

Towards the end he sailed into an extraordinary mildness / And anchored in his home and reached his wife / And rode within the harbor of her hand, . . . // Goodness existed: that was the new knowledge. / His terror had to blow itself quite out / To let him see . . . // He stood upon the narrow balcony and listened: / And all the stars above him sang as in his childhood / "All is vanity," but it was not the same; / For now the words descended like the calm of mountains - . . . / Reborn, he cried in exultation and surrender / "The Godhead is broken like bread. We are the pieces." // And sat down at his desk and wrote a story.
(From the poem "Herman Melville" by W.H. Auden)

When we think of time we think of clock time: calendars, years, months, days, birthdays, "how many seconds left in the game before time's up". We divide the progress of daylight into numbers from 1 to 12 – and twice over as it passes into night.

We speak of miles per hour, countdowns from initial digits until we reach "one" – then blast off! We boil the spaghetti no more than twelve minutes; scan a dashboard full of "meters". We are so caught up with our wristwatches that they have become like handcuffs, controlling us instead of us them.

And of course with the advance of science, clock time has been traced way beyond the 6000 years still reckoned by biblical fundamentalists as the age of the earth. Modern science tracks clock time all the way back beyond the dinosaurs to the earth's origin 4,600,000,000 years ago.

And what about the galaxies, the farthest of which we measure at 9 billion light years away – a light year being the distance light travels at a speed of 186,000 miles per *second*. And we think living to be a hundred is a long time.

All these measurements called "time" are interesting – except, like that mysterious White Whale *Moby Dick* in Herman Melville's novel, this vast and silent universe can diminish our sense of human importance until, like Captain Ahab, we grapple with it, only to be swallowed up by our frustrations, as by wild fires and viruses. But there is always some one like Ishmael who survives to tell a *story*.

And therein lies our unique humanity: aside from all cold, scientific measurement, as *human* beings we also measure our universe *with our imagination*. We tell stories, write poems, perform plays to make sense of things. Indeed, that's why things like the Bible exist – whereby we may ponder and articulate the *meaning* of time's passage, *the meaning* (and not just the *facts*) of life, the accumulation of our past, present and future as *heading somewhere human, personal*.

Like: don't tell me what time it is; rather tell me what's been happening to me and where I'm going as someone mysteriously driven by hope, by love, by art, by music – which are after all also *facts* of life.

Geoff Wood