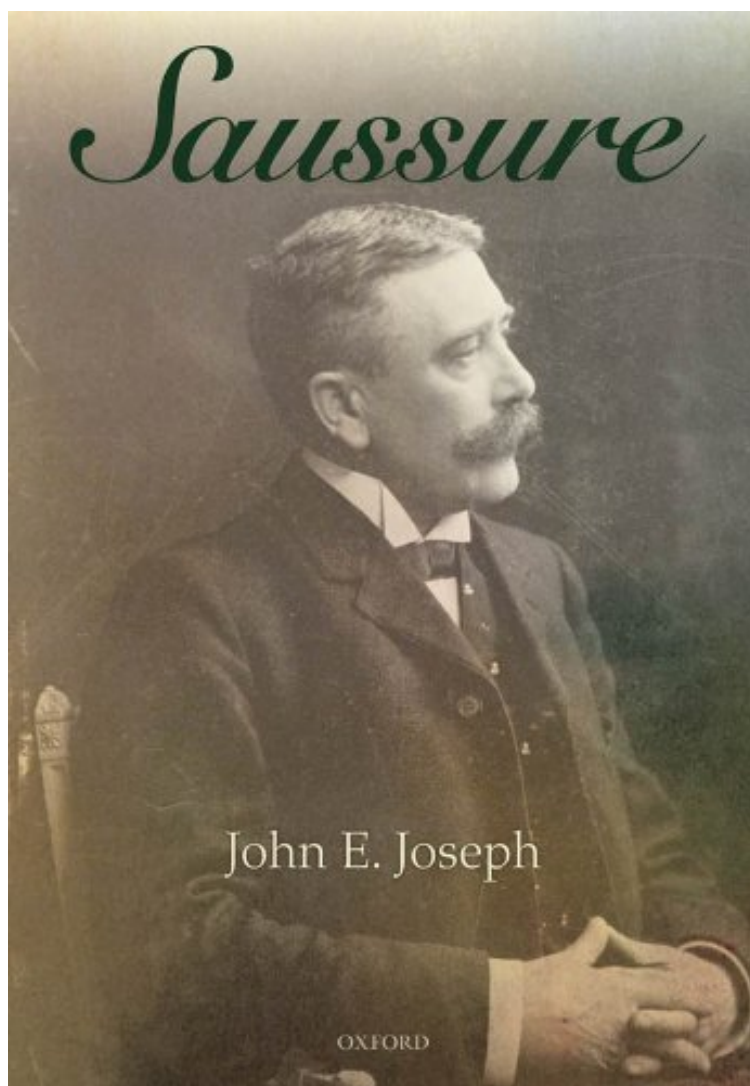


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# Saussure



*Par John E. Joseph*  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur" In a language there are only differences without positive terms. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, the language contains neither ideas nor sounds that pre-exist the linguistic system, but only conceptual differences and phonic differences issuing from this system." (From the posthumous Course in General Linguistics, 1916.) No one becomes as famous as Saussure without both admirers and detractors reducing them to a paragraph's worth of ideas that can be readily quoted, debated, memorized, and examined. One can argue the ideas expressed above - that language is composed of a system of acoustic oppositions (the signifier) matched by social convention to a system of conceptual oppositions (the signified) - have in some sense become "Saussure", while the human being, in all his complexity, has disappeared. In the first comprehensive biography of Ferdinand de Saussure, John Joseph restores the full character and history of a man who is considered the founder of modern linguistics and whose ideas have

influenced literary theory, philosophy, cultural studies, and virtually every other branch of humanities and the social sciences. Through a far-reaching account of Saussure's life and the time in which he lived, we learn about the history of Geneva, of Genevese educational institutions, of linguistics, about Saussure's ancestry, about his childhood, his education, the fortunes of his relatives, and his personal life in Paris. John Joseph intersperses all these discussions with accounts of Saussure's research and the courses he taught highlighting the ways in which knowing about his friendships and family history can help us understand not only his thoughts and ideas but also his utter failure to publish any major work after the age of twenty-one.

Revue de presse I warmly recommend Saussure by John E. Joseph, a lucid account of this great linguist's life and revolutionary linguistic system, pieced together from his students' notes and unpublished papers regularly being discovered in Geneva. (Brian Vickers, *The Times Literary Supplement*) The present work is now the biography of Saussure. There is, quite simply, no other work today in English that has the breadth and range of this one in laying out the personal details of Saussure's life... this is a substantive and erudite overview, analysis, and assessment of the life and work of this seminal linguist. (D.B. Boersema, *Choice*) Joseph's massive, meticulous book is a heroic biography, tightly focused on its protagonist and with a melodramatic, if not tragic, tone of knowing retrospection. Joseph lays out the many crushing psychological, familial, social, institutional and professional forces arrayed against his brilliant, headstrong subject ... There is a growing sense of inevitability as Joseph's story unfolds. Joseph gives us all the particulars that can be had from the archive, more than one imagined could be so carefully documented. (Michael Silverstein, *London of Books*) This book will be essential reading for any student of Saussure. (Colin MacCabe, *New Statesman*) John E. Joseph's biography is a rich, scholarly account, exhaustively detailed, pursuing the Saussure family back into the fifteenth century and forward to the present day (Patrick Wilcken, *Literary*) Each serious study of a great scientist's life is bound to leave us reflecting on that truth, and linguist John E. Joseph's monumental Saussure is no exception. ... This rich account - sympathetic, respectful and sensitive to political and intellectual context - reveals how Saussure, a dazzling and driven scholar from a bourgeois Swiss family, blazed trails to new vistas of social science that opened out in the century after his death. (John A. Goldsmith, *Nature*) John Joseph has made excellent use of the manuscripts preserved in the Geneva library (Roy Harris, *Times Literary Supplement*) John E. Joseph does the work of both a linguist and a historian. He gives us all the historical elements needed to understand Saussure's background and paints a very vivid portrait of the political tensions of his time and their repercussions on the university world, which Saussure had to endure ... On the linguistic plane, John E. Joseph spares no effort in helping readers grasp what was at stake in Saussure's reflections. He allows us to understand better what Saussure did that was revolutionary (Claire A. Forel, *Le Temps*) An epic biography of the inventor of modern linguistics. Joseph presents a detailed scholarly account which is both readable and entertaining. (The Biographers Club) Joseph provides a confident and detailed analysis of Saussure's theories and arguments, identifying and explaining those elements that were perceived as brilliant at the time, those that endured, and those that did not ... The book cannot but become the definitive volume on Saussure's life and an essential reference in further debate on his intellectual contribution. Many of the questions that have been debated for years are re-examined in this volume in the context of documentary evidence that is not only new to the discussion, but demands to be taken into account. (Penny Lee, *Australian Journal of Linguistics*) It's a cracking read and I thoroughly enjoyed it. (Paul O'Doherty, *Bookbound, Dublin City Radio*) Saussure was idolized by structuralists in the 1960s. His *Course in General Linguistics* was on the nightstand of students of anthropology, literary theory, psychoanalysis and, of course, linguistics. But who was he, and what did he actually achieve? This book of more than 700 pages undertakes to answer these two questions with success. (Books: *Livres et idées du monde entier*) A monumental work that bears witness to meticulously detailed research and to an encyclopaedic knowledge that it would be hard to surpass. For anyone seeking information on the life of Ferdinand de Saussure and the genesis of his writings and his aborted projects, Joseph's Saussure constitutes a practically inexhaustible treasury. (Peter Wunderli, *Historiographia Linguistica*) John E. Joseph restores Saussure's voice to life, and reveals the waves of development of his thought, while situating him fascinatingly in the wider history of linguistics. (Julie Bouchard, *La Recherche: L'Actualité des Sciences*) Monumental. (Daniele Gambarara, *Il Manifesto*) John Joseph is an eminent figure in the constellation of Saussurean studies. He is distinguished by the attention he devotes to establishing biographical facts, often neglected by other researchers who confine themselves to epistemological and philosophical exegesis ... With this book, readers have access to a mass of personal information of unequalled comprehensiveness and quality. The challenge of undertaking in parallel a factual biography and

the scientific analysis of the texts is conquered with brio. (Gabriel Bergougnoux, *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris*) Joseph's study immediately installs itself as a standard work not only for Saussure specialists but also for anyone interested in the development of linguistics and its interfaces with philosophy, literary studies, semiotics and cultural criticism. His credentials, as someone who has published extensively on the history of linguistics, are unquestionable, and the sedulousness of the scholarship is evident on every page ... Above all, however, the structure of this critical biography is both astute and generous, bringing Saussure's life and thought into judiciously assessed interrelationships with the genealogies of family, of Genevan society, of Genevan linguistics, and of linguistics and structuralism since. It affords cohesion to a momentous study of a key figure in Western thought (*Forum for Modern Language Studies*)

*Présentation de l'auteur*"In a language there are only differences without positive terms. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, the language contains neither ideas nor sounds that pre-exist the linguistic system, but only conceptual differences and phonic differences issuing from this system." (From the posthumous *Course in General Linguistics*, 1916.) No one becomes as famous as Saussure without both admirers and detractors reducing them to a paragraph's worth of ideas that can be readily quoted, debated, memorized, and examined. One can argue the ideas expressed above - that language is composed of a system of acoustic oppositions (the signifier) matched by social convention to a system of conceptual oppositions (the signified) - have in some sense become "Saussure", while the human being, in all his complexity, has disappeared. In the first comprehensive biography of Ferdinand de Saussure, John Joseph restores the full character and history of a man who is considered the founder of modern linguistics and whose ideas have influenced literary theory, philosophy, cultural studies, and virtually every other branch of humanities and the social sciences. Through a far-reaching account of Saussure's life and the time in which he lived, we learn about the history of Geneva, of Genevese educational institutions, of linguistics, about Saussure's ancestry, about his childhood, his education, the fortunes of his relatives, and his personal life in Paris. John Joseph intersperses all these discussions with accounts of Saussure's research and the courses he taught highlighting the ways in which knowing about his friendships and family history can help us understand not only his thoughts and ideas but also his utter failure to publish any major work after the age of twenty-one.