I. Setting the Stage: A Critical Balance
A. The setting, poetry, drama, etc., of Sefer Devarim
B. The place of sefer in Chamisha Chumshei Torah

II. Authorship

These are the words that Moshe addressed to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan:—
Through the wilderness, in the Arabah near Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Di-zahab,

These are the words that Moshe addressed to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan. On the other side of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moshe undertook to expound this Teaching. He said:

Abaye said: They taught this only with regard to the curses that are recorded in Leviticus, but with regard to the curses that are recorded in Deuteronomy, one may interrupt them by having two different people read them.

What is the reason for this distinction? These curses in Leviticus are stated in the plural, and Moshe pronounced them from the mouth of the Almighty. As such, they are more severe. However, these curses in Deuteronomy are stated in the singular, and Moshe said them on his own.

II. Clearly Unclear
A. Lining Up...
“He began to explain...,” just as "Behold, now I have begun...”

Similarly, Rabbi Saadia Gaon understands this phrase to mean that Moshe "waxed lengthy in his explanation of the Torah" (apparently of his own volition)

Moshe decided to explain that which he thought would become unclear after his death...

"For it is true and clear that the entire Torah, from the beginning of the Book of Bereishit to the words "to the eyes of all Israel" (the final words of the book of Devarim), were spoken from the mouth of the Holy One Blessed Be He directly to the ears of Moshe."

III. From Puzzlement to Controversy

"This is what the Hebres say: "All the words that I speak to you,..." And the Hebres say: "This is what the Hebres say: All the words that I speak to you,...""
These are the words, etc. The word Aldi is restrictive, especially in regard to what has been written previously. Seeing Moshe recorded in this Book only words which he had spoken on his own initiative, the Torah wishes to emphasize that only the words of admonition recorded in this Book were spoken by Moshe on his own initiative. We are told in Megillah 31 that Moshe personally composed the curses recorded in this Book, and that even legislation which Moshe repeated in this Book he had not been commanded to repeat but did so of his own volition. The Torah was concerned that we might conclude that just as Moshe had felt free to say things of his own volition in this Book he might have done so in the previous four Books. This is why this Book commences with the words, "alone the words Moshe spoke of his own volition, none other."

Rabbi Moshe Leib Rabinovich, Current Muncatchzer Rebbe,
The Ohr Hachaim could not possibly believe that Moshe authored the Book of Devarim independently, Rabbi Rabinovich maintains, when the Talmud clearly condemns an individual who denies the divine authorship of even one sentence of the Torah.

After mentioning and rejecting another possibility, suggested by an unnamed kabbalist, that the Ohr Hachaim was actually punished for creating this mistaken impression; the Muncatcher insists on reinterpreting the Ohr Hachaim’s position in line with that of the Maharal and the Vilna Gaon, cited below.

IV Bridging the Divide
Maharal’s incisive explanation of Moshe’s role in Devarim, based on the gap between the notain and the mekabel in God-man dialogue.

**Rabbi Meir Dan Plotzky (Kli Chemda)**

[Building on the Maharal...]

Although Moshe’s primary role vis-à-vis the first four volumes of the Torah is that of faithful scribe of God’s Word, even those volumes, at times, reflect Moshe’s own contributions. Moshe’s dramatic directive to the Levi’im to summarily execute the perpetrators in the sin of the Golden Calf; his mistaken interpretation of a ritual law following the death of Nadav and Avihu; his addition of an extra day to the period of preparation preceding Revelation; his numerous discussions with God; are but a few examples of the many passages in Shmot, Vayikra and Bamidbar that mirror autonomous dialogue and action on the prophet’s part.

The distinction drawn by the Ohr Hachaim and other commentaries between the Book of Devarim and the earlier texts is actually more subtle than might first appear. Moshe’s independent words and deeds certainly contribute to the narrative of three of the four initial volumes of the Torah. *His final recording of the law in those texts, however, mirrors God’s instructions, word for word, without change.* Similarly, towards the end of his life, Moshe independently embarks upon a series of lengthy explanations and elaborations of Torah Law, in order to cement the people’s understanding and appreciation of specific mitzvot before his death. After Moshe offers these analyses, *God eventually directs him to record them in the Book of Devarim, as part of the Torah text.*

God’s commandment to transform the words of the Torah into a complete written record thus ultimately includes, not only God’s contributions to the text, but Moshe’s, as well. These separate threads are woven into one cohesive whole, as God dictates to Moshe, each volume of the Torah, word by word and letter by letter. While Moshe’s contribution to the Book of Devarim, therefore, is more extensive; the actual authorship of this fifth volume of the Torah does not differ from the first four. By accepting and incorporating Moshe’s contributions into a *divinely authored Torah text*, God makes those contributions an integral part of His divine law.¹

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¹ Kli Chemda
Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the most recent Lubavitcher Rebbe

Moshe actually serves, not simply as a scribe, but as a prophetic messenger vis-à-vis the first four books of the Torah. In the formation of these texts, Moshe receives God's messages and then proceeds to transmit those messages to the people in his own words. With the advent of Devarim, however, Moshe experiences a “joining” with the Divine that he has not experienced before. "In the latter instance, the Divine Presence enclothed itself in his (Moshe’s) conceptual processes until the two were united in a bond so powerful that ‘the Divine Presence spoke from his (Moshe’s) throat.’"

From the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s perspective, God's direct involvement in the authorship of the Torah text increases, rather than decreases, with the advent of the Book of Devarim. In this volume, and in this volume alone, God’s words emerge directly and unchanged through Moshe.

V. The Ultimate Message of Devarim’s Character: The Full Definition of Mesora

Implications for Shabbat Chazon...

1. Moshe’s Fear

Then all of you came to me and said, “Let us send men ahead to reconnoiter the land for us and bring back word on the route we shall follow and the cities we shall come to.”

2. The Sin

And they spread an evil report of the land upon which they had spied to the children of Israel, saying: 'The land, through which we have passed to spy upon, is a land that eats its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are men of great stature. 32 And there we saw the Nephilim, the sons of Anak, who come of the Nephilim; and we were in our own eyes as grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes.'

3. Continuing Impact

The night after the spies report was Erev Tisha B’Av. HaShem declared to them: You have cried for naught this evening and I will therefore set for you crying across the ages!