

## NOSTRADAMUS

How could you not be bowled over by predictions made by a sixteenth-century physician which tell accurately of things which happened so long after his death?

Living in Provence, France, from 1503 to 1566, Nostradamus made his living writing annual almanacs predicting the next year's fortunes. He was less well known, in his own day, for the prophecies for which he is so famous today. Written in quatrains, or four-lined verses, they were grouped into 'centuries' of 100 quatrains each. All are complete except Century VII, which has only 42 quatrains. Of the 942 prophecies a few are constantly quoted. The vast majority are ignored.

### Interpreting quatrains

The two most quoted quatrains are claimed to predict the Great Fire of London and World War II. When considering my ability to interpret them differently, you need to consider whether, given enough effort and knowledge, many interpretations could be made from every quatrain. Have they any predictive value at all? Did Nostradamus deliberately write so vaguely?

The quatrains were originally written in an archaic form of French—archaic even for Nostradamus's time. Did he do this to add a degree of mystery to further his reputation as a prophet?

Translations vary slightly because of the version of French involved and the fact that different versions of the quatrains were printed in his time.

### The Great Fire of London?

*Le sang du iuste à Londres fera faulte,  
Bruslés par fouldres de vint trois les six;  
La dame antique cherra de place haute,  
De mesme secte plusieurs seront occis.*

*The blood of the just shall be wanted in London,  
Burnt by thunders of twenty-three the sixes,  
The foolish woman shall fall from a high place,  
Of the same sect several shall be killed.*  
(Quatrain 51, Century II)

This is a widely quoted quatrain which is interpreted as referring to the Great Fire of London on 2 September 1666. Many translators change the word *fouldres* to *feu* so it reads 'fire' rather than 'thunderbolts'. The key, say the Nostradamus supporters, is the 'sixes' which gives the year 1666. How 'twenty three the sixes' can be worked into 1666 is still a mystery. But it is done with confidence.

They claim the 'antique dame' is translated as 'old dame' and refers to St Paul's Cathedral which was known as the Old Lady. However, there are no references to St Paul's ever being called the Old Lady. It couldn't actually fall far, but that has been ignored, as has the fact 'antique' is more accurately translated as 'eccentric' or 'foolish'. Some have claimed there was a statue of the Virgin Mary on top of the cathedral, but this is also not true.

James Randi, in *An Encyclopedia of Claims, Frauds, and Hoaxes of the Occult and Supernatural*, explains how the quatrain can be interpreted (without manipulation) to refer to events taking place in Nostradamus's own time, when Bloody Mary I of England began burning Protestant heretics

at the stake, in groups of six. A 'merciful' addition of bags of gunpowder tied between their legs usually gave a more rapid, and thunderous, end to their suffering. Mary went insane while over 300 lost their lives in groups of six.

Nostradamus knew of these events before they were common knowledge and publication could be done in time to give him credibility as a prophet. As he gained his patronage and living telling the future, isn't that a more likely explanation?

Given the vagueness, this quatrain can be interpreted as foretelling many other events. Let's see if I can use it to predict the death of Princess Diana.

*The blood of the just shall be wanted in London*

Diana cared for the young and infirm, fought against landmines and was always seen to be honest and fair. In London (Buckingham Palace to be specific), we well know her blood was wanted.

*Burned by thunders at twenty-three the sixes*

The crash was a fiery job, but I can't just ignore the twenty-three and play around with the sixes, as many before me have done.

This line refers to the role of the media. At twenty-three, Diana had the second of her children, Harry, and her love affair with the press started to deteriorate. Her death at thirty-six (which you immediately noticed was the product of the sixes) was the result of being burnt by the thunders of the press and their vicious tongues. So obvious once it has been pointed out, isn't it?

*The foolish woman shall fall from a high place*

Diana was bulimic, not known as an academic and threw away the chance to be Queen of All England, all which can be interpreted as 'foolish'. She lost her right to ascend to the

throne. Fallen, well and truly, from about as high a place as you can get.

*Of the same sect several shall be killed.*

Yep. Dodi Fayed and Henri Paul went with her.

Can this quatrain be accepted as prophetic when alternative interpretations are possible?

## World War II?

What about the pilots in oxygen masks and World War II? He saw that, didn't he? As there is no requirement on Nostradamus to be in chronological order, this one is from the first century of his quatrains.

*De nuict soleil penseront avoir veu,  
Quand le pourceau demi-homme on verra:  
Bruict, chant, bataille, au ciel battre aperceu:  
Es bestes brutes parler lon orra.*

*At night they will think they have seen the sun,  
When they see the half pig man:  
Noise, screams, battles fought in the skies,  
The brute beasts will be heard to speak.  
(Quatrain 64, Century I)*

This has been interpreted and quoted often as referring to the battles of World War II when pilots wore oxygen masks, which Nostradamus, in his visions, would have seen as looking like pig faces. The battles were fought in the air, and the brute beasts, which were heard to speak, are interpreted as referring to the radios. Let's see if I can come up with an alternative.

It seems pretty obvious to me that the 'pig men' mean exactly that—men who have had a transplant from a pig. Xenotransplantation is the new technology of using animal

organs to save human lives. Most have been heart transplants using pig hearts. Surely that's a much more accurate interpretation?

*At night they will think they have seen the sun*

These operations take a long time, running into the night, and this line refers to the bright lights of the operating theatre which would look like the sun and daytime to Nostradamus, unused to electric lighting.

*When they see the half pig man*

Obviously this refers to the men who have had a transplant from a pig. You can't doubt it.

*Noise, screams, battles fought in the skies*

This is a very controversial procedure. There has been much outcry against it, battles fought over the radio, television and Internet. (I was tempted to have this the noise and battles fought in the *sties* on the piggy murder days. Pity it doesn't match the French at all.)

*The brute beasts will be heard to speak*

This must be interpreted from the understanding of anatomy available to Nostradamus. People feel with their hearts. They speak from their hearts. The pig men must now be speaking from the heart of the piggy donor.

So it is easy to interpret the quatrains—after the event. Any vaguely written verse can be interpreted many ways, but that doesn't mean they have any validity in predicting the future or give convincing evidence of Nostradamus's prophetic abilities.

## Nostradamus myths

It is a common claim that Nostradamus was exhumed by soldiers during the French Revolution with a medallion lying on his chest predicting his exhumation. This was graphically re-enacted in a television program, *The Man Who Saw Tomorrow*, narrated by Orson Welles. It would be pretty impressive, except Nostradamus was buried in the upright position as was normal in his day and there is no record of this event ever having occurred.

There are many such myths quoted to sell books and TV shows. Some quatrains have been made up for political purposes, so always expect the century and quatrain number to be given before you accept it as genuine Nostradamus.

Deliberate mistranslations have also helped manufacture more credible predictions. 'Pasteur' is represented as a name, when it means 'leader'. 'Franco', too, was presented as a name when it can also be translated as 'messenger'. Which is more likely—that Nostradamus knew a name from the future or he used a common word in his own language?

## Desperately seeking suitable quatrains

It was depressing to note that following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on America, Nostradamus books hit the best-selling lists. References to such events are only ever interpreted in retrospect. With elation one was sent spinning around the world and sent to me by at least a dozen joyous fans of the ancient seer:

*In the city of God there will be a great thunder,  
Two brothers torn apart by Chaos. While the fortress  
Endures, the great leader will succumb. The third  
big war will begin when the big city is burning.*  
(Nostradamus, 1654)

The Australian *New Idea* magazine of 22 September 2001 even honoured the Americans with a full back page image of a burning New York and the words 'God Bless America' topped with this exact quote. When I contacted them I was told I was not the first to ring and point out their error. What is sad is that no one even noticed the obvious clue that this was a hoax. The given date is nearly 100 years after Nostradamus died. He didn't write this quatrain. It was written by a student about ten years before the 2001 disaster, to show how easy it is to create Nostradamus quatrains. He proved his point.

### **So did Nostradamus see the future?**

You need to read the quatrains in the original, convince yourself the translations are legitimate and then decide if you believe the interpretations are accurate. Or are there so many possible interpretations that the quatrains are meaningless?

So what are we left with? A man who wrote 942 vague pieces of four-lined prose. A man who is still read and discussed hundreds of years later, making a lot of money for people who have a vested interest in keeping the beliefs alive. Nostradamus did well!

### **Reference**

Randi, James 1995, *An Encyclopedia of Claims, Frauds and Hoaxes of the Occult and Supernatural*, St Martin's Press, New York