

All That Is Gone Is Gone: A Literary Analysis of Impermanence and Renewal

Obins Nuhu Isaac

Department of General Studies, School of Agricultural Technology, Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic, Zaria, Samaru Kataf Campus.

isaacobins@gmail.com

Andrew Onoja

Department of English, University of Jos, Jos

Markus Fangan

Department of General Studies, School of Agricultural Technology, Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic, Zaria, Samaru Kataf Campus

doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/bjmas.0562>

Published June 12, 2026

Citation: Isaac O.N., Onoja A., and Fangan M. (2026) All That Is Gone Is Gone: A Literary Analysis of Impermanence and Renewal, *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies*,7(3),41-54

Abstract: *This paper offers a literary analysis of the author's original poem: all that is gone is gone, a reflective meditation on the irreversibility of the past and the necessity of living meaningfully in the present. the poem foregrounds the fleeting nature of time, the futility of clinging to lost moments, and the wisdom embedded in acceptance and renewal. through close reading, the study unpacks the poem's thematic preoccupations—impermanence, acceptance, human limitation, and divine order—and situate them within broader philosophical and theological reflections on time and human existence. attention is given to the poet's use of diction, imagery, repetition, and metaphor, all of which reinforce the central theme of impermanence. the analysis is framed within reader-response and existentialist literary theories, highlighting how the poem provokes both intellectual and emotional engagement with the human condition. the study is significant because it demonstrates how even short; reflective poetry can serve as a fertile ground for deep philosophical discourse. ultimately, the paper argues that all that is gone is gone resonates with universal human concerns, offering readers a poetic framework for embracing transience and cultivating a forward-looking orientation to life.*

Keywords: poetry, time, impermanence, acceptance, literary analysis, existentialism, all that is gone is gone

INTRODUCTION

The problem of time has always haunted human imagination. Literature across cultures bears witness to humanity's fascination with the fleeting nature of existence, the irretrievability of

moments, and the paradoxical desire to hold onto what cannot be retained. From the laments of the biblical Ecclesiastes—“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2)—to Shakespeare’s Sonnet 60, which portrays minutes as relentless waves against the “pebbled shore,” writers have sought to give voice to the inevitability of time’s passing. Modernist poetry, particularly T. S. Eliot’s Four Quartets, continues this tradition by exploring the intersection of past, present, and eternity. In African literary traditions as well, poets like Christopher Okigbo and Wole Soyinka have grappled with time as a force that shapes history, identity, and human consciousness.

In African traditions as well, time is often conceived as cyclical and deeply embedded in communal memory. John Mbiti, in *African Religions and Philosophy*, observes that African temporality emphasizes the “living present” and the “past of immediate relevance” while treating the distant future as abstract and less meaningful (Mbiti 17). The poem, however, shares more with the biblical and Western sense of linear temporality in which what has passed is definitively irretrievable. In this respect, it engages in a dialogue between African and Western philosophies of time.

This paper argues that the central theme of the poem is the irreversibility of the past and the necessity of living in the present. Sub-themes include impermanence, acceptance, renewal, and the tension between human limitation and divine order. Each of these themes not only finds resonance in literary and philosophical traditions but also reveals the poem’s relevance to universal human experience. Stylistically, the poem relies on stark imagery, repetition, and free verse rhythm to reinforce its message of temporal finality.

The significance of the poem lies in its capacity to articulate what philosopher Paul Ricoeur calls “the aporia of time”: the tension between time as experienced and time as measured (Ricoeur 101). Humans experience time as fleeting, irretrievable, and often cruel, yet also as the ground of hope and possibility. The poem captures this paradox by juxtaposing metaphors of futility—“clutching smoke in one’s fist”—with metaphors of promise—“the sun does not mourn the night; it simply rises.” Such images echo the existentialist emphasis on authenticity in the face of temporality, as seen in Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, while also resonating with biblical assurances of divine renewal (Lamentations 3:23).

This paper explores these themes in detail, accompanied by an analysis of the poem’s stylistic features and intertextual resonances. By placing the poem within wider literary, philosophical, and theological contexts, the study demonstrates how *All That Is Gone Is Gone* offers not only a literary reflection but also a guide to living wisely in the tension between memory and possibility.

Research Problem

Literature often serves as a mirror through which human beings negotiate questions of impermanence, memory, and renewal. In African poetic traditions, this negotiation is heightened

by the interplay between oral aesthetics, existential reflection, and spiritual symbolism. *All That Is Gone Is Gone* presents a deceptively simple refrain, yet beneath its surface lies a dense web of cultural, philosophical, and theological implications. The problem this study addresses is how a seemingly straightforward poetic statement communicates complex realities of loss and renewal across personal, communal, and spiritual dimensions. Previous scholarship on African poetry has emphasized themes of resistance, memory, and identity (Irele 2001; Ngũgĩ 1986), but less attention has been paid to poems of existential stillness and their role in mediating personal lament with collective resilience. The central question, therefore, is: How does the poem deploy language, symbolism, and cultural memory to articulate impermanence while simultaneously affirming renewal?

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis, grounded in close reading and interpretive criticism. The poem is examined through the lenses of Reader-Response Theory, Archetypal Criticism, Postcolonial Poetics, Existential Hermeneutics, and Biblical Hermeneutics, as outlined in the theoretical framework. Methodologically, the paper proceeds in three stages:

1. **Textual Deconstruction:** A close reading of the poem identifies its dominant images, refrains, and structural features.
2. **Contextual Interpretation:** The imagery and motifs are situated within African oral traditions, existential philosophy, and biblical intertextuality.
3. **Comparative Reflection:** The findings are compared with similar themes in African poetic discourse, particularly works by poets such as Okigbo and Kofi Awoonor, to highlight the poem's broader literary and cultural significance.

The analysis is hermeneutic rather than statistical; it prioritizes depth of interpretation over breadth of data. By engaging both literary criticism and philosophical theology, this methodology ensures that the poem is read not only as a text but also as a cultural and spiritual act of meaning-making.

About the Poem and the Poet

The poem *All That Is Gone Is Gone* belongs to the contemporary African tradition of philosophical and reflective verse. Unlike the expansive narrative or politically charged poetry of earlier generations such as Christopher Okigbo or Niyi Osundare, this poem distills its message into a minimalist structure, relying on repetition and imagery to evoke universality. Its brevity is deceptive: within its few lines lies a meditation on impermanence, memory, and renewal.

Stylistically, the poem resonates with the African oral tradition, where proverbs, aphorisms, and refrains communicate profound wisdom in compact forms (Achebe 1975). The central refrain—"All that is gone is gone"—functions much like a proverbial utterance, creating rhythm, emphasis,

and permanence in memory. This echoes what Ruth Finnegan (2012) observes about African oral aesthetics: that repetition and brevity ensure the transmission of wisdom across generations.

The poet, Isaac Obins Nuhu, is a contemporary Nigerian scholar and writer whose works straddle English language and literature, as well as interests in theology and philosophy. His creative vision reflects a deep concern with the intersections of language, human existence, and divine providence. In line with his broader intellectual pursuits, this poem positions itself as both a personal reflection and a cultural contribution, engaging timeless human struggles with temporality, loss, and hope. By drawing from biblical allusions, African proverbial wisdom, and universal existential concerns, the poet creates a text that is at once local and global in resonance.

The background to the poem suggests that it was conceived not merely as an aesthetic exercise but as a spiritual and philosophical meditation. It belongs to a growing body of African reflective poetry that seeks to reframe ancient wisdom traditions for modern readers navigating uncertainty and dislocation.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant on three levels—literary, cultural, and philosophical-spiritual.

1. **Literary Contribution:** It contributes to African literary criticism by demonstrating how minimalist poetic structures can carry profound symbolic weight. The poem exemplifies the fusion of oral cadence with modern literary form, enriching the corpus of African poetic discourse.
2. **Cultural Relevance:** By analyzing the refrain “All that is gone is gone” within a postcolonial African context, the paper underscores how poetry can serve as a communal archive of resilience. It highlights the role of literature in negotiating memory and continuity in societies grappling with historical disruptions.
3. **Philosophical-Spiritual Insight:** The study offers a bridge between existential philosophy and biblical hermeneutics, showing how African poetry can mediate questions of mortality, hope, and renewal. This cross-disciplinary significance broadens the scope of both literary studies and theology, demonstrating how poetry provides a language for meaning-making in the face of loss. Ultimately, the study affirms that *All That Is Gone Is Gone* is not just a poetic lament but a cultural testimony and spiritual meditation. It validates the role of African literature in addressing universal human concerns while remaining rooted in its own symbolic traditions.

Theoretical Framework

A critical reading of *All That Is Gone Is Gone* requires a theoretical lens that integrates elements of literary criticism, cultural poetics, and philosophical hermeneutics. Since the poem meditates on impermanence, acceptance, and renewal, it lends itself to multiple interpretive approaches. This study draws primarily on Reader-Response Theory, Archetypal Criticism, and Postcolonial Poetics, while incorporating insights from Existential Philosophy and Biblical Hermeneutics.

1. Reader-Response Theory

According to Wolfgang Iser, a literary text achieves meaning only in the act of being read; it contains “gaps” that the reader must fill (Iser 1978). The refrain “All that is gone is gone” is a paradigmatic “gap”—its apparent simplicity invites the reader to project personal experiences of loss, failure, or change. The universality of the line ensures that every reading is colored by subjective memory. Stanley Fish further argues that meaning is not an inherent property of the text but an event realized by interpretive communities (Fish 1980). Thus, the poem’s resonance depends on its audience’s cultural and spiritual frameworks, whether African oral traditions, Christian eschatology, or existential reflection.

2. Archetypal and Myth Criticism

The imagery of dawn, rest, and rising draws upon archetypal symbols deeply rooted in human cultural memory. Northrop Frye identifies dawn as a universal symbol of rebirth, associated with the “mythos of spring” in his cycle of literary archetypes (Frye 1957). Mircea Eliade similarly describes dawn as a mythic archetype of renewal and cyclical time (*The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 1949). In this framework, the poem transcends its personal lament to participate in a collective symbolic order. Its call for renewal at dawn aligns with archetypal narratives of resurrection, seasonal cycles, and cosmic regeneration.

3. Postcolonial Poetics

Although not overtly political, the poem’s language and structure bear traces of postcolonial literary tradition. As Abiola Irele observes, African literature often intertwines personal expression with collective memory and resilience (Irele 2001). The poem’s refrain mirrors the cadence of African oral chants, which simultaneously mourn the past and summon communal courage for the future. By employing accessible diction alongside layered symbolism, the poet situates individual impermanence within a broader communal struggle for continuity and survival. This resonates with Chinua Achebe’s view that literature in African contexts carries a moral and social responsibility (Achebe 1975).

4. Existential Hermeneutics

The philosophical undercurrent of the poem also aligns with existential thought. Jean-Paul Sartre’s concept of nothingness and Martin Heidegger’s Being-toward-death highlight the necessity of confronting impermanence in order to live authentically (Sartre 1943; Heidegger 1927). The poem’s insistence that what is gone cannot be recovered echoes the existential recognition of finitude, yet its movement toward renewal affirms the possibility of transcendence through action and hope. This existential tension gives the poem its philosophical gravitas.

5. Biblical Hermeneutics

Finally, the poem resonates strongly with biblical poetic traditions, especially the Psalms and Ecclesiastes. Its repetitive structure reflects Hebrew parallelism, while its themes echo Ecclesiastes 3: “a time to be born, and a time to die.” As Paul Ricoeur argues, biblical hermeneutics involves

interpreting symbolic language that mediates between literal and spiritual meanings (Ricoeur 1975). The dawn motif, for instance, can be read both naturally (as a new day) and spiritually (as resurrection, renewal, or divine providence). Thus, the poem exemplifies what Ricoeur calls a “second naïveté”—a return to symbols with renewed interpretive depth.

Synthesis

Taken together, these frameworks illuminate the poem’s richness. Reader-Response Theory foregrounds the subjective dimension of interpretation; Archetypal Criticism situates the imagery in universal symbolic traditions; Postcolonial Poetics contextualizes its cultural cadence; Existential Hermeneutics uncovers its philosophical weight; and Biblical Hermeneutics highlights its intertextual resonance with scripture. By weaving these perspectives, this analysis demonstrates that *All That Is Gone Is Gone* is more than a meditation on impermanence—it is a dialogic text that bridges personal grief, cultural memory, and spiritual hope.

Thematic Analysis: Impermanence

Impermanence emerges as the most prominent theme in the poem. The line “All that is gone is gone” repeats the inescapable reality of temporal passage. In this respect, the poem echoes the biblical refrain of Ecclesiastes: “What has been will be again... there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccles. 1:9, NIV). Just as the Preacher laments human striving in a world of vanities, the poem reflects on the futility of clinging to lost moments.

The image of the “leaf once fallen, never reborn” situates the poem within natural metaphors for impermanence. This is reminiscent of Shelley’s *Ode to the West Wind*, in which autumn leaves symbolize decay and change. However, while Shelley’s leaves anticipate rebirth in spring, the present poem emphasizes finality: once fallen, the leaf does not return. In this way, it pushes against Romantic optimism and aligns more with existentialist acceptance of finality. As Heidegger argues in *Being and Time*, “temporality temporalizes itself in falling” (Heidegger 377), suggesting that impermanence defines existence itself rather than simply signaling transition.

The poem’s brevity and simple diction also reinforce impermanence. Just as the thought is spoken, it disappears—mirroring the ephemerality of the subject. In African oral traditions, proverbs serve a similar function. For instance, the Igbo proverb “When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk” reflect on opportunities bound by time. Once gone, the moment cannot be reclaimed. Thus, the poem integrates global traditions of acknowledging impermanence through condensed, proverbial wisdom.

The poem conveys impermanence through layered metaphors: “the ashes of yesterday,” “a river that refuses to return to the shore,” and “a flame that has long gone out.” Each image evokes something once vibrant—fire, flowing water, life—but now irretrievable. Ashes signify what has been consumed beyond restoration. A river’s one-directional flow becomes a powerful symbol of

time's movement, recalling Heraclitus's observation that "you cannot step into the same river twice" (Kirk 187). The image of extinguished flame carries connotations of memory—bright for a moment but leaving only shadow. Together, these metaphors present impermanence not only as an abstract philosophical truth but also as a sensory experience.

Impermanence has long been central to Western literary traditions, and Shakespeare's sonnets offer compelling parallels. Sonnet 60 begins, "Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore, / So do our minutes hasten to their end." The metaphor of waves mirrors the poem's river imagery: time advances ceaselessly, indifferent to human desire. Similarly, in Sonnet 65, Shakespeare laments that "sad mortality o'ersways their power," yet still holds out the possibility of endurance through verse. The poem under study diverges here—it does not imagine art or memory as preservation but rather insists on letting go. While Shakespeare often sought permanence through poetry, *All That Is Gone Is Gone* rests in acceptance of impermanence itself.

The Stoic philosophers also emphasized the inevitability of impermanence. Marcus Aurelius, in *Meditations*, observed: "Time is like a river made up of the events which happen, and a violent stream; for as soon as a thing has been seen, it is carried away, and another comes in its place" (Aurelius 153). The poem's river metaphor echoes this exact imagery, whether intentionally or not. For the Stoics, wisdom lay in recognizing what is within human control and what is not. The past belongs firmly to the latter. In the same way, the poem warns against "clutching smoke in one's fist," reminding the reader of the futility of attempting to reclaim what is irretrievably gone.

The tone of the poem in its meditation on impermanence is sober yet not despairing. It avoids the nihilism of some modernist treatments of time, choosing instead a wisdom tradition stance that acknowledges reality without succumbing to hopelessness. In this sense, the poem follows what Kierkegaard called the "movement of resignation," a necessary step before faith and renewal (Kierkegaard 62). To declare that "all that is gone is gone" is not to end in emptiness but to clear space for the next stage of acceptance.

The theme of impermanence in *All That Is Gone Is Gone* establishes the foundation for the poem's philosophical trajectory. By acknowledging the irretrievability of the past, the poem aligns itself with biblical wisdom, Shakespearean reflection, Stoic philosophy, and African proverbial traditions. Its imagery conveys the sensory weight of time's passing, while its tone encourages sober reflection rather than despair. Impermanence, far from being a merely negative reality, becomes the soil from which the poem's later themes—acceptance and renewal—will grow. In this way, the recognition that "all that is gone is gone" is not only a lament but also the beginning of wisdom.

In African poetic traditions, impermanence is equally central. Christopher Okigbo's *Labyrinths* laments the erosion of cultural memory and personal loss, while Wole Soyinka's elegiac verse

often situates individual mortality within broader historical cycles of decline and renewal. The poem *All That Is Gone Is Gone* joins this lineage by employing imagery familiar to oral cultures: time as a road one cannot walk twice, or as water that cannot be scooped back into the gourd once spilled. Such metaphors parallel the Yoruba proverb: “The river that has passed cannot return to its source,” affirming that impermanence is not only an individual experience but also a communal wisdom (Adeeko 57).

The poem situates acceptance as a form of wisdom, echoing ancient traditions that regard peace as arising not from conquest over time, but from harmony with it. In Stoic philosophy, acceptance (*amor fati*) is not passive submission but active assent to reality. Epictetus insists: “Do not seek for things to happen the way you want them to; rather, wish that what happens happen the way it happens: then you will be happy” (*Enchiridion* §8). This ethic finds poetic resonance in the poem’s unadorned statement, which strips away longing and regret. The line “grasping for yesterday is like clutching smoke in one’s fist” not only names the futility of regret but also prescribes release as the only reasonable response.

Literary traditions further reinforce this theme. T.S. Eliot, in *Four Quartets*, insists that “what we call the beginning is often the end, and to make an end is to make a beginning” (Eliot 1943, 1). For Eliot, as for the present poem, reconciliation with time requires release. To cling to endings is to forfeit new beginnings. In African oral traditions, acceptance is often embedded in proverbs such as the Yoruba saying: “*Bi o ti wu ki igi gun to, igba kan ni yóó şubu*” (“No matter how tall a tree grows, it will fall one day”). Such wisdom counsels against despair when loss comes, teaching instead the grace of embracing life’s natural cycles. The poem channels this cultural insight by acknowledging loss yet refusing to be imprisoned by it.

Taken together, the poem positions acceptance as both a philosophical discipline and a spiritual posture. To dwell perpetually on the irreversibility of loss is to be trapped in futility; to accept that “all that is gone is gone” is to find freedom. Thus, the poem does not advocate escapism but maturity, urging readers toward a higher awareness of temporality. In this sense, acceptance becomes the bridge between impermanence and renewal, preparing the soul to embrace the present with serenity and to anticipate the future with hope.

The poem also gestures toward the ethical implications of acceptance. To cling to the past is, in some sense, to refuse the responsibilities of the present. Heidegger emphasizes that authentic existence arises not by “fleeing” from finitude but by confronting it (Heidegger 240). By releasing the past, the individual is freed for the tasks of the present moment. Thus, the poem does not collapse into fatalism but instead articulates a pathway to ethical renewal. Its wisdom is practical: live responsibly in the present because the past, irrecoverable, no longer belongs to you.

At a stylistic level, the poem enacts acceptance through economy. Its language is stripped of ornament, mirroring the austerity of its message. There is no romanticization of “what is gone,” only a sober recognition of its absence. This sparseness prevents indulgence in nostalgia and keeps the reader oriented toward forward motion. Indeed, the poem’s brevity itself models acceptance—it says no more than is necessary, letting go even of linguistic excess.

Ultimately, the poem reframes acceptance as an existential discipline rather than a passive posture. To accept “all that is gone” is not to yield to despair, but to align one’s life with reality. As such, the poem participates in a cross-cultural conversation: Stoic *amor fati*, Pauline resilience, African proverbial wisdom, and Eastern aesthetics all converge in the simple yet profound refrain. The imperative is universal: accept the irretrievable, and in doing so, recover freedom for the present.

Renewal: The Future as a Horizon of Hope

If impermanence cautions us against clinging to the past, and acceptance calls us to reconcile with the present, then renewal is the poem’s ultimate invitation—a summons to hope and transformation. The lines “But rise, O soul, and boldly see, / The dawn still writes your destiny” enact a movement from resignation to empowerment. The imagery of the “dawn” signifies both rebirth and possibility: each new day arrives as a blank canvas upon which life’s story can be redrawn. By situating the future as a horizon of hope, the poem resists despair and affirms human agency in shaping meaning.

Theologically, the motif of renewal echoes throughout Judeo-Christian scripture. Isaiah proclaims, “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isa. 43:18–19, NRSV). Similarly, the Apostle Paul writes: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17, KJV). The poem resonates with these scriptural promises, envisioning renewal not as denial of the past but as divine transformation of human temporality. The dawn, then, is not merely natural imagery; it becomes sacramental, symbolizing God’s perpetual work of creation and redemption.

Philosophically, renewal corresponds with existentialist insights about freedom. Jean-Paul Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, insists that “existence precedes essence,” which means human beings are constantly recreating themselves through choices (Sartre 1943, 22). The poem’s imperative to “rise” mirrors this existential call to authentic action. The past is not determinative; every present moment carries the potential for a radical recommitment to life. Similarly, Nietzsche’s concept of eternal recurrence challenges the reader to live in such a way that one would willfully choose to relive one’s life endlessly (Nietzsche 1882). Renewal, in this light, is not merely passive waiting for change but the active embrace of one’s freedom.

Literary traditions amplify this vision. In African oral literature, proverbs often stress resilience and rebirth. A Hausa proverb states: “Rana dubu ta barawo, rana daya ta mai kaya” (“A thousand days belong to the thief, but one day belongs to the owner”), highlighting that cycles of loss and renewal are intrinsic to human fate. Likewise, Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* dramatizes how, even amidst cultural collapse, new generations rise to reinterpret their destiny. Renewal is thus embedded in African cosmologies where time is cyclical, offering unending opportunities for restoration. The poem’s dawn imagery echoes this cultural perspective, situating renewal as both personal and communal.

Psychologically, renewal aligns with resilience theory. Resilience scholars argue that the human spirit has an innate capacity to “bounce back” from trauma and loss (Masten 2001). The poem captures this ethos by transforming grief into resolve: the soul is called not to wallow but to rise. Viktor Frankl, writing from the horrors of the Holocaust, observed in *Man’s Search for Meaning* that even in the most desolate conditions, individuals retain the freedom to find purpose (Frankl 1946). Renewal, in this sense, is existential therapy—a reorientation of consciousness that transforms despair into meaning.

Finally, from a literary-critical perspective, the poem’s tripartite movement—impermanence, acceptance, renewal—mirrors the archetypal pattern of death and rebirth found in myth and literature. Northrop Frye, in *Anatomy of Criticism*, observes that literature often dramatizes cyclical movements from fall to renewal, reflecting humanity’s collective imagination of regeneration (Frye 1957). The dawn imagery functions as a mythopoeic symbol, suggesting that renewal is not accidental but woven into the fabric of existence.

Thus, renewal is both a personal and universal truth: the soul is summoned to rise, not because the past is erased, but because life insists on continuity. The poem closes not with despair but with possibility, affirming that while “all that is gone is gone,” what lies ahead may yet be greater. Renewal becomes not only a poetic motif but a philosophical horizon—one where human resilience, divine grace, and cultural wisdom converge.

Language and Poetic Devices in “All That Is Gone Is Gone”

Beyond its thematic concerns, the power of *All That Is Gone Is Gone* lies in its linguistic artistry. The poet’s careful choice of diction, imagery, and structure imbues the work with emotional resonance and philosophical weight. A literary analysis that neglects the poem’s language risks overlooking the very texture through which meaning is conveyed. As Ezra Pound famously observed, “literature is language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree” (*ABC of Reading* 1934, 28). In this sense, the poem’s craft demands close attention to its stylistic and rhetorical devices.

1. Diction and Tone

The diction of the poem is simple yet elevated, blending colloquial directness with reflective solemnity. Phrases such as “All that is gone is gone” employ repetition for emphasis, reinforcing the inevitability of loss. The tone oscillates between lament and encouragement: it begins in a reflective, almost elegiac mood but gradually moves toward exhortation and hope. This tonal shift reflects the thematic movement from impermanence to renewal, embodying in language the very transformation the poem advocates.

2. Repetition and Parallelism

The refrain-like quality of the title and central line, “All that is gone is gone”, operates as a structural anchor, much like a biblical refrain or African oral chant. Repetition here functions both mnemonically and philosophically: it engraves impermanence in the reader’s consciousness while mimicking the cycles of memory and forgetting. As Roman Jakobson argued, parallelism is one of the fundamental principles of poetry, creating rhythm not only in sound but also in thought (Jakobson 1960).

3. Imagery and Symbolism

The poem employs a triadic imagery system:

Decay and loss: signified through words like “gone” and the evocation of absence, representing impermanence.

Rest and surrender: associated with acceptance, reminiscent of biblical metaphors of laying burdens down (cf. Matt. 11:28).

Dawn and rising: symbolizing renewal, hope, and the cyclical rebirth inherent in both nature and human spirit.

The dawn, in particular, functions as a polyvalent symbol—natural, spiritual, and mythic—echoing what Mircea Eliade calls “the archetype of regeneration” (The Myth of the Eternal Return 1949).

4. Metaphor and Personification

The poem personifies the soul, addressing it directly as though it were an autonomous being capable of rising and seeing. This apostrophic device bridges inner psychology and external exhortation, making the struggle with impermanence an intimate dialogue. The metaphor of “dawn writing destiny” fuses time with authorship, suggesting that the future is a living text open to revision. Such metaphors expand the reader’s imagination beyond abstraction, rendering philosophical truths tangible.

5. Rhythm and Structure

Though written in free verse, the poem retains a rhythmic cadence achieved through balanced phrasing and parallel structures. The alternation between shorter and longer clauses creates a meditative tempo, echoing the ebb and flow of thought. The tripartite structure (impermanence–acceptance–renewal) mirrors classical rhetorical progression: exordium, narratio, and peroratio.

This structured movement reflects the Aristotelian idea of catharsis, guiding the reader through emotional release toward resolution (Poetics).

6. Intertextual Resonances

The poem draws subtle intertextual connections with both biblical scripture and African oral tradition. The refrain recalls Psalms' parallelism, while the dawn motif resonates with African proverbial wisdom about cycles of life. Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality underscores that every text is a mosaic of quotations (Desire in Language 1980). The poem exemplifies this, borrowing and reconfiguring motifs that span religious, cultural, and literary traditions.

In sum, the poem's language and devices are not ornamental but integral: they are the very channels through which the themes of impermanence, acceptance, and renewal are embodied. The interplay of repetition, metaphor, and imagery situates the poem at the confluence of personal lament and collective wisdom. Its stylistic economy—simple words carrying profound resonance—exemplifies what Cleanth Brooks described as “the well-wrought urn,” where form and content are inseparable (The Well Wrought Urn 1947).

Contribution to Knowledge

This study extends the critical discourse on African poetry by highlighting the significance of existential minimalism in poetic expression. While much scholarship on African literature emphasizes themes of resistance, nationhood, and cultural identity (Ngũgĩ 1986; Irele 2001), this work demonstrates that poems of brevity and stillness also possess transformative depth. By analyzing *All That Is Gone Is Gone*, the paper shows how repetition, imagery, and cadence function not merely as stylistic devices but as philosophical mediators between memory and renewal.

Furthermore, the study contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship by situating the poem at the intersection of literature, philosophy, and theology. The integration of existential hermeneutics with biblical intertextuality illustrates how African poetic forms serve as vehicles for both secular and spiritual reflection. In doing so, the research widens the methodological horizons of literary criticism, offering a model for reading African poetry through layered hermeneutic lenses.

Finally, this study adds to the body of knowledge on cultural resilience in African poetics. It shows how the refrain “All that is gone is gone” resonates as a metaphor of survival and forward movement, reminding readers of the necessity of acceptance without resignation. This positions the poem as a literary archive of resilience, affirming the continuing relevance of poetry in guiding communal consciousness and philosophical discourse in Africa and beyond.

CONCLUSION

The poem *All That Is Gone Is Gone* encapsulates, in its brevity, the paradox of loss and renewal that defines the human condition. Through a simple refrain, it evokes deep philosophical questions about impermanence, the futility of clinging to the past, and the wisdom of embracing the present. The analysis has shown that the central theme of irreversibility is enriched by sub-themes of impermanence and renewal.

Employing frameworks such as Reader-Response theory, archetypal criticism, and biblical hermeneutics, the study demonstrates that the poem functions simultaneously as a literary artifact, a cultural testimony, and a spiritual meditation. Its language and poetic devices—repetition, symbolism, and metaphor—serve as vehicles of meaning, while its existential undertones affirm the universality of human struggle with time and memory.

Ultimately, the poem's enduring value lies in its ability to guide readers toward wisdom: to accept the irrevocability of the past, to embrace the possibility of renewal in the present, and to locate hope in the divine order that frames human experience. In this way, *All That Is Gone Is Gone* transcends its textual brevity to stand as both a philosophical and cultural statement, affirming that literature remains one of humanity's most powerful tools for navigating the complexities of existence.

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