Study material for Semester II, Compulsory Core English II

THE HOUSE by David John Constantine

David John Constantine’s poem *The House* occurs in his collection of poems, *Something for The Ghosts.* Through the metaphor of the house the poet tries to say that there is an indelible connection between the past, the present and also the future. Time is held together by memories, events, relationships as well as by objects. The house is the object which has been used by Constantine to symbolize how Time binds together the past and the present. As Constantine describes the two houses in the poem--- one where he resided in the past and the other where he resides in the present, he stumbles upon the truth that it is the past which shapes one’s present. The past continues to impinge upon the present and possibly the future.

The image of the house also reflects shelter, solace and bonding. It provides refuge from the alienation and disenchantment of the materialistic world. There is also the image of the looking glass, which is present in the description of both the houses. It is used as an element of omniscience or an object which has been a witness to the past as well as the present. It acts as a medium of connection of the poet’s past and the present.

The poem begins with the line “ You won’t forget the house , will you? I never will.” This emphatic statement reflects the poet’s attachment to his past. The house of the past was by the sea, where the South Wind blows across the shores. Nature imagery has been abundantly used to reflect the joys and freedom of the poet’s past. The sun rises over the sea to usher in a new day and at night the moon’s face is revealed by the parting clouds. Vivid descriptions are presented of the rain beating against the window sills; of the surging sea waves and of the sunlight falling on the bed and the looking glass, inside the house.

The second house described is the poet’s present one. It is far away from the sea, with the North Wind blowing around it and a clump of Oak trees standing near it. The house is silhouetted against the steely gray sky and the stars shine down like icicles. The day dawns with the sun rising among the Oak trees and a hill. The poet says that though the second house is different, it is almost the same as the first one, because symbolically it connects the past with the present.

As a person moves on through the journey of his life he gathers new experiences, holds on to new relationships and resides in different houses. But the past memories remain vivid and indelible, leaving traces in the present as well as the future.