Introduction

It is never a waste of time to study the history of a word. Such journeys, whether short or long, monotonous or varied are always instructive.

    Lucien Febvre, "*Civilisation*: Evolution of a Word and a Group of Ideas" (1930)

In the revised edition of *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams offered a pithy, twenty-two-line entry for "genius." Noting the English word's origin in the identical Latin term, he observed that "the development towards the dominant modern meaning of [genius as] 'extraordinary ability' is complex; it occurred, interactively, in both English and French and later in German."[1] The present book takes a first step toward charting that complex history by examining the fortunes of words used in early modernity to denote the qualities that would coalesce into something more-or-less recognizable as the modern notion of genius. While this modern notion is as capacious and contested as its earlier counterparts, it conjures up associations with exceptionality that include outstanding creativity and intelligence, inborn brilliance, charisma, and a social and psychological disposition that is outside the norm.[2] By comparison, early modern ingenuity was often described as an inborn power brought out by training and industry, which could be affected by environment. Ingenuity, in its highest form, often manifested as sharp wit, fine skill, quick thinking, and swift execution.

By looking to early modern ingenuity, this book seeks to offer (to borrow Terence Cave's term) a "prehistory" of genius before Romanticism, suspending belief in the teleology of the modern concept by excavating the language used to define and express a set of meanings in flux.[3] In so doing we write against the flow of history and modern disciplinary boundaries, moving backward through time to pursue the ways in which certain words rose to prominence, changed shape, and retreated from view; inflated and deflated semantically; sedimented into settled uses or veered off in unexpected directions. This is a form of historical lexicography, the aim of which is not to assemble dry origin stories characteristic of certain kinds of etymology, but to reveal the particularity and peculiarity of lexical traces as they relate dynamically to culture and society. It is a kind of philology that seeks to show how significant words produced meaning *in* history and *as* history.[4]

This book presumes that without attention to the histories of words we cannot hope to comprehend the complex issues to which their meanings gave rise, nor attend sufficiently to the messy processes by which social, intellectual, and cultural notions are forged and transformed. As such, and unlike those studies that have approached the history of genius through the analeptic retrojection of a predetermined concept, we follow Neil Kenny's lead by beginning with language.[5] In his studies on early modern curiosity, Kenny has offered a robust defense of word history as an alternative to the kind of *Begriffsgeschichte* in which concepts trump language by preceding words in the study of their history.[6] Our book shares Kenny's commitment to word history as a means of avoiding the unhistorical superimposition of inappropriate, fixed meaning on energetic premodern signs.[7] Yet where early modern curiosity clusters around a lexically homogeneous set of terms deriving from a single Latin root (*cura*), the qualities with which we are concerned were signified by a larger constellation of words. This comprised not only *genius* in Latin and its vernacular derivatives, but also *ingenium* and its many translations, along with a range of vernacular terms with Teutonic roots. Indeed, the meanings that started to attach to *genius* around the turn of the eighteenth century, as it journeyed toward "extraordinary ability," came more from *ingenium*-related words than

from *genius* per se, such that our study may more accurately be called a history of ingenuity.

Histories of modern genius often cite *ingenium* as its fellow, much as Kant pointed out in the *Critique of Judgment* §46 that "Genius is the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art."[8] The two etymologies have often overlapped since Latin antiquity, but the cultural dominance of *genius* in English (and *génie* in French, *Genie* in German, and so on) has obscured the fact that, until the late eighteenth century, *ingenium* was by far the richer of the two terms. Since Roman antiquity, lawyers had talked about a cunning trick or evil plot as an *ingenium*. This language borrowed from the notion of *ingenium* as machination; siege machines were known as *ingenia*: the products of human craft. By analogy, every writer knew that Quintilian and Cicero list a swift *ingenium* among the basic requirements of the wordsmith, skilled in constructing arguments as well as in the poetics of literary invention. Indeed classical rhetoric and its reception was one of the most important frameworks in which the culture of ingenuity was articulated. The schools and universities of the Middle Ages and Renaissance proved a fertile seedbed for ingenuity. In grammar teaching, in discussions of oratorical style, and in the study of language as a means of personal cultivation, *ingenium* loomed large.[9] In medical faculties, the *ingenium* was the subject of therapy; in arts faculties, it was the mental capacity for logical invention, the discovery of middle terms. Outside the universities, art theorists turned to *ingenium* as the source of pictorial invention, just as courtiers made it central to questions of social standing and civility. A history of ingenuity could focus on these sites and more.

Yet such an approach would be compromised if we did not first examine the lexical history of ingenuity more generally, which requires the investigation not just of a single word but of a cluster of terms. This comprises, in Latin: *genius* and *ingenium*; in Italian: *genio* and *ingegno*; in Spanish: *ingenio* and *agudeza*; in French: *engin*, *esprit*, *naturel*, and *génie*; in German and Dutch: *Art/Aerd*, *Sinnlichkeit/sinnrijk*, *Gemüt* (German), and *geest* (Dutch); in English: *genius*, *ingenuity*, *wit*, and *cunning*. For reasons practical and methodological, in studying these

words we have drawn on a single corpus: printed dictionaries and other lexical works, published between ca. 1470 and ca. 1750.[10] Practically, while this corpus is substantial, it is not so large as to prohibit a thorough, systematic investigation of our keywords. While recent work in digital humanities has made available enormous and diverse corpora that can be searched by keyword, coverage across languages and time periods is sufficiently patchy that such resources are of limited use for comparative studies of early modernity. Moreover, while the kind of quantity-driven approach afforded by big data is useful for identifying broad linguistic (and perhaps conceptual) trends by tracking the frequency and collocations of a given term, such methods can flatten out the microphenomenal twists and turns that are revealed by examining words in close, historical context.[11] By contrast, focusing on dictionaries enables us to tell fine-grained stories through sources that—far from being transparent windows onto pre-existing meanings—reveal the kinds of ideological bias and critical fault-lines that determined how the language of ingenuity was defined, used, and manipulated.[12]

We consider the apparent limitations of this corpus—the "artificiality" of definition compared to the "naturalism" of words in use; conformation to the conventions of genre; time lapse between the currency of a given meaning and its definition by lexicographers—as an opportunity rather than a disadvantage. Early modern dictionaries reveal the struggle to manage and explain the language of ingenuity, not simply in their definitions, but through their absences, repetitions, obfuscations, thefts, and fanciful imaginings. Polyglot lexica, in particular, offer a magnified view of the relationships between local varieties of ingenuity and the translatability (or difficulties therein) between terms, putting the lie to the notion that any of our keywords are simply "untranslatables," as a recent lexicon has implied.[13] Most significantly, this translatability underpins our conviction that a strictly nominalist approach to the history of ingenuity is inadvisable, since early modern dictionary-makers clearly believed that certain synonyms sufficiently (if not fully) captured the meaning of our ingenuity keywords. That is, they maintained a potential distinction between *verba* and *res* by assuming that disparate terms could adequately be used to describe or

define the same thing.[14] Thus, our concern here is not with the metaphysics of concepts, their formation and expressibility in language, but with the semantics of culture. In this book we have sought to deploy a procedural tactic that begins with, but need not simply remain at, the level of language. We consider this a necessary first step in identifying a certain something that was frequently expressed in words, but which was equally evident outside and beyond them.

We have selected our terms according to two criteria. First, according to the kinship of words deriving from or translating the Latin *genius* and *ingenium*. Second, according to the prevalence of certain words in this kinship group. By this we mean the collocative frequency with which equivalent terms recur in the dictionaries. To give an example, in *A Worlde of Wordes* (1598), John Florio translates the Italian *ingegnòso* with a string of English synonyms: "wittie, wilie, ingenious, subtile, wise, cunning, craftie, full of invention." Only three of these synonyms recur frequently in close proximity to one another in the English lexica: *witty*, *ingenious*, and *cunning*. According to our criteria, therefore, these three terms are "keywords" in the ingenuity "family" of words, while the remainder—*wilie*, *subtile*, *wise*, and *craftie*—are "neighbors." It is important to emphasize that this method requires judgment rather than simply counting words, not least because in many lexica the synonym strings and definitions are long and include lengthy quotations. As will be apparent from the chapters on individual languages, in applying these criteria we have drawn upon our familiarity with word use in the discursive contexts that shaped early modern ingenuity.[15]

In exploring the relationships between the nuclear family members of ingenuity in multiple languages and across several centuries, we are concerned less to identify the history of a single concept with an "ineliminable core" than to reveal the emergence, diffusion, and transformation of a shared culture.[16] This "culture of ingenuity" was capacious, mobile, and frequently idiosyncratic. Yet it was always concerned with specific characteristics, clustering around natural inclination, creative potential, craft talent, or mental agility. These were not new notions. Something comparable is evident in the *engin* so prominent in High Middle Ages romance and in the *métis* that pervaded ancient Greek

culture and society.[17] Indeed, it is tempting to define the early modern culture of ingenuity in terms similar to Detienne and Vernant's description of *métis* in their now-classic *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*. For those authors, the semantically polyvalent *métis* is "a type of intelligence and of thought, a way of knowing; it implies a complex but very coherent body of mental attitudes and intellectual behaviour which combine flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism, various skills, and experience acquired over the years."[18] All these properties are observable in early modern ingenuity, which nevertheless differs from its ancient forbear in at least one crucial respect. *Métis*, according to Detienne and Vernant, is "never made manifest for what it is, it is never clearly revealed in a theoretical work that aims to define it. It always appears more or less below the surface, immersed as it were in practical operations . . . ."[19] Yet ingenuity, while equally operative, was subject to explicit theoretical treatment in the period with which we are concerned, be it in Juan Huarte de San Juan's seminal and much translated medical treatise, *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias* (1575), or in Descartes's rules for the direction of the mind, *Regulae ad directionem ingenii* (ca. 1620s, first published in Dutch translation, 1684).[20] Thus, ingenuity not only blossomed in the early modern period; it also attracted numerous attempts at definition and explanation in a host of discursive domains, from natural philosophy to poetics, technical treatises to artistic theory. As one scholar recently put it, by the early modern period "*ingenium* had become a whole empire."[21]

Semantic Axes of Ingenuity

This book cannot hope to chart fully that empire, not least because certain important topics are only dimly apparent in the lexica, such as genial melancholy, inspiration, and the sublime.[22] Rather, we offer an outline map of some of ingenuity's contours, boundaries, and limits, which may be populated, revised, and expanded by future work. Thus the very stable and conservative word histories of *genius* in French and English do not quite do justice to the thriving conceptual history of the notion, which must largely be sought elsewhere.

We have found that the language of ingenuity tends to cluster along four axes of meaning: moral, cognitive, presentational, and artificial (the latter meaning both contrived and artful). These axes are a useful grid against which to plot the changing cultural and epistemological trajectories of ingenuity, revealing what is at stake in this history. They help us compare different emphases and uses of the word family of ingenuity, hinting at the different vocabularies available at different times and places. Not all characteristics were invoked all at once, but varied over the period we examine, across Europe.

First, we mean "moral" in the broadest possible early modern sense, encompassing both nature and identity. For the language of ingenuity addressed the question of what made one distinct, what gifts and abilities one might have—or lack. This grand sense of "moral" ran closely with the narrower question of moral responsibility for one's desires and abilities. Was one's temperament shaped by birth, so that someone born noble (*ingenuus*) was also born gentle? Could trickery or licence be excused by saying one could not determine one's inborn inclinations (*indulgere genium*, *suivre son génie*)? Unlike Romantic genius, *ingenium* was something everyone had; the challenge, tackled most influentially by Huarte de San Juan, was to classify the specific ingenuity of an individual or a particular group.[23]

Ingenuity's grand moral sense can be distinguished from a second axis of meaning, which turns on its cognitive roles. Theorists remained ambivalent about the source of such capacities. How much was simply what one was born with, and how much could be sharpened, softened, or redirected through habit and study? Not only was *ingenium* thought to be the faculty by which one alighted on the middle term in a logical syllogism, but physicians thought of it as a distinctive faculty, while thinkers like Juan Luis Vives made it stand in for the whole apparatus of the soul's various faculties.[24] Thus, in different places and times, ingenuity could refer sweepingly to the mind in general, or quite precisely to certain cognitive processes. While early Renaissance physicians and philosophers simply thought of *ingenium* as the capacity for invention (logical, rhetorical, or otherwise), Goodey has observed that over the sixteenth century *ingenium* became increasingly a part of a

concrete faculty psychology, often associated with the imagination and with "quick-wittedness"—fast forms of cognition.[25]

Along a third axis, ingenuity was a matter of presentation. In displaying itself, ingenuity played on the knife's edge between hiding and revealing, judgment and insouciance. As Sallust's often-repeated maxim put it, "no one ever deployed their *ingenium* without a body."[26] The hidden dimensions of wit must out in works, words, and deeds. The display of ingenuity required on the one hand a certain liberality, the sign of an ebullient fertility—hovering in and out of sight. One found something "ingenious" when the effect had an unexpected source; when unlikely parts made a surprising whole; when a contrivance elegantly worked by hidden means. Likewise, it took ingenuity to recognize such displays. One of ingenuity's great theorists, Emanuele Tesauro, explained that "it is a secret and an innate delight of the human intellect to find that it has been sportively deceived; because the transition from illusion to disillusion is a kind of learning by an unexpected way; and therefore most pleasing."[27] On the other hand, unlike Romantic genius, ingenuity had to be presented with careful judgment. Courtiers and salon-goers jousted wits in deadly play, but always within the bounds of decorum. The paradox was that a powerfully inventive mind was recognized by its play within a prudent distance of the measured rule. Thus, what distinguishes Romantic genius from pre-Romantic *ingenium*—the Nietzschean *Übermensch* from the exemplary court artist—is that the former gives sovereignty to itself. In pre-modern Europe, the sovereignty of ingenuity is given by another ruler: the prince, who gives the artist licence and is himself granted sovereignty by God.[28] This carefully choreographed dance of ingenuity introduced, however, a significant tension. Gifted individuals—the *virtuosi* and *ingegniosi* of the early modern court—had to push beyond the norms of decorum in order for their sovereign *ingenia* to be recognized. They had to push just far enough, without breaking the sovereign's trust (as Galileo infamously did, with disastrous personal consequences).

The fourth, final axis around which we see ingenuity aggregate has to do with these limits: the "artificial" or "artful." To play with rules implies mastery over them. In Latin, Italian, and Spanish, ingenuity

was often paired with industry not only in contrast but sometimes in pleonasm; ingenuity displays both talent and mastery of a craft.[29] The ingenious courtier, courtesan, or clockmaker matched natural cunning with technique. In particular, the mechanical, artisanal overtones of the lexis of ingenuity stretched under divergent pressures. The artisan's ingenuity had long been ambivalent, praised for its capacity even as it was blamed for the meanness of mechanics. Neither meaning disappeared. In fact, they spread, and the notion of "artificiality" was transferred from people to objects as well. Although early humanists tended to ignore the fact that in Latin antiquity *ingenium* was also a legal ruse or a siege engine, these objective meanings multiplied in some of the early modern vernaculars to fill early modern material culture. Thus paintings, telescopes, and Richelieu's new bureaucratic machinery were all ingenious as displays of their makers' minds and hands. This went beyond artisans. One of the most powerful analogies to structure premodern knowledge, of nature as craftsman, ensured that natural objects too could be ingenious, melding art and nature into a single category. Thus not only could a gallant *salonnière* possess *esprit*, but Nature herself might display "spirited" matter.

Lexicographical Ingenuity and the Genius of Language

The practice of lexicography itself is a good example of the "artfulness" of ingenuity. The very work of lexicography exercises one's wit, Ambrogio Calepino observed in the preface to his 1502 *Dictionarium*: "Non enim tam instruendorum aliorum quam mei exercendi ingenii gratia id efficere aggressus sum" (For I set out to do this not so much to teach others as for the sake of exercising my *ingenium*).[30] In reflecting on their own practices, humanist lexicographers developed a discourse on ingenuity as the critical textual ability to elucidate meaning through gloss, commentary, emendation, the right grasp of authorial intentions, and styles. The roots of this discourse are to be found in classical rhetoric, in which *ingenium* is identified as one's natural ability to generate *copia*, that is, to find or invent the good subject-matter or *res* for oratory.[31] In this tradition, *ingenium* is the source of invention. In the early modern period, however, *ingenium* developed further into the

site of sound, critical judgment.[32] Artful selection and excerpting gen-
erated lexicographical *copia*, captured in the alphabetically arranged
commonplaces and glosses of dictionaries. Yet this enterprise was a
slippery one; fictitious etymologies and overclever wordplay were the
province of the *logodaedalus*: a dangerously cunning wordsmith.[33]

One of the earliest instances relating ingenuity to various human-
istic practices of textual criticism is in Polydor Vergil's preface to his
1496 edition of Niccolò Perotti's posthumous *Cornu Copiae* (1489).[34]
The first Renaissance dictionary of classical Latin, the *Cornu Copiae*
was in fact a word-by-word commentary on Martial's epigrams. That
the beginnings of neo-Latin lexicography should consist of the copi-
ous unravelling of Martial's witty compressions is no coincidence.[35]
As laconic genres on the rise throughout the period, epigrams, adages,
and aphorisms offer a particularly apt perspective on early modern in-
genuity. Their conceits and concision displayed the quick-wittedness
of their authors and demanded of their readers an equally swift mind.[36]
Lexicographically, they are connected to the development of genius.

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) provides three definitions of
aphorism:

1. A "definition" or concise statement of a principle in any science.

2. Any principle or precept expressed in few words; a short pithy
   sentence containing a truth of general import; a maxim.

3. *abstractly*, The essence or pith. *Obs. Rare*.

Neither these nor the supporting quotes that accompany them invoke
genius in any sense. Nevertheless, these words *genius* and *aphorism*
rubbed shoulders through their shared relationship with *wit*. This is ev-
ident from the amplest lexicographical work of our period in English:
Samuel Johnson's celebrated *Dictionary* (1755). Johnson's fourth
sense of *genius* is "Disposition of nature by which any one is qualified
for some peculiar employment." Among the entry's quotes is a famous
couplet from Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (1711), which con-
nects *genius* to *wit*: "One science only will one *genius* fit; / So vast is
art, so narrow human wit." Indeed, by Johnson's time these two words
were more or less synonymous, the fifth sense of his entry for *wit* be-

ing (in its metonymic sense) "A man of genius." We may understand this connection through an earlier definition of wit. In his *English Dictionarie* (1623), Henry Cockeram defined *witty* as "ingenious, atticke, pregnant," offering for "witty sayings short and pithy" none other than *aphorisms*.[37] We have arrived, with *pithy*, at the OED's senses (2.) and (3.), such that we may now state with confidence that an early modern English aphorist and his inventions could have been described using the flexible language of "genius."[38]

This kind of quick wit also lay behind the intuitive grasp of a text that Polydor Vergil praised when thanking his friend, the physician and philosopher Thomas of Venice. Unlike Vergil, Thomas was particularly good at spotting and amending scribal errors, discrepancies in style, or awkward grammatical constructions. These critical practices demanded ingenuity from readers and authors alike. For instance, in the 1536 edition of his *Thesaurus linguae latinae*, Robert Estienne left the elucidation of meaning to his reader's learned guesses: "Eam itaque lectoris iudicio maluimus divinandam relinquere, quam temere ex nostro Marte atque ingenio apponere" (And so I leave to the judgment of the reader to conjecture what he can supply from our art and *ingenium*).[39] Equally, lexicographers were painfully aware of the toil their craft required. Drawing on the classical coupling of *ars et ingenium*, or *industria et ingenium*, Estienne emphasized the industry of lexicography in the first 1531 edition of his *Thesaurus*. The painstaking compilation of his lexica from the works of Plautus and Terence was an exhaustive and exhausting job; Estienne confesses that he neglected his household and his health for two years because of it.[40] Yet this industry is a specific form of ingenuity, in the light of Estienne's own definition of the term in his *Thesaurus*: "Industria est ingenium seu ars qua aliquid struere sumus idonei" (Industry is the *ingenium* or art by which we are made suitable for composing something).[41] When applied to the problem of bilingual translation, these critical practices reveal not only the ingenuity of the lexicographer, but also the ingenuity of his mother tongue. In the preface of the Latin-French *Dictionarium Latinogallicum* (1538), Estienne insists that the purpose of lexicographical industry is to define what would later become the

"genius of the French language," by making French a worthy competitor of Latin.

At first glance, the respective word histories of *ingenium* and *genius* as they unfolded in early modern dictionaries not only confirm but reinforce the humanist myth of a European culture of ingenuity resting on the linguistic foundation of a shared Latinity. As a learned language, Latin broached vernacular differences; in fact, it was the very foundation of learned vernaculars themselves.[42] Yet Latin has no significant precedence other than chronological in the European word history of ingenuity. Lexicographers themselves made this point. In his *Tesoro de la lengua castellana, o española* (1611), Sebastián de Covarrubias often uses simple words or whole quotations from Latin, either as etymologies or to further elucidate his Spanish headwords. Yet his preface argues that Latin does not hold precedence over any of the many languages from which Spanish emerged. He begins with a version of the myth of Babel that shows him keenly aware of how hybrid the vernacular is: Spanish is more a messy mixture of foreign tongues than Latin's rightful heir. Covarrubias playfully exhausts the metaphoric possibilities offered by the label of "treasure": a new epic hero, the lexicographer will meet and defeat the various "monsters" of foreign tongues before he can reach the "treasure" of the Spanish language. He fears that as soon as he brings this treasure "out of the cave" and publishes it, the critics will, like Moorish witches, turn its gems into coal; but he also hopes that well-meaning and learned readers will use their supple *ingenium* to transform those coals (back) into sparkling carbuncles and beautiful rubies.[43] For Covarrubias, the hybrid genius of the Spanish language lies ultimately in the poetic and literary uses that inspired wits make of it—its relationship to a Latin linguistic ideal is irrelevant. In polyglot Latin dictionaries, the impression that equivalence between vernacular and Latin terms is straightforward proves to be just that: an impression. The compressed definitions and translations in eleven vernaculars of Latin headwords in Calepino's *Dictionarium* (1590 edition) and the "list" layout of Hieronymus Megiser's *Thesaurus polyglottus* (1603) amount to illusions of transparency. These terms were translatable, but not so straightforwardly as some entries imply.

Ingegno and *genio*, *esprit* and *génie*, *Sinnlichkeit* and *geest*, *wit* and *genius* all featured as translations of *ingenium* and *genius* into vernaculars before they became entries in their own right in vernacular dictionaries. Their linguistic variety mirrors the diversity of the Latinate culture of ingenuity when translated into different national and vernacular contexts. Yet while Latin was often construed as the touchstone of linguistic excellence against which to pit vernacular languages, bilingual Latin > vernacular dictionaries such as Petrus Dasypodius's *Dictionarium latinogermanicum* (1535) and Estienne's Latin-French *Dictionarium latinogallicum* (1538) also highlighted the distance between Latin and vernacular languages and cultures.

Lexicographers were acutely aware of this issue. It features in the preface to one of the earliest bilingual Latin/vernacular dictionaries, Antonio de Nebrija's *Dictionarium* (1492). Nebrija explains the transience of linguistic meaning by glossing an epigram from Martial about a chestnut tree planted by Julius Caesar in Córdoba. These trees, he says, were common in Spain under Roman occupation. To the Romans, chestnut trees represented their *genii* and were of utmost importance, yet Nebrija's Spanish contemporaries barely know them and they can no longer be seen in Spain.[44] Such trees—absent from the Spanish landscape, their meaning lost to the Spanish people, yet fossilized in a Latin epigram—emblematize the difficulty of retrieving the genius of language.

Ultimately, lexicographers fashioned this genius in vernacular-only dictionaries. At first, they did so by retrieving a lost linguistic and cultural golden age. The first, 1612 edition of the *Vocabolario* of the Accademia della Crusca exemplifies this tendency. The words that made it into the *Vocabolario* had been harvested from the works of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Dante and Boccaccio marked the boundaries of the *buon secolo*, which witnessed the blossoming of the Italian vernacular (specifically Tuscan) into perfection; according to some, that language alone was worthy to become the national standard. More than a century later, Johnson's *Dictionary* located the genius of the English language among the great writers prior to the "decadence" of the Restoration: Bacon's natural philosophical writings, John Hooker's Bible,

Raleigh's political and military oratory, Spenser and Sidney's poetry and fiction, and finally Shakespeare for the diction of common life:

> I have studiously endeavoured to collect examples and authorities from the writers before the restoration, whose works I regard as *the wells of English undefiled*, as the pure sources of genuine diction. Our language, for almost a century, has . . . been gradually departing from its original *Teutonick* character, and deviating towards a *Gallick* structure and phraseology, from which it ought to be our endeavour to recal it, by making our ancient volumes the ground-work of stile, admitting among the additions of later times, only such as may supply real deficiencies, such as are readily adopted by the genius of our tongue, and incorporate easily with our native idioms.[45]

For Johnson, in these sources words (*verba*) rather than things (*res*) were at stake, that is, good diction and style. Their texts revealed the deep "Teutonic" and "Saxon" roots of English, which constituted the genius of the language and ought to be preserved from the lexicographically decadent doublets of foreign—and especially French—imports through translation.[46] Thus, Johnson's lexicographical enterprise was a critical as well as antiquarian one.

The incipient nationalism this kind of search implies could be taken to ridiculous extremes. Thus, the ingenious etymologies of Johannes Goropius Becanus made a case for the Adamic status of the Dutch language: for Goropius, Paradise spoke Dutch.[47] Goropius exemplified the excesses of lexicographical ingenuity as overly fanciful and erudite guesswork and became the laughing stock of fellow lexicographers. In his polyglot *Lexicon tetraglotton* of 1660, James Howell related the mocking reply of the Italian Accademia della Crusca to Goropius's Edenic tongue: Dutch "being a rough and cartalaginous or boany Speech in regard of the collision of so many consonants" was better suited to sentencing a man to be stoned to death.[48]

By way of contrast, the French lexicographers of the seventeenth century emphasized criticism above "mere" antiquarian truffle hunting. The delineation of the *génie de la langue*, itself an expression of the "esprit français," suffuses the prefaces of Pierre Richelet's *Dictionnaire*

des mots et des choses (1680), Antoine Furetière's *Dictionaire univer-sel* (1690), and of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* (first edition 1694).[49] These works stress two features: good denotation—the semantic accu-racy of the French vocabulary—and good grammatical operators: its syntactical and logical precision, supposedly replicating clear thought processes.[50] The French *génie de la langue* was therefore potentially universal because it was the linguistic expression of a fundamental hu-man trait, namely rationality. Thus, the preface of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* lists among the perfections of the French language "this direct construction, which, without straying from the natural order of thought, chances upon all the delicacies that art can bring to it," upholding distinctness as a lexicographical ideal in the definitions of simple words.[51]

Structure

Despite its labyrinthine theme, this book is not a maze. It consists of six chapters, each devoted to one particular language or set of lan-guages: Latin first, followed by Italian, Spanish, French, German and Dutch, and English. As each chapter is self-contained, readers inter-ested in one or a few specific word families may focus on the relevant sections without having to read the rest of the book. Those interested in a broader and more nuanced pan-European account will find it worth reading the chapters sequentially, so as to experience the full breadth of the book's argument.

Each chapter is structured as follows: first, a brief account of its keywords, to explain concisely the rationale behind our selection, in relation to the historiography of ingenuity in that particular language; then a section devoted to the lexicographical landscape of that chapter's language, tackling issues of chronology and periodization and, most importantly, sources. The rest of the chapter is then focused in turn on each of the ingenuity keywords, arranged in successive subsections.

Besides offering a sense of cohesion amid all its diversity, this uni-fied structure ensures that attention is focused on the most important, but also the most elusive, elements in this story: fluctuations within and across languages. In consonance with the four semantic axes described

above, the range of variations that these chapters are intended to high-light and discuss include:

- the semantic developments experienced by terms within a particular word family

- the indications of moral or object-subject reversibility exhibited by certain keywords

- the recording but also the occlusion, by period lexica, of meanings and usages recorded by other sources

- the linguistic and methodological crossovers from language to language and from national context to national context

- other culturally relevant questions, such as the emergence of national identities through language, or the association of the language of ingenuity with notions of style

The choice of Latin as the first language of ingenuity to be discussed is pivotal to the book's structure. We have already explained why, but it is worth repeating here. First, there is the centrality of Latin as Europe's learned language throughout the period under consideration. The early phases in our chronology are particularly relevant: Latin stood out as one of the most fertile working grounds for the humanist project in a moment also marked by the consolidation of European vernaculars. Second, and more importantly, the Latin case exposes the humanist concern with philological systematicity, which in lexicographical terms saw this very language, Latin, becoming a model of supposed univocality and translatability.

Given the dependence on Latin of the Italian and Spanish ingenuity word families, these languages are discussed next. Although both languages share a number of keywords (e.g. *ingegno* and *ingenio*), their lexicographical traditions differ sufficiently so as to produce very different word histories. Italian was especially concerned with the *questione della lingua*, the inflections of its keywords heavily dependent upon the construction of a literary-*cum*-linguistic canon rooted in the works of Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch. More than in other languages, the Italian dictionaries reflect the vigorous (and early) discussion of ingenuity as a pillar of artistic theory. In the Spanish case, the lexi-

cographical sources offer an interesting point of contrast to the lively culture of ingenuity that marked this period, which includes the so-called Spanish Golden Age. Ingenuity did inform the work of lexicographers. However, the treatment that *ingenio* and *agudeza* receive in these sources offers but a partial view of the complexity and sophistication with which ingenuity was exercized and theorized. The French word history of ingenuity suggests that the French *âge classique* was not so much the Age of Reason but the age of *esprit*: dictionaries reflect the use of this term for the purpose of social and cultural disciplining, as well as its predominance in the debates from which our modern notion of literature and criticism emerged. Next, German and Dutch offer a counterpart to the Latinate family of ingenuity, which testifies to the pan-European nature of the culture this book describes. German lexicographers especially were acutely conscious of their Teutonic roots, and went to great lengths to eject the Latinate families of ingenuity from their lexica. Yet despite their best efforts, over the period German and Dutch developed vocabularies that bore suspicious resemblance to the word families of ingenuity elsewhere. The English chapter is situated last, since its most ambitious lexicographical project came late: Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755). The trajectories of the English keywords reflect that language's development from both Anglo-Saxon and Latin, their semantics a result of complex etymological intertwinings and the impact of loan words. As in the French case, the English language of ingenuity was notably affected by late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century attempts to define a literary canon and criteria for good taste. English is distinctive, however, in showing the effect of local debates about the workings of the mind—which marked *wit* especially—and the inflation of *genius* in criticism and aesthetics.