Waiting For Godot: Stylistic Impact Of Repetitions

Through the use of repetition, Samuel Beckett's play 'Waiting For Godot' examines the futility of life, demonstrating the play's absurdist nature and nihilistic philosophy. This is evident through the character's nonsensical, illogical dialogue and actions, conveying the monotony of their lives. The absurdist quality of this play is identifiable in the tragic nature of their situation, as through constant recurrence it is clear that the characters have no control over their own lives, towards which they possess an attitude of disregard. These combined aspects of repetition throughout the text contributes to the nihilistic perspective conveyed that all life is futile and meaningless.

The character's attitude of resignation towards the fact that they have no control over their lives is established through the repetitive nature of their dialogue. This is first evident in the opening line, where Estragon states 'nothing to be done,' a phrase directly repeated by Vladimir approximately 30 lines later. This phrase is recurring throughout the entire text, emphasising the characters passivity and incapability to have a more active role in their own lives. Furthermore, Estragon admits that 'nothing happens' within their day. The repetition of the word 'nothing' throughout the text reinforces the concept that the characters lives are significantly empty and banal. This sense of passivity is continued through the repeated conversation:

This exact conversation repeats itself numerously throughout the play, emphasising both Estragon's lack of memory concerning their perpetual situation, as well as establishing their passive existence. The short syntax of each line furthered by the monosyllabic words creates a jarring rhythm to the conversation, indicative of the frustration Estragon feels. His lack of memory regarding this also suggests the pointless nature of the events during his life, as he clearly does not pay attention to conversations or recall certain happenings. Estragon's 'despairing' response establishes the agony he feels at this perpetual entrapment of endless waiting, and yet they are unable to leave for the hope that Godot will eventually arrive. The exclamation mark of Estragon's 'Ah!' further dramatizes his reaction, and emphasises his anguish at being imprisoned in cycle of waiting and nothing. This incessant waiting conveys the monotony of their lives, as the characters continue to wait for something without any sense of purpose or reason.

Additionally, repetition of words and phrases within dialogue is used by Beckett to convey the banality of Vladimir and Estragon's life. The titular phrase 'suggests a prevalent theme of waiting, further conveyed by Vladimir's statement '' The repetition of 'waiting' emulates the concept of monotony and tediousness, and reinforces the underlying theme of meaninglessness. Furthermore, Estragon continues this by declaring 'Here Beckett uses repetition of the negative, connoting a sense of emptiness and stagnation within their lives. This line emphasises the banality of their life by highlighting the fact that boredom is what the character's desperately wish to escape from. The listing in this line further reiterates the extent of the insignificance of their lives, through the evident emphasis on how meaningless and empty they are.

The repetition of illogical, pointless actions conveys the characters desperation to escape boredom, which highlights the lack of meaning their lives contain. This is evident through the

stage directions that dictate:

These repeated irrational actions show how the characters are desperate for ways to pass the time, the senseless nature of their behaviour establishing the absurdist nature of the play. Additionally, this scene evokes an amused response from the audience as these farcical actions have a humorous quality due to the mere bizarre nature of the scene. However, ultimately the point of these actions is in question, which highlights the futility of these gestures. The meaninglessness of these repeated actions is addressed by Vladimir, who remarks '.' The adjective 'great' emphasises the extent of which habitual actions reduce the vitality of life, diminishing it to a meaningless existence. This is conveyed through the forceful yet blunt plosives in 'deadener' that create an impactful, flat sound reminiscent of the abruptness and misery associated with death. This reinforces how the repetitive nature of the characters actions creates such a meaningless existence, that it is perpetually reducing the life within them. Therefore the monotonous repetition of the characters actions is evidence of their attempt to cope with their boredom, however essentially these recurring actions form habits that holistically do nothing but reduce an individual's sense of life.

Cyclical, pointless dialogue is used in conjunction with these repetitive actions, which Becket also uses to emphasise the monotony of their lives. This is seen in:

The repetition of 'creates a cyclical dialogue that demonstrates both the absurd nature of the play, as well as the tedious, monotonous nature of life. This scene also establishes the contradiction between dialogue and action, as the stage direction indicates that 'despite Pozzo's desire to leave. This cyclical sense is further conveyed in two acts mirrored conclusion, both repeating the lines:

Becket concludes both acts with these two lines, indicating the cyclical nature of the play as ultimately Vladimir and Estragon constantly return to the same place with the same thought. Furthermore, the direct contrast between the dialogue and the stage direction highlights the inevitable inertia of their lives, despite their intent to leave. This also heightens the tragedy of the play, as the audience recognises how the characters are trapped within the mundane, banal nature of their lives. In addition to the character's dialogue, the cyclical structure of the play demonstrates the lack of change or direction in the characters life, and therefore the meaninglessness to their continued existence. This is evident through the distinct parallels between the two acts, the second almost presented as a repeated version of the former. One such similarity is the discussion of suicide:

The repetition of this conversation in both acts demonstrates the cyclical nature of their lives, and how they are imprisoned in this recurring loop. The comedic aspect of this scene reduces the severity of the action they are discussing, conveying their disregard for their own life through this nonchalant and flippant attitude. This is further emphasised through the stage direction of Estragon's 'excited' response, the exclamation mark further indicating his thrill at the possibility of an erection, yet at the consequence of his death. This presents the characters disregard for their lives, and further illustrates the message of the play that all life is indeed meaningless.

Beckett's use of frequent silences throughout the play emphasises the characters desperation to avoid boredom, and therefore conveys the lack of meaning to the actions and dialogue that they do. This is evident in particularly in scene four, which begins:

Here Vladimir is portrayed to be desperate for conversation in order to escape from the silences that repeatedly permeate through their stunted conversations. His ‘anguish’ is indicative of the extent Vladimir is uncomfortable with the pauses, almost to the point of causing him pain. The imperative language used in ‘conveys Vladimir’s desperation through the establishment of a demanding tone directed at Estragon. This is heightened by the use of exclamation marks that further convey a sense of urgency. The silences therefore can be representative of all that the characters are trying to avoid - loneliness, boredom, nothingness, Vladimir’s distress an attempt to escape this. Therefore the use of repetition of silence in Waiting for Godot highlights the ever present reminder that their lives are without meaning, and everything that they do is merely an attempt to avoid boredom.

In conclusion, through the use of repetition Samuel Beckett in his play Waiting for Godot conveys a nihilistic perspective through the depiction of life as lacking in meaning, as well as demonstrating a sense of absurdity that was common during this time. The play questions the monotony of life, highlighting how meaningless it is when an individual is trapped within a recurring cycle demonstrated by the character’s repetitive dialogue, gestures and the plays cyclical structure.