

AWAY WITH WORDS

A TRICK IN TIME

Time is a tricky thing. There are so many ways to describe it. You can kill it or save it. At school you are taught to tell it. Time can hang heavy on your hands or slip through your fingers like grains of sand. You can never go backwards in time, only forwards – unless of course you are a writer. Time travelling is possible for writers because they can set their stories in the past, present or future.

There is a story contained in the decoration on this clock. Time is represented by the ancient winged figure of Old Father Time, usually seen with his scythe in one hand and hourglass in the other. However, here some cherubs have stolen his scythe, expressing the idea of 'Love Triumphant over Time', a popular decorative motif on clocks since the early 18th century.

Talking points

Discuss the language of time and examine the clock in detail.

Creative challenges

Prepare a speech, create a comic, write a story from a prompt.

KEY WORK



Astronomical Clock, c. 1750

ASTRONOMICAL CLOCK

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DATE c. 1750

SIZE 294.5 x 133.5 x 91 cm

MATERIALS Gilt bronze, patinated bronze, oak, amaranth, mahogany, pine, tulipwood, glass, sycamore, ebony, box, satiné, silvered brass, blued steel and gilt brass

MAKERS Movement:
Michel Stollewerck
Movement Designer:
Alexandre Fortier (c. 1700-1770)

PLACE France

THE CLOCK

This exceptional clock was a real statement piece. It was probably made for Jean Paris de Monmartel (1690-1766), banker to the French court and one of the wealthiest men in the country.

This astronomical clock can perform many functions. The clock tells two types of time, the usual kind a clock gives, and solar time, normally read off sundials.

From the central dial you can read the age, longitude and phases of the moon, the passage of the sun across the zodiac, and the time anywhere in the northern hemisphere.

The two lowest dials show the rising and setting of the sun (left) and the moon cycle (right).

The days of the week and the months of the year are revealed in two openings under the planisphere. The only thing this calendar can't account for is a leap year, so the clock has to be stopped every four years, on the 29th of February.

The movement of the clock was designed by an inventor called Alexandre Fortier and made by Michel Stollewerck.

GLOSSARY

Cherub

A kind of angel that is represented in art as a beautiful, chubby, naked child with wings.

Old Father Time

An image of an old bearded man, usually carrying a scythe and an hourglass, who represents the passing of time.

Scythe

A farming tool for mowing grass or cutting down crops.

Planisphere

An instrument formed of two adjustable disks that rotate on a pivot, used to display the visible stars for any time and date.

VOCABULARY

astronomical

zodiac

cherubs

hemisphere

rotation

spin

axis

DISCUSS



- Can you think of different ways to describe time? What sayings come to mind?
- How do you think the cherubs might have tricked Old Father Time into giving them his scythe?
- Take some time to have a look at all the details of the clock. Then have a go at describing it from memory.

ACTIVITIES



- Jean Paris de Monmartel is giving a talk about his magnificent clock. Write his talk, describing the clock in detail, including the different dials and all the different types of time the clock can tell.
- Imagine how the cherubs might have tricked Old Father Time into giving them his scythe. Role-play the scene, starting with a freeze frame of the image at the top of the clock.
- Record the story of Old Father Time and the cherubs in a comic or graphic novel format.
- Write a story that has the title 'A Trick in Time'.

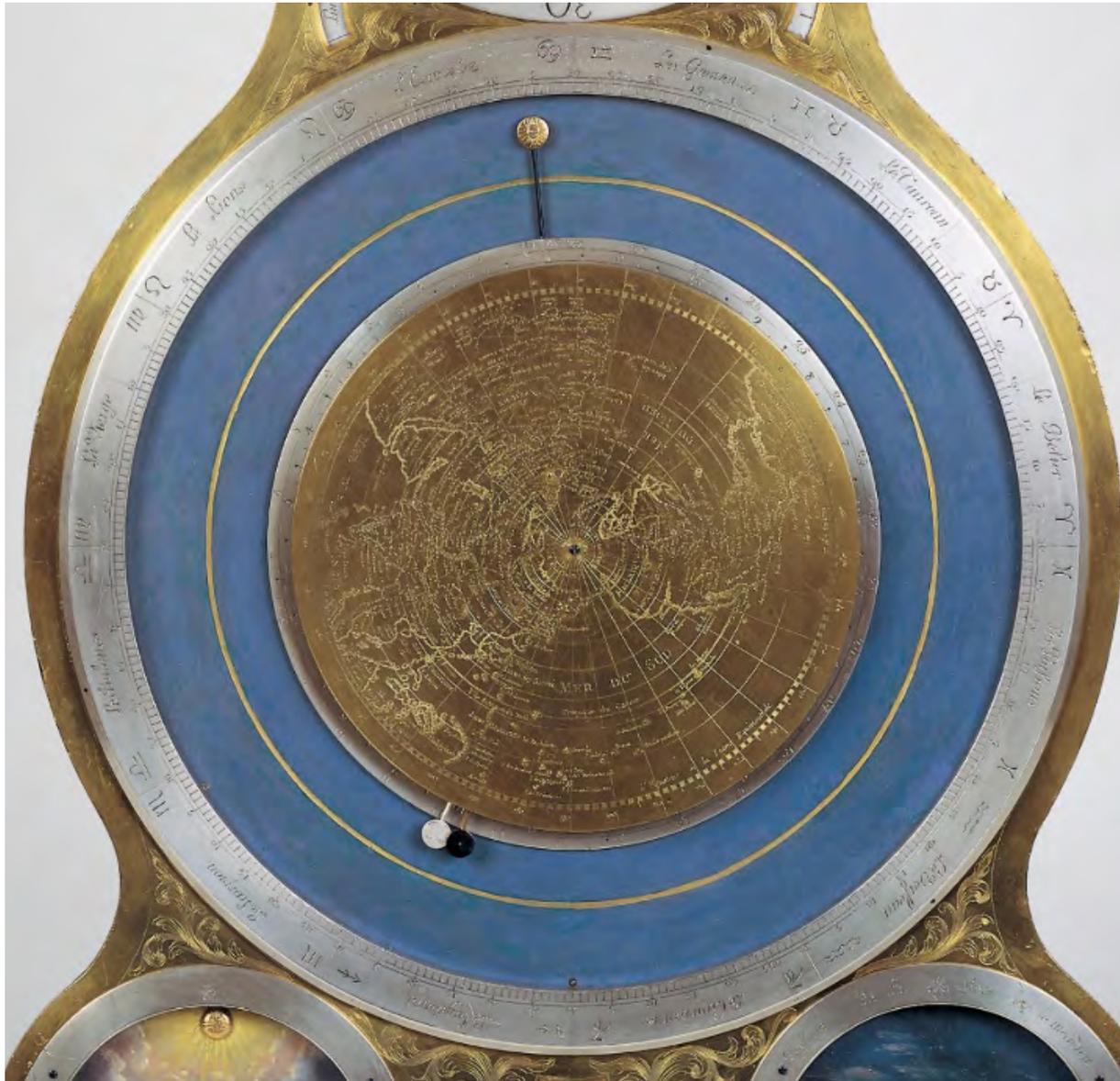
ASTRONOMICAL CLOCK



IN DETAIL

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