratives on *minim* reveal a similar phenomenon. While in Palestinian literature, the *min* is a deviant Jew, like the apostate or the informant,[[53]](#footnote-53) in the Bavli he – and it is always a “he” – is usually presented as a gentile.[[54]](#footnote-54) The Bavli is also the birthplace of the genre of dialogues between *minim* and rabbis,[[55]](#footnote-55) in which the sage always wins and the *min* is refuted, humiliated, or even killed.

Richard Kalmin read these stories as offering ridicule as a mechanism to cope with the dangers posed by the heretics, which he takes as a code name for "Christians" [REFERENCE]. He opposes this technique to the one used in Palestinian literature which present the *minim* as threatening and seductive. For him, this new genre of dialogues is hardly indicative of a newfound capability for meaningful dialogue. Rather it presents a new way of confronting the dangers of *minim*/Christians.

But this blanket statement is too general to be useful. Consider the story in Bavli Sanhedrin 39a.

A heretic said to R. Kahana. You say that a menstruant is permitted to be secluded with her husband. Can fire touch flax and not singe it?[[56]](#footnote-56)

The heretic wants to know how the couple is able to refrain from having sex if they live together, and Rav Kahana answers:

The Torah testified regarding us: *hedged with lilies* (Song 7:3), that we will not break through a fence, though it is made of lilies.

Though the context and characters are different, the atmosphere of this story is just as non-combative as the dialogue between the *matrona* and R. Jose above. The *min* is not provocative, the sage not defensive. Other Babylonian narratives present *minim* praising the land of Israel (Ket. 112a) and supporting the words of the sages (San. 106b), as well as sages answering a *min* and disciple at the same time (San. 39a), or learning not to curse a *min* (San. 105b).

The following story is a clear example of Babylonian complexity, discussed much in scholarship with little regard for its reflective potential.

1. Pesahim 87b

A *min* said to the Patriarch Judah III: we are better than you. Concerning you, it is written *For six months did Joab remain there with all Israel, until he had cut off every male in Edom* (1 Kgs 11:17; Edom=Rome). We however lived with you for many many years and we have not done anything to you. He said, a disciple will join (to answer) you. R. Hoshaiah joined and said: this is because you did not know what to do to us. Would you kill us all? You do not rule over [all of] us. If you kill those over whom you rule, they will call you a lame kingdom. He said: by the love of Rome, with this [thought] we get up, and with this we go to sleep.

Saul Lieberman suggested that the interlocutor here is a Roman official stationed at Caesarea.[[57]](#footnote-57) Isaiah Gafni argued that the story is an apologetic for the Babylonian diaspora, a place of refuge for Jews beyond Roman's reach.[[58]](#footnote-58) Scholars further connected this story to a famous Roman stereotype of Jews as misanthropes.[[59]](#footnote-59) Note however that the story does not refute the claim put in the mouth of the *min*. While his claim that the Romans are hospitable to the Jews is questioned, his accusation of the lethal attitude of the bible toward gentiles hangs unanswered, lingering in the study house like the proverbial elephant in the room. Since no real Roman interlocutor would cite scripture, this narrative cannot be read as a simple quotation of a roman stereotype, but as an internalization and adaption of such a claim to suit a midrashic argument – a fact overlooked by scholars who use this story as an exemplar of rabbinic reactions to "anti-Semitism."

Another genre unique to the Bavli (with one exception) is that in which sages encounter prostitutes.[[60]](#footnote-60) Here is one famous example:

1. b. Avoda Zara 17a

It was said of R. Eleazar b. Dordia that there was not a prostitute whom he did not sleep with. One time he heard there was a prostitute overseas who charged a bag of *denarii* as her salary. He took a bag of *denarii* and crossed seven rivers to get to her. While they were getting on with their sin she passed gas. She said: just as this gas can never go back to its place, so Eleazar b. Dordia will never be able to repent.

He left, and sat between hills and mountains. He said: mountains and hills, pray for me. They told him, before we pray for you, we should pray for ourselves, as it says *for the mountains will move and the hills will be shaken* (Isa 54:10). He said: heaven and earth, pray for me. They told him, before we pray for you, we should pray for ourselves, as it says *though the heavens should melt away like smoke and the earth wear out like a garment* (Isa 51:6). He said: sun and moon, pray for me. They said, before we pray for you we should pray for ourselves, as it says *then the moon shall be ashamed and the sun shall be abashed* (Isa 24:23). He said: stars and constellations, pray for me. They told him, before we pray for you we should pray for ourselves, as it says *all the host of heaven shall molder* (Isa 34:4). He said: I see that the matter is only dependent on myself. He placed his head between his knees and cried until his soul departed. A voice came out and said: R. Eleazar b. Dordia is invited into the life of the world to come.

Tali Artman portrays the Bavli's prostitute as a positive, yet negligible figure.[[61]](#footnote-61) Indifferent to her fate, the rabbis use here simply to move the plot forward. The prostitute disappears from the story just like the gas she passes (in the only Tannaitic sage-and-prostitute narrative, Sifre Num 115, she marries the disciple who came to her so he can gain from his repentance). Artman contrasts this with prostitute characters in contemporaneous Christian literature, who are cast as heroines in the repentance drama. But for our purpose we should ask: how exactly does the prostitute move the plot forward? Does the dialogue with her have any epistemological significance? While in the Tannaitic parallel of the story, the sage is moved to repent by noticing his *tzitzit*, the ritual fringes attached to his garment, in the Babylonian story the prostitute sets in motion the entire process of repentance – culminating in the death and eschatological rebirth of the sage –with a short sentence. Unlike the character of Elisha ben Abuya, the quintessential "Other" (Y. Hag 2:1 [77b]; b. Hag 15a), who resists the plea of his student, R. Meir, insisting that he cannot repent, here the outsider's gaze alone is portrayed as capable of effecting internal change. Stories like this are models for repentance, which mark the confrontation with the Other, and the perspective she brings with her, as a vehicle for a possible change of heart.

A final example is discussed at length in my book, *Demonic Desires*, on the rabbinic *yetzer hara* (evil inclination).[[62]](#footnote-62) A homily in the Tannaitic *mekhilta de-arayyot* portrays the *yetzer* as undermining the commandments, just as the gentiles do, and describes the role of the audience of the Mekhilta as resisting it.

1. Mekhilta de-Arayot, *Aharei* 8:3

*And you shall uphold my laws* (HQWTY; Lev 18:4). These are the things inscribed (ḤQWQYM) in the Torah that the evil *yetzer* argues against and the nations of the world argue against, such as the eating of swine, and wearing mixed cloth, and the *halitzah* of the levirate wife, and the purity of the leper, and the scapegoat, which the evil *yetzer* argues against and the nations of the world argue against. Scripture teaches, *I am the LORD* – I have inscribed them (ḤQQTYM) and you may not argue against them.

This is not the only rabbinic source which voices severe disapproval of any attempt to talk things over with your *yetzer*. "Let not your *yetzer* promise you that the *Sheol* (underworld) may be your asylum*,*" warns the Mishnah (Avot 4:22). Boaz refuses to engage his *yetzer* over the question of what he must do with Ruth the Moabite, and instead adjures it with God's name (Sifre Num 88). The Sifre recommends elsewhere that the righteous swear in God's name to protect themselves from the advice of the *yetzer* (Sifre Deut 33). Even when the *yetzer* is finally confronted it is only so that it may be completely negated. Thus, the Torah repeats and specifies the prohibition on idolatry so that the *yetzer* will not be able to find any loopholes in the law (Mek. RI, *bahodesh* 6). Later sources explicitly forbid negotiating with the *yetzer* (y. Taan. 9:1, 65d; b. Had. 16a).

The Rabbinic *yetzer* is no base and hedonistic tempter, but an intelligent interlocutor, and *as such* it must be ignored. Unlike the *minim* and *matronae*, the constructive potential of the dialogue with the *yetzer* is never materialized in rabbinic literature. I claimed that this is due to the basic role rabbinic literature accords the *yetzer*: to mark the very boundaries of dialogism. The *yetzer* is recruited exactly in order to mark what may *not* be discussed under any circumstances. Questions that may otherwise be considered as legitimate, for example about allegedly meaningless commandments – become illegitimate when associated with the *yetzer*. Taking advantage of legal loopholes, an acceptable tool for coping with difficult laws, becomes forbidden when they are suggested by the *yetzer*. The *yetzer* is deployed in a narrative to prevent conversation, not engender it.

This too is a case of achieving reflection by turning to the other. This instance however fortifies the discourse rather than subverting it. Any religious system has its own mechanisms for preventing the unapproved use of loopholes. Such mechanisms define borders and so look beyond them, and thus are reflective by nature. This reflection however is a tool not for subversion but for maintaining and replicating existing discourses.

The subversive effects of such a discourse cannot however be written off wholesale. It too is capable of generating reflection on the borders of discourse. It might not effect change immediately, but could facilitate future discussions. True, the inherent reflective potential is not realized here; but this can change. Sidelined options may claim center stage later and orthodox texts can be seen as less conformist by future readers. Here I find myself coming full circle, back to Fisch and Benbaji's claim that encounters with the Other only *enable* change but change itself must come from within. They use this claim to insist on the fully rational nature of self-critique; we can use it to appreciate the subversive potential of even affirmative utilizations of the other.

A literary and historical reading of rabbinic literature reveals that the other can play differing and conflicting roles in different contexts, and that the same text can have changing effects. The encounter between contemporary philosophy and rabbinic sources thus illuminates both: it reveals the textual capability for criticism, which rabinicists tend too often to overlook;[[63]](#footnote-63) while at the same time challenging the philosophical thesis by pointing out other, more affirmative uses for dialogues with others.

1. See I. Rosen-Zvi, "The Birth of the Goy in Rabbinic Literature", *Te'uda* 26 (2014), 361-438 [Hebrew] and the vast bibliography cited there. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Fisch himself has applied some of these observations to rabbinic literature in M. Fisch and H. Shapira, "Pulmusei ha-battim: ha-makhaloket ha-meta hilkhatit bein beit shammai le-beit hillel," *Iyyunei mishpat* 22 (1999), 461-497. This paper however discusses legal dialogues in the house of study only. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. On the difference between modern and pre-modern portrayals of the self, see C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the Making of Modern Identity*, Cambridge, MA 1989, and I. Rosen-Zvi, *Demonic Desires: Yetzer Hara* *and the Problem of Evil in Late Antiquity*, Philadelphia 2011, 212 n.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A move identified already in Stoicism. For Epictetus' transformation of the Socratic dialogic technique into an inner-dialogue see A. A. Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life*, Oxford 2002, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For a critique of the new trend which read rabbinic literature in light of the culture of self-reflection and self-fashioning of late antiquity see I. Rosen-Zvi, "The Rise of the Self in Rabbinic Literature: A Reexamination", *JJS* (Forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Stein distinguishes between "self-reflexivity" (or "self-referentiality") which is a textual and linguistic phenomenon, and "self-reflectivity" which is a trait of humans. Her conceptual analysis however allows her to apply the latter too to rabbinic literature, thus using the two interchangeably. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See I. Rosen-Zvi and A. Ophir, "Goy: Toward A Genealogy", *Dine Israel* 28 (2011): 69-122. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See especially J. W. Drane, *Paul: Libertine or Legalist*? London 1975; H. Hübner, *Law in Paul's Thought*, Edinburgh 1984. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Yad 4:8. See M. Kister "*Ke-dat moshe ve-yehudaei: toldoteihah shel nusha mispatit-datit*", *Atara LeHayim: Mehkerim ba-siferut ha-talmudit veha-rabanit likhevod Professor Hayim Zalman Dimitrovsky*, D. Boyarin et al. (eds.), Jerusalem 2000, 202-208; 208 n. 48. Kister claims (following M. Hengel, *the Zeallots*, Edinburgh 1989, 56-57) that *min* is used here in its old meaning – as a sect rather than a heresy – and refers to the zealots, i.e. Josephus's "fourth philosophy". For a different view see Y. Furstenberg, “*Kovelin anu aleikhem perushim: le-itsuvah shel temunat ha’olam ha-perushit ba-mishnah*,” *Ha-Halakhah: heksherim ra’ayoniyim ve-ideologiyim geluyim u-semuyim*, A. Rosenak and D. Schreiber (eds.) Jerusalem 2012, 283-311. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. On *minim* in Tannaitic literature see A. Schremer, "Wayward Jews: *minim* in Early Rabbinic Literature," *JJS* 64 (2013): 242-263; N. Cohen, "Heresiology in the Third Century Mishnah," *HTR* 108 (2015): 508-529. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Most famous are the dialogues between Rabbi Judah the Prince and "Antoninus." See e.g. Mek. RS 15:1, ed. Epstein-Melammed, 76-77. See L. Wallach, "The Colloquy of Marcus Aurelius with the Patriarch Judah I", JQR 31 (1940/1), 259-286; M. Hirshman, *Torah lekhol baei ha-olam: zerem universali be-sifrut ha-tannaim ve-yahaso le-hokhmat he-amim*, Tel Aviv 1999, 150-164 and the bibliography there. Cf. M. D. Herr, "The historical significance of the dialogues between sages and Roman dignitaries", *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 22 (1971), 123-150, who however conflates early and late sources. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See e.g. Hirshman, *Torah,* 163 who claims that dialogues between members of the Patriarchal line and non-Jews in Tannaitic literature focused on "highly crucial issues" which *could* have taken place in reality. Herr, "Significance," apply a similar claim also to dialogues in later corpora. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See Y. Teppler, *Birkat HaMinim: Jews and Christians in Conflict in the Ancient World* (Tübingen 2007). Cf. J. Schwartz and P. J. Tomson, "When Rabbi Eliezer was Arrested for Heresy", *JSIJ* 10 (2012): 145-181. It is important to distinguish between the identification of the *minim* in Tannaitic literature as Christians, and the historical claim that "*Birkat ha-minim,*" attributed by a barayta in b. Ber. 28b to Raban Gamliel's court, was aimed at Christians. The reference of *minim* only in the Tosefta (here and Hul. 2:24) points at a later dating for the tradition. See J. Marcus, "Birkat Haminim Revisited", *NTS* 55 (2009), 523-551, and D. Boyarin, "Once Again Birkat Haminim Revisited" *La croisée des chemins revisitée*, S. C. Mimouni et B. Pouderon (eds.), Paris 2012, 91-106. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For the claim that *minim* does not refer to any particular group see S. Miller, "The *Minim* of Sepphoris Reconsidered", *HTR* 86 (1993), 377-402; 391. Cf. "Minim is often used ambiguously for rhetorical effect – it is a classic example of 'them,' those who disagree with 'Us'" (Visotsky B. L., "Goys Aren't Us", *Heresy and Identity in Antiquity*, Tübingen 2008, 299-313; 300-301). Note however that Halakhic sources, unlike aggadic ones, clearly discuss readily identifiable groups (see e.g. t. Hul. 1:1; 2:20). Schremer, "Wayward Jews" leaves aside the question of the identification of the *minin* and instead asks what are the matters that stood at the center of the Tannaitic anti-*minim* discourse. He finds three main such issues: doctrine, religious practice and social enmity. See also, A. Schremer, "Beyond Naming: Laws of the *Minim* in Tannaitic Literature", Peter J. Tomson and Joshua Schwartz (eds.), *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries: How to Write Their History*, Brill, Leiden 2014, 383-397. Cf. N. Cohn, *The Memory of the Temple and the Making of the Rabbis*, Philadelphia, 2013, 155 n. 67 and see n. 51 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Y. Sussman, "Heker toledot ha-halakhah u-megillot midbar yehudah," *Tarbiz* 59 (1990), 11-76; 54 n. 176; S. C. Mimouni, *Early Judaeo-Christianity. Historical Essays*, Leuven 2012, 150. See e.g. y. Ber 5:3 (9:3): "with regard to all [benedictions] they do not make him [the cantor] to return [to a benediction that he mistakenly skipped], except when he who did not say '[He who] resurrects the dead', '[He who] overpowers the apostates' and '[He who] builds Jerusalem', for I say: he [the cantor who skipped one of those three] is a *min*." See M. Bar Ilan, *Sitrei Tefila ve-Hekhalot*, Ramat Gan 1987, 135-156, that the first benediction, on resurrection, is aimed against Sadducees, the second, on apostates – against Christians, and the third, on Jerusalem – against Samaritans. All three are named by the same title: *min*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. C. E. Hayes, "Displaced self-perceptions : the deployment of "mînîm" and Romans in b. Sanhedrin 90b-91a", in H. Lapin (ed.), *Religious and Ethnic Communities in Later Roman Palestine*, Bethesda, MD 1998, 249-289. Compare Martin Goodman's claims that in Tannaitic literature, *minim* are used as a theoretical construct to examine the borders of the rabbinic community, just as the *tumtum* and *androgynos* are employed in other contexts. M. Goodman, "The function of "minim" in early rabbinic Judaism", in Peter Schäfer (Hrsg.), *Geschichte - Tradition – Reflexion*: *Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag. Bd. I: Judentum*, Tübingen 1996, 501-510; 508. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. "Do minim themselves change, or do rabbinic portrayals of minim undergo development?" (R. Kalmin, "Christians and Heretics in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity", *HTR* 87 [1994], 155-169; 168). Cf. Gafni's argument against the historicity of the story in b. Pes 87b (discussed below). I Gafni, *Land, Center and Diaspora: Jewish Constructs in Late Antiquity*, Sheffield 1997, 33 n. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Scholars have shown time and again that the Bavli remodels its others according to its needs. See. E. Burns, "The Relocation of Heresy in a Late Ancient Midrash", *JSQ* 19 (2012), 129-147; 140 n. 35; and cf. below, n. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Burns, "Relocation," might be hinting at this direction. In his reading of Exod Rab. 30:9 he claims that casting the sages of Yavneh in dialogue with a Christian *min* in Rome allows the late redactors of this Midrash to imagine what might have been if they chose to engage the Christians in dialogue rather than casting them out. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. I refer here to the rabbinic narrative-like parables. On the biblical parables see J. Kugel, "Wisdom and the Anthological Temper", *Prooftexts* 17 (1997): 9-32. Kugel summarizes the rhetorical function of the biblical two-tiered parable thus: "You agree with A, now therefore admit B" (22). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See D. Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature*, Cambridge, MA 1991; M. Halbertal, *“Intimiyut u-protokol,”* *Ta-Shema: mehkerim be-mada’ei ha-yahaut le-zikhro shel Israel Ta-Shema*, ed. A. Reiner et al. (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 2012), 319-343. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. All translations are mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Note the ironic addendum to this tradition: "when they are eclipsed as they enter [the sky], their calamity will be delayed, and when they are eclipsed as they leave, their calamity will be speedy. But others say: vice versa." [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See I. Rosen-Zvi, "Berakhot ke-mippui: mivne ve-tokhen be-mishnat berakhot perek 9," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 78 (2009), כה-מו. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. This is also how the parallel parable in m. Suk 2:9 should be understood: "when it rains, when is it permitted to leave (the Sukka)? When the stew goes bad. A parable: what is this like? A slave who comes to mix wine for his master, and he throws the water jug in his face." With the help of the human analogy, rain during Sukkot is reread as a sign that God is not interested in the holiday's "service", as the Talmuds ad. loc explicate. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See M. D. Herr, "Persecutions and Martyrdom in Hadrian's Days", *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 23 (1972), 85-125; A. Schremer, "Akhim aherim," *Reshit* 1 (2009), 165-185, who discuss the various ways in which the rabbis were challenged by the emerging concept of the brotherhood of humankind which was making inroads in Roman politics and culture. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. C. Hayes, "Displaced Self-Perceptions", 251. In some passages Hayes seems to assume a deeper, epistemological role for those literary 'others' "an ability to see themselves and their exegetical activities as they may have been seen by outsiders" (260). Ultimately, however, the Freudian reading – the "others" as projection of rabbinic anxieties – prevails. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. J. R. Labendz, *Socratic Torah: Non-Jews in Rabbinic Intellectual Culture* (Oxford, 2013), 184. The apologetic tone in unmistakable (see e.g. 194). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. "Her interpretation depends on reading the gentiles' words in these dialogues as authentically 'gentile'"; "Labendz depicts the rabbis' interlocutors as possessing independent 'Bakhtinian' voices, and this has far-reaching epistemological implications"; "Labentz does not fully entertain the possibility that the apparent empiricism in 'Socratic Torah' might be unique to the genre, and hence play a rhetorical rather than an epistemic role" (E. Kiesele, *The Marginalia Review of Books*, August 15th 2013: <http://themarginaliareview.com/archives/3489>). Labendz's argument that "there is no need to respond to heretical arguments in a dialogue form" (176) does not actually counter the polemical reading, for it is the multiple function of the dialogic form itself that is at stake here. The fact that "instead of replying directly, the rabbi engages in Socratic Torah" (180) cannot, thus, in and of itself, clarify the *function* of this give and take. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Similarly "Rabbi Abahu takes the time to find out exactly what bothers the minim so that he can answer them appropriately and satisfactorily" (178) is hardly an adequate description of R. Abahu's polemics with the minim in Gen Rab 25:1, to which R. Tanhuma respond "R. Abahu answered them well (יפה השיבן)," meaning: refuted them effectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Boyarin himself does not see representations of dialogues with others as a key to dialogism, for these are subjugated to the all-encompasing Talmudic reasoning (155-161). He therefore turns specifically to the most grotesque, Rabelais-like narratives, such as BM 84a-b and BK 117a-b. His interest however is limited to the Bavli alone, where the unifying steamroller is indeed exceptionally strong. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. S. Stern, *Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings*, Leiden 1994, 215-23; cf. Goodman, "Function," 507. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See Kalmin, "Heretics," 168, who notes that Christians are usually named Jacob, if they are named at all. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See Sifra *Behar* 5:5; b. BK 113a; E. S. Rosenthal, "Shenei devarim," Y. Zakovitch and A. Rofé (eds.), *Sefer Isaac Aryeh Seeligman: maamarim be-miqra u-baolam he-atik*,Jerusalem 1983, 463-468; M. Kahana, "Ha-yahas le-nokhrim bi-tequfat ha-tannaim ve-ha-amoraim," *Et ha-daat* 3 (2000), 22-36, 28; S. Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism,* Princeton 2010, 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See Rosenthal, "Devarim," 475 n. 48 and cf. M. Kahana, "Dappim min ha-mekhilta li-devarim parashot haazinu ve-zot ha-berakha," *Tarbiz* 57 (1988), 165-201; 183-185, who demonstrates that the version of the Mekhilta to Deuteronomy 33:3 is also secondary to the Sifre. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. I guess I am not the only one finding myself thinking, while reading the newspaper, "imagine how we would respond if someone treated Jews like that." [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. In both the Mekhilta and the Yerushalmi there, a closing sentence was added indicating that the two Romans miraculously forgot the episode so they would not be able to inform their government. In the original version their promise not to tell is enough. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. 1. Why the phrase "*ki tov*" was not employed for the second day of creation. 2. Why God took Adam's rib by stealth. 3. Why scripture says nothing of Enoch's death. 4. Why Esau was born first. 5. What does God do after creation. 6. Why Jacob refused to be consoled for Joseph's death. 7. Did scripture "censor" the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Note that the dialogues do not appear together, and they do not, in their current state, form a "cycle". Cf. n. 41 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Herr, "Significance;" R. Gershenzon and E. Slomozic, "A Second Century Jewish-Gnostic Debate: Rabbi Jose ben Halafta and the Matrona", *JSJ* 16 (1985): 1-41. For a detailed reading of one of the stories (nom. 5 above; regarding match-making) as an anti-Christian polemics see A. Schremer, *Male and Female He Created Them: Jewish Marriage in the Late Second Temple, Mishnah, and Talmud Periods*, Jerusalem 2003, 43-46, 65 n. 116 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. T. Ilan, "Matrona and R. Yosi: An Alternative Interpretation", *JSJ* 25 (1994): 18-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Rabbinic literature is not in the habit of using first names for women, and Ilan's claim that the *matrona* should have been identified with an article if it were a regular noun is simply not compatible with rabbinic usage of the noun elsewhere. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Cf. Labendz, *Socratic Torah*, 181. The question on Enoch (Gen Rab. 25:1) is a case in point, as it is followed by a similar question attributed to the *minim*. Ilan correctly remarks that R. Jose's answer to matrona is markedly different in tone from that of R. Abbahu to the *minim* (33; Pace Labendz, 178). His answer is couched in the normal academic terminology. Ilan also shows that in Lev Rab. 8:1 the *matrona* is portrayed as a gentile (saying "*your* law is good"), as opposed to the parallel phrasing in Gen Rab 68:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ilan's answer that the anecdote simply happened that way in reality is untenable, as is her suggestion that the redactor of Geneis Rabbah had at his disposal a cycle of dialogues of R. Jose and the *matrona* on the entire book of Genesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. See Herr, "Significance," 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. See Ilan, "Matrona." [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Gen Rab. 87:7, a bold, and quite explicit, homily on "and his arms were made firm" (Gen 49:24) on which see J. Levinson, "An-Other Woman: Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife - Staging The Body Politic," *JQR* 87 (1997): 269-301. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Cf. Herr's remark that it is "characteristic of 'Bible criticism' of the Gnostic genre" ("Significance", 147). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. For contrasting *matronae* with slaves see e.g. Gen Rab. 45:1 ("it is better that my daughter be a maidservant in this house and not a *matrona* in another house"). For *matronae* as wives of "kings," (i.e. high officials) see Gen Rab. 1:4, 46:4, 45:10, 56:11. Cf. Lam Rab. 5:19, "can anyone sit without a chair, and [similarly] can a king be without a *matron*?" [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Prostitutes: b. Rosh Ha. 19a (=Taan. 18a), Kid. 39b, Shab 127b; witches: Shab. 81b, Yom 84a, Hul. 105b. See R. Calderon, "*Mussagim kevuim be-sipporet ha-aggadah ba-talmud ha-bavli*," Ph.D. Diss, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. See the scholarship listed by Noam Zion, *The Spouse and the Other Woman: Tales of Marital Drama in the Talmud* (forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. R. Hanina who is saved from the *matronita* by Caesar's retinue and R. Kahana who is saved by Elijah the prophet. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Kalderon, "Mussagim kevuim" notes that the temptation theme gets in some of the Bavli's matronita narratives a comic (87) and even carnivalic (89) twist. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. See t. Ber. 3:25, Bab. Mez. 2:33, San. 13:5, and more. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. On *minim* as deviant, "sectarian," Jews in Palestinian literature see Miller, "Minim," and Schremer, "Akim." On *minim* as gentiles in the Bavli see S. Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine*, New York 1941, 104 n 96; R. Kimelman, "Birkat Ha-Minim and the lack of evidence for an anti-Christian Jewish prayer in late antiquity," E. P. Sanders (ed.)  *Jewish and Christian self-definition, vol.* 2 (Philadelphia 1981), 226-44, 230-231; D. Boyarin, "The Christian Invention of Judaism: The Theodosian Empire and the Rabbinic Refusal of Religion", *Representations* 85 (2004), 21-57, esp. 43-47; On Babylomian *minim* as Christians see S. Naeh and Moshe Halbertal, "*Maaynei ha-yeshuah: satyra parshanit u-teshuvat ha-minim*," in J. Levinson (ed.) *Higayyon le-yonah: hebetim hadashim be-heqer sifrut ha-midrash ha-aggadah ve-ha-piyyut qovets mehqarim likhevodo shel professor Yonah Frankel bi-melot lo shivim va-hamesh shanim*, Jerusalem 2007, 179-198. For Zoroastrian *minim* see S. Secunda, "Talmudic Text and Iranian Context: on the Development of Two Talmudic Narratives," *AJS Review* 33 (2009): 45-69.‏ [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Over thirty occurrences in the Bavli, compared to a single occurrence in the Yerushalmi (y. Ber. 9:1). See Kalmin, "Heretics," 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. On the Babylonian and Persian context of this story see Secunda, “Talmudic Text,” 64-65. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Lieberman, *Greek*, 140-141. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. See Gafni, *Land*, 31-32; Cf. the brilliant elaboration of this thesis in D. Boyarin, *A Traveling Homeland:*

    *The Babylonian Talmud as Diaspora*, Philadelphia 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. M. D. Herr, "The Sages’ Reaction to Antisemitism in the Hellenistic-Roman World", *Antisemitism through the Ages* (1988), 27-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. See S. Fishbane, 'Go and Enjoy Your Acquisition – the Prostitute in the Babylonian Talmud', *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, 13 (1999), 71-85. On the single Palestinian exemplar of this genre in Sifre Num 115, see J. Goldin, “A Law and its Interpretation,” *Tehillah Le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg*, M. Cogan, B. L. Eichler and J. H. Tigay (eds.), Winona Lake 1997, 285-290; 288-289; A. Goshen-Gottstein, “*Mitzvat tzizit, ha-zonah ve-hasippur ha-darshani*,” *Mahashevet Hazal:divrei ha-kenes ha-rishon she-hitkayyem be-16 be-kislev 5748*, Z. Groner and M. Hirshman (Eds.), Haifa 1990, 45-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. T. Artman, "Ha-zenut bein yahadut le-natsrut," *Adkan* 56 (July, 2012), 24-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. I. Rosen-Zvi, "Refuting the Yetzer: The Evil Inclination and the Limits of Rabbinic Discourse", *Journal for Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 17 (2009), 117-142. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. This essay would not be even conceived if not for Fisch pointing in this direction in his remarks in a session dedicated to *Demonic Desires* at Tel Aviv University on December 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)