Ferdinand de Saussure's 1915 work, A Course in General Linguistics (English translation in 1959), proposed that language was a system in which various components existed in relation to each other. In terms of literary and cultural criticism, Saussure's structural theory of language provides particular insights and approaches as follows: – It suggests that content in a poem, a film or a play is dependent upon the form in which the themes are expressed. – The grammar is the structure of the poem, and follows specific rules that function like language, based on opposition, difference and rationality. – Culture itself has an underlying organization or structure where different elements are combined to generate meaning. Saussure proposed that the link between the word/sound (signifier) and concept (signified) is based on the difference between sounds and our ability to distinguish between them, the relationship between sounds (a relationship of difference) and is purely arbitrary (where the sound/word does not describe the object, but is assumed to do so by convention and repeated use). Later, Saussure's ideas about structures and rules were adopted by the anthropologist Claude Levi–Strauss to analyse rituals, myths and kinships. Saussure's ideas were also appropriated by the linguists and the literary critics in Europe and Russia. i. The set of rules by which we combine words into sentences, use certain words in certain ways, rules which are rarely altered and which all users of a language follow. The everyday calculations we do––from prices in shops to simple totaling––is an instance of parole where we employ the tables to get the calculations done. If langue is the system of rules and conventions that govern how we use words and meanings, parole is, then, language in context. Saussure suggests that words and their meanings are not 'natural' but created through repeated use and convention. He was undermining the very notion of language by proposing the relationship between words and meanings as arbitrary. We can now summarize the three principles regarding language that Saussure puts forward: i. Arbitrariness: Words have no real connection to their meanings or the things they describe. What Saussure was proposing was a radical rethinking of the nature of language. Then, in his second move, Saussure proposes a relational theory of language where i. 'words' existed in relation to other words and ii. The word 'cat' does not naturally refer to a four–legged furry animal of a particular kind with particular habits. The word (or 'signifier') is connected to the meaning or concept (the 'signified') in a purely arbitrary relationship. The structure of language ensures that when we use words, however arbitrary their meaning might be, we register certain differences and make sense of them. Thus, even though the term 'cat' is only arbitrarily connected to the animal, we still make sense of it because it is different from other words that are equally arbitrary in their relationship with things. Saussure makes three significant moves in his analysis of language. In most cases we are not aware of the langue component; we use the system of conventions by habit, and are not always alert to the large structure of language in everyday use. Meaning thus emerges in the difference or opposition between words. We work with binary or paired oppositions to make sense of words and sounds in speech. Language imposes its structure (the recognized difference between 'cat' and 'hat') whatever be the individual contexts in which the sounds or words are being used. The animal cat does not declare its 'catness', we attribute the 'catness' to it by giving it a name. Together the signifier and signified constitute a sign. For Saussure the sound was a material manifestation of the abstract concept. This means (and this is the consequence of Saussure's thinking on the nature of language) that words in a language do not refer to a 'reality' but to other words

from which they are different. This he termed langue. iii.