

With reference to East (1974), to what extent is Steven Berkoff's work post-modern?

Berkoff takes a stand against naturalism in his play East, he uses a range of past styles to create a new form using intertextuality and a collaboration of art forms. The extreme physicality and characterisation results in a clear distinctive style that is post modern.

East uses past styles and influences to create something new that is post modern. The episodic structure is similar to those of the Falstaff scenes from Shakespeare's Henry plays. Les and Mike and later the other members of their family tell stories building up a picture of their life. The language uses East End London slang and verse as a Shakespearean Parody, for example Dad says 'untimely ripped from thy mother's womb' which parodies Macbeth. The use of verse gives an effective and shocking tone when juxtaposed with the Cockney profanities e.g. Les says of Sylv, "I told her to get to a nunnery, in other words piss off". This phrase echoes "Get thee to a nunnery" from Hamlet III and translates it into contemporary street talk. The characters also refer to the past throughout the play; in the first scene Mike says 'I do bestride Commercial Road like a colossus'. The Colossus of Rhodes was a statue of the Greek Titan Helios. There are further classical references to Ancient Greece; 'the sight that sent Penelope mad' and 'the gift of a Cyclops to stun to stab screams like Attila. Berkoff also uses other past styles such as punk poetry seen in "From Hoxton to Tottenham... from Bethnel Green to Hornsley town, to Poplar up to Islington, the clash of steel and crunch of testicles'. In contrast to the classical references, verse and poetry, East uses Cockney rhyming slang e.g. 'Minces' means eyes and 'North and South' refers to the Mouth. Overall the language used is in various forms; spoken word, verse, song, Cockney assertiveness and Shakespeare's verse alongside recognisable quotations for the audience to identify, this allows the audience into the world that he creates and is post-modern.

East involves many references to the past and uses other practitioners and their techniques to create a post modern approach to working class northern life. The mime used throughout East is influenced by Jacques Lecoq, in which Berkoff uses all three mime techniques. Scene 8 is an example of this as the family act out going to a fair ground and going on different types of rides such as dodgems, rollercoasters and a carousel. Berkoff also uses personification in that the actors become objects. In scene 12, Les becomes a motorbike by bending over and holding his arms up, while Mike sits on his back. Les makes revving and other sounds to create the effect of a motorbike, this is also a past style since it is one of Brecht's 'Total Theatre' techniques. Personification is an element of post modernism due to its abstract and visual imagery. Another 'Total Theatre' technique used is Greek chorus, an example of this is