

Deuteronomy 15:1-18 in Socio-Rhetorical Perspective

by

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1 Introductory comments

Robbins (1994:113-116; 1996) has recently developed a socio-rhetorical approach for the interpretation of early Christian discourse in terms of the interaction between four main arenas of texture – inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture and ideological texture. This broad explanatory framework presents a significant heuristic strategy for the interpretation of various types of discourse within the Hebrew Bible. The readerly engagement with the text is, after all, a multi-faceted endeavour which concurrently invokes a variety of perspectives in the creation of meaning.

The purpose of this article, is to explore some possibilities of Robbins' model with specific reference to the case of Deuteronomy 15:1-18. Within the limits of the discussion, the problem of inner texture will be surveyed more fully because it provides a basis for reflection on the other aspects of texture. The review of intertextual and social and cultural analysis, will only probe certain possibilities which are offered by each interpretive procedure. The reflection on ideology, which will focus specifically on the establishment of discursive power in Deuteronomy 15:1-18, serves as a basis for a brief review of the results of the investigation.

For the purpose of the analysis, the Deuteronomic Code will be read as a coherent literary entity against the background of the late pre-exilic to early exilic period.¹

2 Inner texture

2.1 A rhetorical approach to Deuteronomy 15:1-18

The discussion of inner texture will use a rhetorical approach which draws on the resources of classical and modern rhetoric, to explore the text's persuasive strate-

gies.² In terms of Aristotle's distinction between three genres of persuasive discourse, Deuteronomy 15:1-18 shows affinities with deliberative discourse, which had its home in the public assembly in which matters such as the form of the constitution were debated.³ It appeals to the audience's self-interest in advocating a certain course of action which is most expedient – for instance the promotion of harmony within the state (cf Smit 1993:223-224). The typification of Deuteronomy 15:1-18 as deliberative discourse can be correlated with scholarly opinions which view the Deuteronomic Code as a whole as either a comprehensive social charter (so McBride 1987:229-244), or as a resource which could be used in formulating an Israelite constitution (Mayes 1993:30). As part of the Deuteronomic Code, the *Shemittah* and debt-slavery units therefore propose a quality of inner-Israelite social relationships, which is consonant with an envisaged constitutional order. An understanding of these sections as deliberative discourse, however, already raises the question of the self-interests of the audience to whom they address their rhetorical appeal.

Aristotle also defines three modes of persuasion, namely *logos* (rational appeal), *pathos* (emotional appeal), and *ethos* (ethical appeal) (Aristotle 1.2.1356a; Gitay 1981:37; Kennedy 1984: 15-16). A remarkable characteristic of Deuteronomy 15:1-18 is the use of *pathos*, which is especially predominant in 15:7-11, to sway the emotions of the audience into compliance with the *Shemittah* law.

As far as the arrangement of the discourse is concerned, the number of divisions which were recognised by classical rhetoric varied considerably.⁴ Drawing especially on Robbins' review of classical sources,⁵ the following categories will be applied to Deuteronomy 15:1-18: a) the introduction; b) the thesis, or statement of facts; c) the rationale; d) the confirmation of the rationale; e) the refutation, or argument from the contrary; and f) the conclusion. The problem of the rhetorical situation of these units, will be deferred until the consideration of social location in the review of social and cultural texture.

1 Both Crüsemann (1993:242-248) and Albertz (1994:199-201) have recently advanced cogent arguments for maintaining the link between the Deuteronomic Code and the reform movement of Josiah. For Crüsemann, the material in Deuteronomy 12-26 is essentially a product of the late pre-exilic period, while Albertz allows for some redactional activity of the reform group until the early exilic period.

2 It is well known that rhetorical criticism in Old Testament studies has been largely influenced by Muilenburg (1969:1-18) in concentrating on literary aspects of the text (Howard 1994:88-91; Tribble 1994:25-32). Yet scholars have also drawn on Muilenburg to develop a rhetorical criticism which understands itself in an Aristotelian sense as the study of the art of persuasion (Tribble 1994:41-48).

3 The three genres of persuasive discourse are the judicial, the deliberative and the epideictic (cf Aristotle 1.3.1358b-1359a; Gitay 1981:36; Kennedy 1984:19-20).

4 In the *Ad Herennium* (1.3), six basic parts of the discourse are recognised, namely the introduction, the statements of facts, the division, the proof, the refutation and the conclusion (cf also Gitay 1981:39). Lanham (1968:112) argues that there were seven parts of an oration, indicating that the „division“ could be divided into two parts, namely the exposition or definition, and the proposition. He, however, points out that the distinction between the various parts of the oration could be quite flexible.

5 Robbins (1994:121-131) refers especially to the *Ad Herennium* and Hermogenes' *Progymnasmata*.

2.2 Deuteronomy 15:1-11

Deuteronomy 15:1-11 can be organised into the following parts: a) the introduction (v 1); b) the thesis (vv 2-3); c) the rationale (v 4a); d) the confirmation of the rationale (vv 4b-6); e) the refutation and conclusion (vv 7-11).

2.2.1 The introduction (v 1)

The introduction, with its basic assertion of the seven yearly practice of the *Shemittah*, points to the topic which will occupy the ensuing discourse.

2.2.2 The thesis (vv 2-3)

The thesis develops the specific understanding of the *Shemittah* stipulation which is fundamental to Deuteronomy 15:1-11. The concept of the *Shemittah* is foregrounded, firstly, by the repetition of the term *שְׁמִטָּה* in verse 2 (x 2), as well as the repetition of verbal forms of the root *שָׁמַט* within verses 2 and 3 (x 2). Secondly, the technique of anadiplosis,⁶ focuses attention on the clarification of the *שְׁמִטָּה*, which is introduced by the term *שָׁמַט* at the start of verse 2aβ.⁷

As far as the interpretation of verse 2aβ is concerned, it is accepted that *מִשֶּׁה* אִתּוֹ should be inserted after *בְּעַל* (so Mayes 1979:248; Merendino 1969:108-109),⁸ so that the words *מִשֶּׁה יָדוֹ* form the object of the verb *שָׁמַט*.⁹ In the phrase *מִשֶּׁה יָדוֹ*, the word *יָדוֹ* refers to the one who has control over the *מִשֶּׁה* (cf Morrow 1995:92; North 1954:187) – which should probably be understood as a reference to the loan which the creditor advanced to the debtor (Chirichigno 1993:265-272).¹⁰ Thus verse 2aβ

6 Anadiplosis refers to the repetition of the last element of a syntactic group, at the start of a new syntactic group (cf Lausberg 1960:314 – § 619). Verse 2aa ends with the term *שְׁמִטָּה*, while 2aβ starts with the term *שָׁמַט*.

7 The significance of verse 2aβ is also underscored by Morrow (1995:35, 95, 99), who points out that it presents one of the rare occurrences of a free, positive verbal clause within the clause rows of Deuteronomy 14:1-17:13.

8 Morrow (1995:92) argues that the phrase *כָּל-בֹּעֵל* is the subject of the verb *שָׁמַט*, while *מִשֶּׁה יָדוֹ* is the object. However, if *בְּעַל* cannot stand without qualification, he accepts the solution of Mayes and Merendino.

9 There are various alternative explanations. Thus Weinfeld (1995:165) argues that *יָדוֹ* is the object of *שָׁמַט*. Hamilton (1992:17) follows North (1954:187), in seeing *מִשֶּׁה יָדוֹ* as one bound phrase, and translates „every holder of a pledge/loan under his control shall release ...“.

10 Chirichigno (1993:265-272) offers a number of arguments against the common interpretation of the term *מִשֶּׁה* in 15:2, as a human or immobile pledge which was secured at the commencement of the loan (cf Weil 1938:196; Cholewiński 1976:219; Cardellini 1981:270). He accepts that the loan contract which is referred to in Dt 15:2 required the debtor to provide a pledge for the creditor, and that the verb *נָשָׂא* has the dual meaning of „to lend“ and „to pledge“. However, he argues that the Deuteronomic laws restricted the taking of pledges to non-essential items, and did not envisage the pledging of immobles (houses or fields) or persons. The use of pledges of immobles or persons for antichretic purposes would also have conflicted with the prohibition on the charging of interest on loans of accommodation. Lastly, Chirichigno also

can be translated, „every creditor shall remit his personal loan which he lent to his countryman“ (cf Morrow 1995:91-92). As far as the intention of the remission is concerned, the arguments in favour of a complete cancellation of the debt (so Cholewiński 1976:220-221; Braulik 1986b:111), appear more convincing than a mere one-year suspension of repayment (so Wright 1984a:136-137).¹¹ If the loans are of a consumptive rather than a commercial nature (Cholewiński 1976:221; Braulik 1986b:111; Chirichigno 1993:270), then their cancellation is specifically aimed at redressing situations of severe economic dependence.

The chiasmic structure of verses 2-3 presents a further stylistic device which serves to define the intention of the *Shemittah* institution (Seitz 1971:168; Hamilton 1992:17). The arrangement of the text can be portrayed as follows:

A – 2aβ	שְׁמֹוּ כָל-בֹּעֵל מִשֶּׁה יָדוֹ
B – 2aγ	אֲשֶׁר יִשֶׁה בְּרֵעֵהוּ
C – 2ba	לְאִיִּנֹשׁ אֲתִדְרַעְהוּ וְאֲתִדְאִחִיו
D – 2bβ	כִּי־קִרָא שְׁמִטָּה לַיהוָה
C1 – 3a	אֲתִדְהַנְכִּרִי תִגַּשׁ
B1 – 3b	וְאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֲתִדְאִחִיךָ
A1 – 3b	תִּשְׁמַט יָדְךָ

The delimitation of the *Shemittah* to an inner-Israelite practice is underscored by the contrast between the countryman and the foreigner in the parallel sections (C-C1) of the chiasmic arrangement, as well as by the use of an inverted verbal clause in verse 3a (cf Seitz 1971:168; Morrow 1995:91). Furthermore, the central section of the chiasm (D) sanctions the law by an appeal to the authority of Yahweh (Hamilton 1992:18). Thus the call for the performance of the *Shemittah*, which is stressed through the repetition of the basic stipulation in the outer parts of the chiasm (A/B – A1/B1), is legitimated in terms of the divine will.

The counterpoint of the clear differentiation between the countryman and the foreigner, is the conspicuous superfluity that is created by the juxtaposition of „countryman“ and „brother“ in 15:2. Commenting on Deuteronomy 15:2, Perlitt (1980:32-34, 43-44) argues that the use of the designation „brother“ as a reference to a fellow Israelite, has no textual antecedent in either the Covenant code or eighth century prophecy. Its use as a qualification of „countryman“ in verse 2, points to a specific Deuteronomic notion of Israel as a community of „brothers“ (cf Hamilton 1992:35-37). Following the perspectival shift from the term „countryman“ to „brother“ in verse 2, Deuteronomy 15:1-11 continues to refer to a fellow Israelite as

argues that verse 3b should be understood as the release of the loan which was in the debtor's possession.

11 The admonition in verse 9 against a refusal to make loans due to the proximity of the *Shemittah* year, makes more sense if a cancellation is envisaged (Chirichigno 1993:273).

a „brother“, with the term appearing no less than four times in Deuteronomy 15:7-11.

The thesis in verses 2-3 thus calls for the granting of economic restitution to dependent Israelites, through the seven yearly cancellation of debts which had been incurred for consumptive purposes. The *Shemittah* institution is undergirded both in terms of an appeal to divine authority, and in terms of a specific conception of Israel as a community of „brothers“.

2.2.3 The rationale (v 4a)

The rationale for the *Shemittah* practice concerns the eradication of the אֲנִיִּים from Israel. In order to probe the intention of the argument at this point, recourse must be had to matters of an intertextual nature. Lohfink (1990:31-33, 36) has pointed out that the Deuteronomic Code meticulously differentiates between the poor, whom it consistently denotes by the terms אֲנִיִּים and עָנִי, and certain classes of socially dependent people – specifically the triad of the resident alien, fatherless and widow.¹² As a prohibition against the existence of poverty,¹³ verse 4a is thus not arguing for the elimination of all forms of social dependence within Israel. Rather it urges that those people who ordinarily do have the right to land ownership, should be able to exercise this right.

As is frequently asserted, verse 4a stands in some tension to the very need for the *Shemittah* in verses 1-3, and the acknowledgement that „the poor shall not cease from the land“ in verse 11 (Morrow 1995:102, 200-201; Seitz 1971:169). In my opinion, this tension forms an integral part of the rhetorical arrangement of the text. Lohfink (1990:37) remarks that Deuteronomy 15:11 describes the reality of life *in the land*, in which various factors could have contributed to progressive indebtedness. By contrast, Deuteronomy 15:4 describes the reality of life *in Israel*, and boldly maintains that the true Israel should know no poverty. In terms of the arrangement of the text, Deuteronomy 15:4-6, with its call for the elimination of poverty, precedes 15:7-11 with its appeal to make loans available to destitute fellow Israelites. Knowledge of the community's true character confronts and challenges the readerly perspective as a preparation for the call to open-handedness (cf Hamilton 1992:15).

12 These groups could not normally exercise the right to land ownership. The fatherless and the widow also did not enjoy the capacity to represent themselves in judicial proceedings (Lohfink 1990:33-36; Van Houten 1991:95-98). The stipulations concerning the three yearly tithe (14:28-29), the participation in the festivals of Weeks (16:9-12) and Tabernacles (16:13-15), and their entitlement to the gleanings from various crops (24:19-22) are all meant to develop a system of permanent care which recognises their social dependence.

13 Morrow (1995:93) points out that the לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ clause in 15:4a is to be regarded as a prohibition, because it is governed by the conjunction כִּי אִם. The conjunction gives the clause the quality of a restriction which serves to qualify a preceding statement (Schoors 1981:262). The elaboration of the *Shemittah* institution in vv 2-3 is thus qualified by the assertion that there should be no poor amongst Israel.

2.2.4 Confirmation of the rationale (vv 4b-6)

The use of the promulgation formula (אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה הוֹיִם) in Deuteronomy 15:4b-6, invests the speaker with the authority of the covenant mediator, who calls for obedience to the law as the premise for the divine blessing which will lead to the eradication of the poor.¹⁴ In syntactical terms, Morrow (1995:94) indicates that the prohibition against poverty in verse 4a is justified by means of the conditional construction in verses 4b-5. Within this construction, verse 5 presents the protasis and verse 4b the apodosis, so that divine blessing is conditional upon adherence to the law.¹⁵ Verse 6, which is introduced by a temporal כִּי clause in the protasis, then provides an exposition of the blessing which has been mentioned in verse 4b.

In the light of these syntactical considerations, it may be argued that the argumentative function of verses 4b-6 is to entrench the status of the speaker. Within the conditional construction of verses 4-5, the reference to divine blessing (4b) reflects the use of pathos to direct a personal (second person singular) appeal to the audience's self interests. It is in their interest to believe that God will bless them, and that such blessing will create an ideal community in which poverty will no longer exist. However, the condition for the creation of such a situation, is their acceptance of the speaker as the legitimate representative of the divine will (v 5). With the covenant mediator they have to believe that the *Shemittah* law forms part of a body of Deuteronomic stipulations, which constitutes a way of life that is consonant with the character of Yahweh.

The appeal to the audience's self-interests then receives further emphasis in verse 6, which further qualifies the blessing by pointing to Israel's ability to assume an independent position over against the nations. It may well be that the term מִשָּׁל in verse 6bβ does not refer to exploitation, but rather to the economic help which Israel is able to offer the other nations because of its own predicted social independence (Braulik 1986b:112). Be that as it may, by depicting the results of divine blessing as economic self-sufficiency, the discourse clearly fulfils a deliberative function by confronting the audience with the advantages of following the course of action which is set out in verses 4b-6. Adherence to the Deuteronomic law, including the *Shemittah*, becomes the necessary manner through which material prosperity – and thus the eradication of the category of the אֲנִיִּים – will be procured.

Verses 4b-6 thus serve as a confirmation of the rationale which is provided in verse 4a, by legitimating the speaker as the representative of a manner of life which is characterised by the blessing of God upon an obedient people.

14 The participle of צוּה together with הוֹיִם is used within Deuteronomy to refer to the present proclamation of the law in the plains of Moab (Braulik 1988:13). Because Yahweh is not used as the subject of the promulgation formula in its participial form (cf Braulik 1988:14), verse 5bβ must be understood as the address of the covenant mediator (Morrow 1995:98).

15 The integration of verses 4b and 5 within one conditional construction is underscored by the use of the two emphatic verbal constructions (Inf. plus Impf.) within both verses.

2.2.5 Refutation and conclusion (vv 7-11)

In marked contrast to the ideal which has been elaborated in the rationale and the confirmation of the rationale, Deuteronomy 15:7-11 opens and ends with a reference to the existence of the poor. While verse 7 merely accepts their hypothetical presence, verse 11 starkly asserts that they will remain a feature of life in the land (cf Hamilton 1992:13). I understand the unit as a refutation, which rejects attitudes and actions that will exacerbate the problem of poverty. By means of the refutation, the unit leads to a new understanding of the intention of the *Shemittah* law itself.

As Hamilton (1992:13) has demonstrated, the rhetorical force of verses 7-11 is already apparent in the personal address of the audience by means of the series of prohibitions and emphatic commands which are elaborated in verses 7b to 10a (cf also Morrow 1995:105). Hamilton's chart indicates how a series of two prohibitions in verse 7b („do not harden your heart“; „do not close your hand“), is followed by two emphatic commands which both use a free infinitive and imperfect construction in verse 8 („surely open your hand“; „surely lend“). The formula *השמר לך פן* in verse 9 assumes the force of a prohibition (Morrow 1995:106). Verse 10 then employs another emphatic command with a free infinitive and imperfect construction („surely give“), which is followed by a prohibition („do not let your heart begrudge“). Morrow (1995:108) draws on the alternating sequence of prohibitions and commands to argue that verses 7-10 can be portrayed as a ring composition which includes a chiasmic arrangement of prohibitions and commands in verses 7b-8 and 10a:

v 7a	כי clause
v 7b	prohibitions (2)
v 8	emphatic commands (2)
v 9	prohibition
v 10aα	emphatic command
v 10aβ	prohibition
v 10b	כי clause

This arrangement in terms of clause constituent analysis, suggests that verse 9 with its reference to the *Shemittah* year plays a central role within verses 7-11. The matter may receive greater clarification in the light of some further remarks on the arrangement of the unit. Firstly, it appears that verse 10 deliberately takes up terminology from verse 9 in order to develop a positive or appropriate response to the demands of the *Shemittah* year. In verse 9, the audience is admonished not to harbour a vain thought (*דבר בליעל*), which will result in an evil attitude (*ורעה עינד*) and a concomitant unwillingness to give (*ולא תתן לו*). Verse 10, by contrast, takes up each of the elements of verse 9 in reverse order, so as to delineate the required action and attitude: willingness to give (*נתון תתן לו*), without begrudging it (*ולא ירע לבבך*), establishes an action (*הדבר הזה*) which receives divine blessing. Verse 9 thus sketches a course of action which culminates in divine sanction (9b), while verse 10b

points to the material reward which flows from divine blessing (cf Weinfeld 1972:312). Secondly, as Seitz (1971:169-170) and Morrow (1995:109) have noted, verse 11b takes up elements from verses 7-8a, thereby creating an envelope structure around the negative and positive qualification of the *Shemittah* law in verses 9-10. The most obvious resumptive element is of course the repetition of the clause *פתח את ידך* from the start of verse 8a. However the reference to the „poor brother“ as the recipient of the open hand in verse 11b takes up the repeated reference to the „poor“ (*אביון*), who is qualified as a „brother“ (*אח*), in verse 7. Finally, „your land“ (*בארצך*) is mentioned in both verse 7 and at the end of verse 11, as the specific space in which solidarity with the poor is advocated.

With specific reference to the development of thematic elements, verses 7-8 thus serve as an introduction to the unit of verses 7-11, by elaborating the general principle of generosity and open-handedness. Verses 9-10 then review the negative and positive implications of the call to inner-Israelite charity, with specific reference to the *Shemittah* year. Verse 11 serves a conclusion to the unit, by reaching back to elements from verses 7-8a in order to reiterate the appeal for solidarity with the poor.¹⁶ There is clearly an element of tension between such an understanding of the arrangement of the unit, and the remarks which have been already made on verse 9 as the centre of a ring composition at the level of clause constituent analysis. In my opinion, such ambiguity forces the reader to engage verse 10 on two levels. On the one hand, it forms the culmination of a series of alternating negative and positive commands which flow from verses 7b to 10a, while, on the other hand, it relates specifically to verse 9 in its presentation of a positive response to the demands of the *Shemittah* year.

The preceding remarks on the flow of the text already point to its powerful rhetorical force. The artful use of alternating commands and prohibitions reinforces the emotional appeal for the adoption of certain attitudes and actions. Furthermore, the audience is led to consider negative and positive reactions to the *Shemittah* institution (vv 9-10), within the framework of the demand for compassion with the poor (vv 7-8/11).

The use of pathos as a major part of the unit's persuasive strategy is heightened by the prevalence of relational and somatic imagery. Hamilton (1992:31-40) has drawn extensive attention to both of these aspects. As far as relational vocabulary is concerned, the passage is characterised by the fourfold use of the term „brother“, which is used three times in apposition to the word „poor“ (*אביון*). Thereby, the audience is reminded that its obligation to the poor rests upon as wide as possible a definition of the members of the Israelite community as „kin“. Somatic imagery is apparent in the repeated references to the „hand“ (vv 7, 8, 10, 11) and heart (vv 7, 9,

16 Cholewiński (1976:223-224) argues that Deut 15:7-11, should be divided into two sections, namely vv 7-8 and 9-11. A general call for charity in vv 7-8, is specifically applied to the *Shemittah* year in vv 9-11. In my opinion, he does not make enough of the resumptive elements from vv 7-8a in verse 11b.

10), as well as the single mention of the „eye“ (v 9). The clauses which refer to the closing and opening of the hand in verses 7b β , 8a and 11b, define the addressees as possessors of power, who have the ability to shape society (Hamilton 1992:32). The description of the „heart“ which harbours base thoughts, and the „eye“ which is fixed on the „brother“ for evil in verse 9, points to the ability of negative attitudes and dispositions to bring about a close-fisted disregard for the needs of others. Interestingly, Hamilton (1992:33) suggests that the reference to the hardening of the heart in verse 7ba, invokes the incident of Sihon, who according to Deuteronomy 2:30 hardened his heart and was given over to conquest. This intertextual allusion serves as an evocative warning of the grave consequences of a hard-hearted and close-fisted attitude.

Finally, it is possible that verse 9 uses direct quotation to attribute a certain expected response concerning the *Shemittah* to the audience. The verse takes issue with and refutes this type of response. If such an explanation is plausible, then Perelmann and Olbrechts-Tyteca's notion of „dissociation“ may help to illuminate the rhetorical strategy which is at work in verse 9. According to Perelmann and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969:413), dissociation is prompted by an incompatibility which necessitates a modification in a concept's structure. It can be expressed in terms of a differentiation between term I and II, with term II providing the criterion for those aspects of term I which are of value, and those which are not. Thus the dissociation between terms I and II can, for instance, be expressed in terms of the contrast between appearance and reality (Perelmann & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969:416).

Deuteronomy 15:9 serves to express an incompatibility concerning the audience's potential understanding of the *Shemittah*. Merely on the basis of the thesis of verses 2-3, it may have been possible to develop a distorted view of the *Shemittah* which would actually discourage loans to the needy (term I). This distorted view, which is taken up in verse 9, is then consistently refuted through the redefinition of the *Shemittah* law which is developed in verses 7-11 (term II). The strategy of dissociation is thus at work in the various devices – arrangement of the text, alternation between emphatic commands and prohibitions, relational and somatic vocabulary, repetition of key terms – which are used to inculcate certain attitudes and actions in verses 7-11. The unit serves as a refutation, because it urges the audience to reject a distorted view of the *Shemittah* practice in favour of the recognition that it forms a crucial action of social care. The concern which motivates this redefinition of the *Shemittah* law, is carried by an appeal to place solidarity with poor „brothers“ before narrow considerations of personal economic advantage. By means of its reference to divine blessing (v 10b), the speaker indicates that the audience best serves its own interests by engaging in such actions of altruistic social concern.

There is no separate section which serves as a conclusion for verses 1-11. However, the resumptive elements which are found in verse 11, suggest that it can serve as a rather apt summary for not only verses 7-11 but also the whole section on the *Shemittah* law.

2.3 Deuteronomy 15:12-18

The manumission law is related to the *Shemittah* law by means of its concern with a seven yearly cycle, and shares the same background concerning the problem of the indebtedness of poor farmers. However, while the *Shemittah* law envisages a general remission of loans in the seventh year, the manumission law prescribes an individual release after the completion of a six year period of service (Cholewiński 1976:233; Braulik 1991:36; Chirichigno 1993:284-286).¹⁷ The manumission law thus treats the problem of debt-slavery as a distinct issue, rather than as a mere extension of the universal release which was effected in the *Shemittah* year. Deuteronomy 15:12-18 may be divided into the following parts: a) Introduction (v 12); b) Thesis (vv 13-14); c) Rationale (v 15); d) Refutation (vv 16-17) and e) Conclusion (v 18).

2.3.1 Introduction (v 1)

Deuteronomy 15:12 provides for the manumission of Israelites who have allowed either themselves or members of their family to be sold into debt-slavery (cf Lemche 1976:44; Cardellini 1981:272).¹⁸ The term עבֵרִי is used in an ethnic sense (Lemche 1976:44; Chirichigno 1993:277-278),¹⁹ while the explicit mention of the עֲבֵרִיָּה suggests their independent status before the law, and therefore also the possibility that they could be reduced to debt-slavery (Driver 1896:182-183; Mayes 1979:251).²⁰

By means of the introduction, the speaker prepares the audience to accept its

17 Various authors argue that the release of debt-slaves according to Dt 15:12 presents a specific application of the general seven year cycle which is established for the *Shemittah* year (cf Merendino 1969:113; Seitz 1971:171; Mayes 1979:250). Mayes points to the text of Jer 34:8ff, to argue that Zedekiah's simultaneous release of slaves was in accordance with the Deuteronomic law. However, as Chirichigno (1993:284-286) asserts, Dt 15:12 and 18 clearly point to a six year period of service. Furthermore, the expression שָׁבַע שָׁנִים in Jer 34:14 occurs in a context which affirms the obligation to release debt-slaves after a six year period of service. The link which the author of Jer 34:8ff makes between the manumission law and the sabbatical year should be understood as part of the specific rhetorical strategy of that passage, rather than as a definitive interpretation of Dt 15:12 (cf Weinfeld 1995:153-156).

18 In my opinion, Chirichigno (1993:222-223, 281) overstates the case that Dt 15:12 refers to the sale of the debtor's dependants rather than to the debtor himself. The fact that LH §117 refers specifically to the sale of dependants, need not imply that a similar delimitation applies to Dt 15:12. Self-sale by the head of a household was probably a last resort, but the practice could certainly have occurred.

19 Contra Wright (1984b:196-197) who understands the עֲבֵרִי as a specific class of landless persons.

20 Chirichigno (1993:281) rejects the interpretation of the עֲבֵרִיָּה as a woman of independent means, arguing instead that on the basis of LH §117 it refers to a female dependent of the debtor. To my mind, it is more plausible to assume that the Deuteronomic code accepts the possibility that women could inherit property (2 Kings 8:3), and could therefore assume an independent status before the law.

personal involvement in the successful implementation of the manumission provisions. The use of the verb שלח in the clause השלחנו חפשי מעמך, reminds the text's powerful addressees of their responsibility for the timely release of debt-slaves (Weinfeld 1972:283; Braulik 1986a:16). The concern for the protection of the rights of former debt-slaves, is further underscored by the insistence that they should be released „free“ (חפשי) – with a full restitution of their previous status (cf Chirichigno 1993:209-214).²¹

Tying in with its occurrences in the Shemittah law, the use of the term „your brother“ to foreground the עברי and the עבריה forms a significant aspect of the verse's persuasive strategy. The attention of every member of the audience is focused on their „kinship“ links with those persons who were sold into debt-slavery (cf Japhet 1986:77-78; Chirichigno 1993:278). The text thus appeals to the emotions of its addressees (pathos), to encourage them to treat debt-slaves from a perspective of communal solidarity.

2.3.2 Thesis (vv 13-14)

The use of anadiplosis to repeat the clause השלחנו חפשי מעמך at the start of verse 13 as well as the use of anaphora in the further repetition of השלחנו in verse 13b,²² indicates that the thesis elaborates upon the introduction, in order to present a specific delineation of the duties which the text's addressees have to fulfil upon manumission. The sequence of prohibition and emphatic command in verses 13b to 14a is reminiscent of the more elaborately worked out pattern in verses 7-11 (cf Morrow 1995:114), and highlights the contrast between sending the former debt-slaves away empty-handed, and with a generous provision from the master's own resources. The reference to the provision from the flock, threshing floor and wine press may be understood in a more figurative sense as a description of whatever supplies were available to the master (Chirichigno 1993:293). The point is that the audience has the capacity to provide significant economic assistance, which will help former debt-slaves in their endeavour to secure a meaningful existence upon the land.²³

21 Lemche (1975:142) argues that in Ex 21:2ff, the term חפשי denotes a dependency, either as a private clientage to a former master, or as a collective dependency upon the city state. He concedes, however, that in Dt 15:12, the term is used to refer to a complete restitution. By contrast, Wright (1984b:198) argues that even in Dt 15:12, the term חפשי denotes someone with no legal right to the possession of land. Chirichigno (1993:209-214) advances various arguments in favour of the interpretation of the term as „freedom“, with no legal impediment or status of dependency, in both the Covenant and Deuteronomic codes.

22 Anaphora – the use of the same word to begin a series of clauses – establishes connections between the successive thoughts in a sentence or series of sentences (Lausberg § 629; Kennedy 1984:27).

23 In the case of dependants of a debtor who had been sold into debt-slavery, they would have been able to bring such provisions back to the familial property (Chirichigno 1993:293). In other cases, it is possible that the former debt-slaves could have returned to their property, if this had not already been lost because of the debt. Whether the complete restitution of Israelite debt-

Verses 13-14 thus continue from verse 12, in developing the personal appeal to the text's addressees that they should use their power in the interests of their impoverished „brethren“. Verse 14b makes it clear that the warrant for such generosity is provided by their own experience of divine blessing (cf Hamilton 1992:25). Establishing a correspondence between their open-handedness and God's blessing,²⁴ points in the direction of deliberative discourse. Once again, the audience is invited to secure its status as the recipient of God's blessing by engaging in specific acts of social care.

2.3.3 Rationale (v 15)

Compared to the rationale and confirmation of the rationale which is developed in verses 4-6, verse 15 appeals far more directly to the audience's emotions. The motive clause in verse 15a,²⁵ establishes a direct analogy between the audience's memory of their status as slaves in Egypt, and the specific acts of *caritas* which they are expected to perform to debt-slaves (Hardmeier 1992:141-147). The reappropriation of the Egyptian suffering as an element of both the people's collective biography and an aspect of personal experience, thus facilitates a perspectival change. Through their identification with the Egyptian persecution as foundational event, the audience is challenged to express solidarity with socially vulnerable persons in their contemporary situation (Hardmeier 1992:148-151). The rhetorical force of the verse receives further impetus by the appeal to Yahweh's redemptive intervention in Egypt in Deuteronomy 15:15aβ. The manumission of former debt-slaves constitutes the expected course of action, by a people who claim to live in conformity with the character of God (Nasuti 1986:18).

In verse 15 the speaker thus uses powerful arguments, appealing both to the addressees' personal and collective identity, and to the character of God, in order to urge them to comply with the stipulations concerning manumission. Furthermore, the use of the speech of the covenant mediator in verse 15b, invests the speaker's appeal to the audience with the unique authority of the divine representative. An intriguing aspect of verse 15 is that the speaker has not pushed the implications of the argument further. Surely the liberative character of God constitutes a fundamental point of critique against the existence of an institution such as debt-slavery? Yet, within Deuteronomy 15:12-18, no argument is made for its abrogation.

slaves could also include the return of alienated property is unclear. Lemche (1976:44-45) seems to accept this possibility, while Kaufman (1986:282) rejects it.

24 Hamilton (1992:25) points to the break between verses 14a and 14b, so that the reference to divine blessing in 14ba is linked to the action of „giving to him“ in 14bβ. He thus translates: „Just as Yahweh your God has blessed you, so you shall give to that one“ (cf also Chirichigno 1993:289).

25 On the use of חכרה to introduce a motive clause, see Sonsino (1980:71).

2.3.4 Refutation (vv 16-17)

The use of כִּי at the start of verse 16, signifies that verses 16-17 present a new turn in the discourse (Cardellini 1981:274; Morrow 1995:113).²⁶ The use of direct quotation in verse 16aβ shifts attention from the perspective of the master to that of the debt-slave. It is from the slave's point of view, that the statement לֹא אֶצַע מֵעֶמֶךָ in 16aβ introduces the only case in which manumission will not take place. This statement echoes the sharply contrasting words תִּשְׁלַחֵנוּ הַפְּשִׁי מֵעֶמֶךָ that consistently address the master in verses 12, 13 and 18. By means of this contrast, the speaker accentuates that refusal of manumission can in no case be the prerogative of the master. As Hamilton (1992:21-22) asserts, verses 16-17 therefore affirm the general intention of the debt-slavery law, which is that slaves should go free. It is only the slave who can alter this expected course of events, by exercising the option for permanent slavery.

Hamilton (1992:20-21) also points to the analogy between verses 16-17 and verses 7-11. Both units introduce a situation which is contrary to what the audience has been led to expect. In verses 7-11, the audience is confronted with the reality of poverty as a feature of life in the land, despite the ideal of its eradication. In verses 16-17, the possibility is considered that manumission may not follow the normal period of service. The thrust of both units, however, is to refute actions and attitudes which will distort the true intention of both the *Shemittah* and the debt-slavery laws. In the case of Deuteronomy 15:16-17, it remains the debt-slave's prerogative to forego the granting of manumission. The addressees are not to abuse their economic power in order to enforce relationships of permanent slavery.

2.3.5 Conclusion (v 18)

Verse 18 serves as a conclusion for the whole unit of Deuteronomy 15:12-18. Shifting back to the perspective of the master, the key expression שְׁלַח הַפְּשִׁי מֵעֶמֶךָ reiterates the basic intention of the law, which is that debt-slaves should go free.

Remarkably, the two motivational clauses in verse 18aβ proceed to provide the clearest reflection on the addressees' self-interests in the whole of Deuteronomy 15:1-18. In particular, the statement of verse 18aβ that the work of the slave has been worth twice as much as that of a hired labourer, points to the economic advantage which has accrued to the master.²⁷ The allusion to material benefit, probably serves as a device which conditions the audience to accept the claims which verses 13-14 have placed upon their generosity. The effect of the conclusion, however, is that the debt-slavery unit achieves a fine balance between the interests of its powerful addressees and dependent Israelites. Compliance with the manumission law is

²⁶ In formal terms, verses 16-17 present a subsidiary case, which stands in contrast to the main case and its elaboration in verses 12-14 (Cardellini 1981:274).

²⁷ Following the proposal of Tsevat, scholars such as Mayes (1979:253) have translated the term כִּשְׁנַיִם as „equivalent“. Lindenberger (1991:479-482) has provided a detailed critique of this view, and indicates that the term should be understood in the sense of „double“.

informed both by the expectation of divine blessing (18b), and by the consideration of the material gain which has been derived from the practice of debt-slavery (18aβ).

2.4 Summary statements on inner texture

The discussion has considered rhetorical strategies which facilitate the development of the basic intentionality of the *Shemittah* and manumission units. The *Shemittah* section holds forth the ideal of a community without any poor, as a primary motivating force for dealing with situations of poverty which will continue to characterise life in the land. The redefinition of the *Shemittah* institution in verses 7-11, insists that it should be used specifically to alleviate the problems of the poor. The focus of the manumission unit lies on the responsibility of masters to provide former debt-slaves with a quality of release, which will enable them to secure a meaningful existence on the land. Both sections make noticeable use of pathos in order to influence the actions and attitudes of the addressees. They are reminded that they should use their power over the lives of their dependent „brothers“, in the interests of an equitable system of social care. As deliberative discourse, Deuteronomy 15:1-18 frequently points its audience to the benefits, especially in terms of divine blessing, which will accrue from such action. The debt-slavery unit, however, balances the interests of the addressees more finely with those of the economically dependent. Perhaps it acts as an acknowledgement that the achievement of the social ideal which is proclaimed in Deuteronomy 15:1-18, is ultimately dependent on the interested co-operation of the possessors of power.

3 Intertexture

3.1 Intertextuality

The discussion cannot review the complex notion of „intertextuality“. Rather, reference will be made to a few proposals which Van Wolde has made concerning a practice of intertextual interpretation which can be applied to biblical writings. Firstly, intertextuality is not primarily concerned with indexicality, or the reconstruction of causal relationships between so-called older texts (genotexts) and later texts (phenotexts – Van Wolde 1989: 45-46; 1991:341). Theories of causality operate with problematic notions of influence, which can lead to a devaluation of the author's creativity in the production of the text.²⁸ Secondly, intertextual interaction may be understood as a process through which the reader establishes analogies between a text and other texts, and for instance considers the syntagmatic arrangement and

²⁸ On the problem of influence, see also Clayton & Rothstein (1991:3-17). Discussing the decline of interest in the author as an intentional agent who was influenced by previous works, they remark: „What became important was not an author's source but the textual shaping of materials at hand, not debt but the leverage that the appropriation of resources might offer“ (Clayton & Rothstein 1991:13).

ungrammaticalities of one text on the basis of a correlation with other, similar texts (Van Wolde 1991: 344-351). Analogous texts are thus placed in synchronic or simultaneous conversation with each other, in order to understand the creative processes which have led to the selection and arrangement of material within a given text (Van Wolde 1989:47).

3.2 An intertextual perspective on Deuteronomy 15:1-18

With a view to the possibilities that are offered by the present paper, the review of Deuteronomy 15:1-18 in terms of intertexture, will use deliberate strategies of containment to delimit the discussion. An intertextual analysis could of course consider the *Shemittah* and debt-slavery laws against the framework which is created by the Mesopotamian institutions of *misarum* and *andurarum*, as well as other Ancient Near Eastern legal material (cf Hamilton 1992:47-72; Cardellini 1981; Chirichigno 1993; and Weinfeld 1995:162-168). Furthermore, Deuteronomy 15:1-18 should also be brought into relation with other intertexts from the biblical law codes which deal with debt-slavery and the fallow, sabbatical and jubilee years (Weinfeld 1972: 282-283; Lemche 1976; Wright 1984a; 1984b; Chirichigno 1993), or with broader issues of social justice in the codes in general (cf Hamilton 1992:73-97).

Within the present paper, however, Otto's reconstruction of the framing function of the debt-slavery and *Shemittah* laws in the proto-deuteronomistic form of the Covenant Code, will be used as an intertext for reflection on the place of Deuteronomy 15:1-18 within the arrangement of the Deuteronomistic Code in its extant form. While the use of an intertext which rests upon an earlier stage of redaction than the final form of the text is a provisional undertaking, it is argued that such a hypothetical text can constitute a legitimate part of the reader's textual repertoire. In using the Covenant Code as an intertext, no attempt will be made to treat its relationship to the Deuteronomistic Code in terms of literary influence. Rather, the debt-slavery, *Shemittah* and rest-day units within the Covenant Code (Ex 21:2-11; 23:10-12) are viewed as analogous texts to the *Shemittah* and debt-slavery units in Deuteronomy 15:1-18.²⁹ The reader is invited to reflect on the syntagmatic ordering of the analogous texts in both of the codes.

Otto (1988:52-53) argues that in its last proto-deuteronomistic phase, the Covenant Code (Ex 21:2-23:13) is provided with an introduction in the altar law of Exodus 20:24-26, which is followed by an outer frame in which the fallow and rest day stipulations in Exodus 23:10-12 correspond to the debt-slavery stipulations in Exodus 21:2-11. Their common 6/7 scheme gives expression to a theology of divine privilege. This theological perspective is manifested in the institutions of the rest day and fallow year in Exodus 23:10-12, where limitations are placed on human work and the enjoyment of the produce of the land. The separation of the rest day and the

²⁹ On Dt 15:2 as a further specification of the principle of the fallow year to the problem of debt release, see already Driver (1896:177-178) and also Lohfink (1992:22).

fallow year are a recognition of God's sovereignty over Israel's life in the land. Through their connection with Exodus 23:10-12, the debt-slavery sections in Exodus 21:2-11 have come to share the theology of divine privilege, which now constitutes the dominant perspective which legitimates the laws in the Covenant Code.

Otto (1993:260-278) has subsequently asserted that the Deuteronomistic Code in its pre-exilic form, has been developed in conscious redactional dependence upon the Covenant Code in its proto-deuteronomistic form. Because the present discussion approaches the Deuteronomistic Code from the different perspective of its final form, this aspect of his analysis will not be reviewed here.

Within the Covenant Code then, the slavery, *Shemittah* and rest day sections constitute a framework of divine privilege law. In accordance with certain structuring proposals which have been advanced by Crüsemann (1993:241-242), the place of the *Shemittah* and debt-slavery sections within the Deuteronomistic Code may, however, be understood rather differently. According to him, the code is introduced in Deuteronomy 12:2-14:21 by a block of material which deals with more specifically religious themes: Cultic unity (12), the exclusive worship of Yahweh (13) and the holiness of the people (14:1-21). The block of Deuteronomy 14:22-26:15 is arranged in a chiasmic manner, with a frame which is provided by the sections which deal with tithes in Deuteronomy 14:22-29 and 26:12-15:

- A 14:22-29: Tithes
- B 15:1-16:17: Social consequences of sacral times
- C 16:18-18:22: Officials and institutions
- D 19:1-21:9: Preservation of life
- C1 21:10-23:15: „Private“ institutions of the family (and sexuality)
- B1 23:16-25:19: Laws for the protection of the socially weak
- A1 26:12-15: Tithes

Crüsemann has not adduced detailed arguments to support his structural proposals. The attention of the present discussion will be limited to the plausibility of viewing Deuteronomy 14:22-29 and 26:1-15 (not merely 26:12-15) as frame sections, and to the links between the blocks of Deuteronomy 15:1-16:17 and 23:16-25:19.

Various observations which Otto (1993:263-264) has made with respect to his reconstruction of the pre-exilic Deuteronomistic code, can, be appropriated and modified to indicate that Deuteronomy 14:22-29 and 26:1-15 form a framework of divine privilege around the material in 14:22-26:15 in the code's present form. There are various links between the sections on the yearly tithe in 14:22-27 and the bringing of the first-fruits in 26:1-12. Thus the word ראשית in 26:2a, takes up the motif of the בכרה in 14:23. The phrase כל פרי האדמה acts as a summary of the fruits of the land in 14:23, while the use of הלך and the maqom formula takes up the uses of the formula in 14:22-27. In addition, 26:11 develops the themes of rejoicing (שמח) before Yahweh, and the care for the levites which are found in 14:26b-27. It is also possible to see the confession which accompanies the separation of the first-

fruits of the land's produce in 26:5-10, as an elaboration of the theme of fearing Yahweh in 14:23b. The units of 26:12-15 and 14:28-29 both deal with the three yearly tithe which is used to provide for the levite, the resident alien, the fatherless and the widow (14:29; 26:12, 13). The expression *אח כל מעשר תבואתך* in 26:12 takes up 14:28 verbatim, and through the words „when you have finished tithing“ (26:12a) indicates that the actions of bringing and storing the tithe which are specified in 14:28 have been completed. Finally, both 26:12-15 and 14:28-29 end with the theme of divine blessing. These observations suggest that the units of 14:22-29 and 26:1-15 which deal with the dedication of first-fruits, yearly and three yearly tithes express a theology of divine privilege which is used as a framework for the block of material in Deuteronomy 14:22-26:15.

Deuteronomy 15:1-16:17 extends the rhythm of sacral cycles from 14:22-29, to develop the system of social care which is linked with the seven yearly cycles of the *Shemittah* and manumission, as well as the thrice yearly festival cycle of 16:1-17. On a thematic level, the link between Deuteronomy 15:1-16:17 and 23:16-25:19 becomes particularly clear, when it is noticed that it is specifically the latter section which returns to laws which deal with the social protection of the *אביון* and *עני*, as well as the provision for the resident alien, fatherless and widow. Thus the terms *אביון* and *עני* occur only in the *Shemittah* law (*אביון* – 15:4, 7 (x 2), 9, 11 (x 2); *עני* – 15:11), as well as the sections which deal with the taking of pledges (*עני* – 24:12) and the timeous payment of the wages of the hired labourer (*אביון* – 24:14; *עני* – 24:14, 15). The problems of the payment of hired labourers and the taking of pledges for debt, delineate stages of economic dependence which are integrally related to the concerns with which the *Shemittah* and debt-slavery laws deal (cf Lohfink 1990:31-33). Furthermore the sections which deal with the maintenance of the justice of the resident alien, fatherless and widow (24:17-18) and their right to the gleanings of the harvest (24:19-21), present a further development of the provision which is made for the needs of these marginal groups by the three yearly tithe (14:29) and the festivals of Weeks (16:11) and Booths (16:14 – cf Lohfink 1990:33-36).

In thematic terms, it is also interesting that the block of Deuteronomy 23:16-25:19 starts with the problem of the fugitive slave (23:16-17), thereby setting up a link with the only other section which deals with the problem of slavery in Deuteronomy 15:12-18. In its radical elaboration of the rights of the slave, Deuteronomy 23:16-17 goes far further than Deuteronomy 15:12-18 to practically undermine the institution of slavery (Braulik 1986a:18; Hamilton 1992:119-120). The section on the exaction of interest in Deuteronomy 23:20-21, reflects the distinction which the *Shemittah* law makes between the „brother“ and the „foreigner“ (Hamilton 1992:121). Conceptually the problem of interest has everything to do with the economic deprivation of small farmers, which forms the focus of the *Shemittah* law. As with the *Shemittah* law, the section on interest is thus concerned to establish the kind of relationships which should characterise the Israelite community. The fact that Deuteronomy 23:21 uses a

blessing formula which stands the closest to Deuteronomy 15:10, by using the words *בכל משלח ידך*, does not seem accidental.

On a formulaic level, Crüsemann (1993:263) takes up a point which has been made by Weinfeld (1972:345), namely that blessing texts which use the formula „to bless the enterprise of“ are specifically characteristic of the sections of the code which deal with social care. The formulas are found in connection with the three yearly tithe (14:29), the *Shemittah* law (15:10), the manumission law (15:18), the provision for the resident alien, the fatherless and the widow within the context of the festival of Booths (16:15), the prohibition on the exaction of interest (23:21), and the unit which deals with the gleanings from the harvest (24:19). In Crüsemann's view the blessing formulas provide a trenchant demonstration of how the code binds these laws of social care into coherent blocks of stipulations (cf Crüsemann 1993:263). It may also be noted, however, that the formula concerning the remembrance of the slavery in Egypt is found only in Deuteronomy 15:15, 16:12, 24:18 and 24:22. All the texts deal with crucial facets of social care, referring specifically to people who either cannot or do not yet possess land, and who stand outside the normal supportive network of the family (Schottroff 1964:118-120; Braulik 1986a:13; Hardmeier 1992:133-134). The third conspicuous formula is *קרא עליך אל* *יהוה ויהי בכך חסא*, which is found only in Deuteronomy 15:15 and 24:15, and expresses the constitutive role of the poor in the establishment of the righteousness or sin of the free, land possessing Israelites to whom the code is specifically addressed (cf Kessler 1992:153-163).

While a more specific discussion of structure would have to explore the facets of social protection in Deuteronomy 23:16-25:19 more extensively, the above considerations point to clear thematic and terminological links between this block and the material in Deuteronomy 15:1-16:17.

3.3 Concluding remarks on intertexture

The discussion has argued that the function of the debt-slavery, *Shemittah* and rest-day stipulations as a framework for the proto-Deuteronomistic form of the Covenant Code, constitutes an intertext for the consideration of the role of the *Shemittah* and debt-slavery sections in the Deuteronomistic Code. Comparison of the analogous texts, suggests that the Deuteronomistic Code also uses a framework which expresses a theology of divine privilege to legitimate the stipulations which are found in Deuteronomy 14:22-26:15. This framework must, however, be located in Deuteronomy 14:22-29 and 26:12-15. The *Shemittah* and debt-slavery laws form part of a block of material in Deuteronomy 15:1-16:19, which stands in close relationship to laws concerning social protection in Deuteronomy 23:16-25:19. The intertextual undertaking of reviewing analogies between these blocks of material, allows the reader to view the *Shemittah* and debt-slavery laws as part of a wider network of laws within the Deuteronomistic code which are concerned with the social care of the poor, and socially dependent groups such as the resident alien, the fatherless and the widow.

The fact that these blocks of material in Deuteronomy 15:1-16:19 and 23:16-25:19 have been incorporated within a framework which rests upon a theology of divine privilege, indicates that the call for various acts of social care is motivated by the recognition of God's authority over every aspect of Israel's life. Thus the *Shemittah* and debt-slavery laws in Deuteronomy 15:1-18 are not only characterised by overt appeals to the divine will (15:3, 5, 9), divine blessing (15:4, 6, 10, 14, 18) and the character of God as liberator (15:15). The underlying theology which informs these laws is that Israel's life in the land depends upon its acknowledgement of God as sovereign.

4 Social and cultural intertexture

The following discussion will limit itself to only two aspects of a possible social and cultural analysis of Deuteronomy 15:1-18, namely social location, and social and cultural response.

4.1 Social location

Deuteronomy 15:1-18 will be interpreted in the light of societal developments in late pre-exilic Judah. Dutcher-Walls (1991:77-94), Crüsemann (1993:248-251, 311-314) and Albertz (1994:201-205) have all recently affirmed that the Deuteronomic reform movement accommodated diverse interest groups. A vital role was played by the 'am ha'arez, which was a middle class among the free land-owning farmers of Judah (cf Albertz 1994:201; Crüsemann 1993:249). After their deposition of Amnon (2 Kings 21:23-24), they allied themselves with the royal house in order to exercise effective political control over Judah during the time of Josiah. The reform movement would not have been possible, however, without the involvement of members of the Jerusalem priesthood,³⁰ and influential scribal circles, who were associated with the family of Shaphan.³¹ It also drew on the support of individual prophets such as

30 Crüsemann (1993:314-315) asserts that the reform was supported by levitical-priestly groups, but not by the Jerusalem priesthood. Albertz's view that the members of the temple priesthood were involved in the reform, seems more plausible (Albertz 1994:202). It seems that Deuteronomy uses the term „levite“ to refer to the distinct groups of the Zadokides in Jerusalem, and the priests in the provincial sanctuaries, and that all priests are thus referred to as „levites“ (cf Albertz 1994:221; Crüsemann 1993:314). It seems unnecessary to maintain that only the priests or levites who were linked to the provincial sanctuaries, rather than some who were also active at the central sanctuary, should have supported the reform movement.

31 The mention of Hilkiah, the High priest, and Shaphan, the scribe, in the report concerning the discovery of the „Book of the Law“ in 2 Kings 22:3ff, points to the involvement of members of the Jerusalem upper class in the Deuteronomic reform. For further comments on the families of Shaphan and Hilkiah, see Crüsemann (1993:312-313). Crüsemann points to the interesting, though speculative, thesis that Hilkiah's son Eliakim governed Judah during Josiah's adolescence (cf Isa 22:20-24).

Jeremiah (Dutcher-Walls 1991:92; Albertz 1994:203). The exclusion of traditional court circles from the movement, as Crüsemann (1993:314) argues, seems implausible. Dutcher-Walls (1991:80-82) draws on Lenski's study of the social structure of agrarian societies, and Carney's analysis of ancient aristocratic societies, to suggest that the struggle for power in late monarchic Judah was situated in the circles of the elite. Her analysis is suggestive, even though it perhaps makes too little of the trend towards urbanisation in seventh century Judah. It is therefore probable that the Deuteronomic reform attests to a power struggle within aristocratic groups in Jerusalem (Albertz 1994:202, 223).

The aims of the reform group may be clarified in the light of developments in Judah during the seventh century BCE. Halpern (1991:11-107) has marshalled evidence concerning the far reaching impact of the Assyrian campaign against Judah in 701 BCE (cf also Stohlmann 1983:147-175). Factors such as depopulation, population relocation, the flight of refugees to Jerusalem (Broshi 1974:21-26; Mazar 1990:417-424), and then the gradual repopulation of the land in the seventh century, favoured the dissolution of the larger kinship network in favour of a more nuclear family unit. Peasants who had lost traditional means of agrarian subsistence, had to compete for work in other sectors of the economy. Many of them may have found this transition difficult, and could have easily accumulated heavy debts in their struggle to exist as hired labourers. Through its possible direct involvement in the program of resettlement that was undertaken in the seventh century,³² the state also increased its control over economic production on the land (Halpern 1991:59-64). As a result, peasants who probably worked as sharecroppers or hired labourers, would be directly dependent on the state for employment and could easily be exploited by state officials. Debt-slavery would be a natural result of such exploitation. The weakening of traditional kinship structures aggravated these problems, by undermining a significant network of social support (Halpern 1991:70-74).

Against this background of social crisis, the reform movement must have attempted to create a new sense of solidarity amongst the people through the amelioration of social abuses.³³ The *Shemittah* and debt-slavery sections in Deuteronomy 15:1-18 form a crucial part of their vision for a more just society. By means of these stipulations they addressed especially those members of the elite who continued to benefit from practices such as latifundialization and rent capitalism, which concen-

32 For example, Stager (1976:145-158) has found evidence of three paramilitary outposts in the Buqe'ah area in the Judaean desert, at Khirbet Abu Tabaq, Khirbet as Samrah and Khirbet el-Maqari. On the basis of his work at Khirbet Abu Tabaq, he argues that the forts exercised control over the surrounding farmlands – perhaps suggesting that the farms were worked as part of a state-controlled enterprise. Various forts were also established in the northern and eastern Negev (Mazar 1990:442).

33 A consideration of other aspects of the reform, such as the program of cultic purification and centralisation, and its impact on traditional forms of piety, falls outside the scope of the present discussion (cf Albertz 1994:206-216).

trated the possession of property in their hands.³⁴ The members of the Judaeen elite and the *'am ha'arez* who stood behind the reform movement, must thus at least be credited with a social vision which was inspired by a new sense of communal solidarity and freedom. The discussion of social and cultural response will endeavour to define this social vision more closely.

4.2 Social and cultural response

Under social and cultural response, attention will be paid to Deuteronomy 15:1-18 in terms of both Wilson's typology of religious sects, and the typology of cultures which Robbins (1996:167-174) has developed under the rubric of a text's „final cultural categories“. These typologies are all based on modern sociological theory, and it is recognised that the Deuteronomic Code does not necessarily fit neatly into the categories of social and cultural response which such theories discern.

With reference to Wilson's typology of religious sects, Deuteronomy 15:1-18 relates most clearly to either reformist or utopian argumentation. A reformist stance stresses the role of social conscience, and encourages people to involve themselves in the world by means of good deeds. Social, political and economic institutions can serve good, rather than oppressive ends (Wilson 1969:369; Robbins 1996:149). As the discussion of inner texture has demonstrated, Deuteronomy 15 certainly develops the understanding that the *Shemittah* and debt-slavery institutions should serve the positive ends of economic redress. Through its various rhetorical strategies, it engages with and redefines existing social practices. Yet the thrust of Deuteronomy 15 within the context of the Deuteronomic Code points to the more comprehensive view of social change which is affirmed by a utopian social response. As Wilson (1969:370) indicates, a utopian response is more radical than a reformist stance, because it proposes a programme for the construction of the world on a communitarian basis. It is interested in not merely improving and reforming the existing society, but rather in implementing a new social order.

The possibility that Deuteronomy 15 approximates a utopian social response, can be correlated with various characteristics which Roberts (1978:111-126) has attributed to a counter-culture. A counter-culture is an alternative miniculture which engages in intra-cultural conflict with the dominant culture over central values, and supports its ideological position by means of a constructive definition of what constitutes „the good society“ (Roberts 1978:113-115, 120-122). Counter-cultures are thus intra-cultural phenomena, which arise out of the matrix of the dominant culture, and develop a viable and sustainable alternative model of life. True counter-cultures, according to Roberts (1978:122-124) are not merely counter-dependent on the dominant culture, but are intentionally formed communities with a self-sufficient system of values. Finally, Roberts (1978:121) asserts that counter-cultures are not interested in using legislative reform to implement their vision of a better society. Rather they

34 On the practice of rent capitalism, see Lang (1983:114-127).

hope that their example may prompt the dominant society to engage in a voluntary process of reform.

There is no indication that the social vision which is propagated in a unit such as Deuteronomy 15:1-18, actually resulted in the implementation of an alternative miniculture in late pre-exilic or exilic Judaeen society. What can be argued is that the *Shemittah* and debt-slavery sections contribute to the development of a counter-cultural ideal, which is supported by the system of values that is propagated in the code. Certainly Deuteronomy 15:1-18 contains a portrait of economic justice, which constitutes a fundamental critique of central values of Judaeen society. The misuse of debt-slavery to privilege the interests of the master is at least substantially qualified, while the *Shemittah* stipulation explicitly rejects the exploitation of poor farmers through the rigid exaction or denial of consumptive loans.

Furthermore, the frequent use of the term „brother“, which has been commented on in the review of inner texture, highlights the communitarian ethos which informs Deuteronomy 15:1-18. It is plausible that the notion of a community of „brothers“ uses the concept of fictive kinship (cf Elliott 1993:141), to encourage inner-Israelite solidarity. Even during the monarchic period, primary kinship units were constituted by extended families (*bet 'ab*) which were often located within the area of a single housing compound (cf Halpern 1991:49-51).³⁵ At a further level of the kinship structure, clan sectors which were based on real or fictional common ancestry, functioned as the agencies of village and town organisation (Halpern 1991:52-59). The Deuteronomic appeal to „brotherly“ solidarity, may thus present an archaising invocation of traditional kinship structures as a protest against the atomising tendencies which distinguished Judaeen society in the seventh century BCE. Lending to destitute „brothers“ according to their needs (Dt 15:8), accords with a theory of distributive justice which is based on the assumed intrinsic equality of all persons. As Roberts (1978:118-120) argues, such a theory leads to a quite different determination of central societal values, than systems which are based on the rigid maintenance of societal hierarchies. Through the various rhetorical strategies by which Deuteronomy 15:1-18 develops its distinct notion of community, it thus gives definition to central values concerning social care and the dignity of the economically dependent.

In my opinion, the function of the *Shemittah* and debt-slavery stipulations within the Deuteronomic Code is precisely that they continue to form part of the elaboration of a counter-cultural and utopian social vision. One cannot legislate an attitude of open-handedness towards the economically destitute. In this respect, these stipulations stand in a certain tension to aspects of the Deuteronomic reform programme, such as the process of cultic centralisation, which clearly were implemented during

35 The term *bet 'ab* is used in a fluid sense in the Hebrew Bible to denote the nuclear and extended family, as well as the lineage (cf Lemche 1985:245-259). Nevertheless, Stager's analysis of Iron Age villages, points to the practice of extended families living together on housing compounds (Stager 1985:1-35).

the Josianic period. Furthermore, if Albertz (1994:203-204) and Crüsemann (1993: 315) are correct, then the reform party could also have used the institution of the Jerusalem High Court during the time of Josiah, to influence the administration of justice in the interests of reform. It seems, however, that they could only use the power of rhetoric and theological appeal, to induce their contemporaries to embrace the vision of the „good society“ which they elaborated in sections such as Deuteronomy 15:1-18. With the disintegration of the reform movement after the time of Josiah (cf Albertz 1994:232-236), the Deuteronomic Code must have largely continued to function as the expression of an alternative model of life over against the dominant culture. The *Shemittah* and debt-slavery stipulations form an integral aspect of its counter-cultural and utopian ideal, concerning the construction of society along the lines of a more communitarian ethos.

4.3 Concluding remarks on social and cultural texture

The *Shemittah* and debt-slavery sections form part of the social vision which was elaborated by a reform movement which was active during the late pre-exilic and early exilic period in Judah. Through its propagation of central values concerning the dignity and „brotherhood“ of all members of the community, Deuteronomy 15:1-18 expresses a concept of distributive justice which is profoundly utopian and counter-cultural. Thereby, the text reacts against societal tendencies in seventh century BCE Judah, which favoured the dissolution of kinship networks and the exploitation of poor farmers and peasants by the aristocracy.

5 Concluding remarks on a socio-rhetorical analysis of Deuteronomy 15:1-18 with reference to the problem of ideological texture

The conclusion will use various strategies which Foucault has proposed for the analysis of power relations, as a means of drawing perspectives from the analysis of inner texture, intertexture and social and cultural texture together. The problem of ideological texture, will thus focus specifically on the management of discursive power in Deuteronomy 15:1-18.

Foucault defines a power relationship as the use of a total structure of action, to „conduct“ the possibilities for action which are open to other people (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982:220-222). According to him, the analysis of power relationships involves various steps:

- i) The definition of the system of differentiations that permits one to act upon the acts of others;
- ii) The types of objectives that are pursued by those who act upon the actions of others;
- iii) The means of bringing power relations into being;
- iv) The forms of institutionalisation of power;

v) The degrees of rationalisation of power relations. (cf Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982: 223)

Deuteronomy 15:1-18 can be briefly reviewed in the light of these steps. The system of differentiations in Deuteronomy 15:1-18 sets up a clear distinction between the speaker and the addressees. The speaker – „Moses“ – is presented as the covenant mediator (15:5, 11, 15), who is invested with the full authority of Yahweh's legitimate representative. S/he knows the divine will, and can thus appeal to the audience to live in accordance with the law (15:5) and with the character of God (15:15). The divine representative authoritatively announces the type of actions which will receive God's blessing (15:4, 6, 10, 18), as well as those which will meet with His sanction (15:9). By means of the system of differentiations in Deuteronomy 15:1-18, the reform movement entrenches its authority as the authentic guardian of the tradition. Through their potential resistance to the course of action which is prescribed in Deuteronomy 15:1-18, the addressees place themselves in tension with the divine will itself.

The objective of the discourse is the implementation of a more equitable system of distributive justice. The speaker endeavours to „conduct“ the actions of the addressees so that they will co-operate in the redefinition of the *Shemittah* and debt-slavery institutions, and accept the substantial economic sacrifice which such action entails. For this purpose, it must be argued that the utopian and counter-cultural social vision which is developed in Deuteronomy 15:1-18 presents the authentic expression of community life, and that the adoption of this model of life lies in the interests of the elite possessors of power.

The means of bringing power relations into being, can be discussed together with their institutionalisation and rationalisation. The authorisation of the speaker's social vision is achieved, firstly, by means of the various rhetorical devices which have been reviewed in the section on inner texture. The use of pathos is already apparent in the predominant use of the second person singular address, to establish the text's direct appeal upon the audience. The rhetorical arrangement of both the *Shemittah* and debt-slavery sections performs a directive function, in stressing the basic intentionality of the laws. Acts of open-handedness towards the poor (15:7-11), take place against the backdrop of an ideal community situation which no longer knows the presence of the אֲבוֹנִים (15:4-6). The thrust of the manumission law that all should go free (15:12/13-14), is not altered by the slave's possible election of permanent slavery (15:16-17). Furthermore, the use of sequences of prohibitions and emphatic commands (15:7-10, 13b-14a) and the repetition of key terms which are associated with somatic and relational vocabulary, all contribute to the swaying of the audience's inner attitudes and actions. The frequent use of the term „brother“, is meant to bring about a perspectival change towards the poor (אֲבוֹנִים) and former debt-slaves. The total effect of these and other rhetorical strategies, is to endorse the speaker as the upholder of the true communitarian ethos which should characterise Israel.

The social vision of Deuteronomy 15:1-18 receives further legitimation by means of the framework of the theology of divine privilege which encompasses Deuteronomy 14:22-26:15. The speaker points to the recognition of divine sovereignty, as the ultimate ground for the acts of inner-Israelite solidarity which are demanded in Deuteronomy 15:1-18 and the related section of Deuteronomy 23:16-25:19.

The establishment of discursive power, however, involves more than theological appeal, and the use of rhetorical techniques to endorse a particular view of society. Finally, the potential credibility of the speaker is established by the deliberative appeal to the audience's self-interests. Compliance with the *Shemittah* law not only ensures the economic independence of the Israelite community (15:4b-6). Through the correlation of acts of social care with the receipt of divine blessing (especially in 15:10 and 15:18), the addressees are urged to secure their own material concerns through altruistic provision in the needs of the poor and manumitted debt-slaves. The debt-slavery section admittedly goes further than the *Shemittah* law, in maintaining the economic advantage of the former master (15:18a β). Yet both units continue to affirm the position of the addressees as possessors of power. It seems, then, that Deuteronomy 15:1-18 achieves a rather fine rationalisation of power relations. Paradoxically, the addressees are invited to accept an alternative model of life which, for all its radicality and insistence on a community of „brothers“, does not finally question their privileged status in society. The speaker – the members of the reform party – institutionalise their own power, by projecting themselves as the guardians of the community's true ethos. Yet their power, and their ability to implement their social vision, consistently presupposes the power of their addressees. Deuteronomy 15 is not innocent discourse. For both the architects of a new social order, and the possessors of economic power, social justice is ultimately a question of the legitimation or rationalisation of power.

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