**NOSTRADAMUS**

**Nostradamus**, ([December 14](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/December_14), [1503](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1503) – [July 2](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/July_2), [1566](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1566)) born **Michel de Nostredame**, is one of the world's most famous authors of [prophecies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prophecy). He is most famous for his book *Les Propheties*, which consists of one unrhymed and 941 rhymed [quatrains](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quatrains), grouped into nine sets of 100 and one of 42, called 'Centuries'. Interest in the work of this prominent figure of the French Renaissance is still considerable, especially in the media and in popular culture.

**Life**

**Childhood**

Born in [Saint-Rémy-de-Provence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint-R%C3%A9my-de-Provence) in the south of [France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France) in December 1503, Michel de Nostredame was one of at least eight children of Reynière de St-Rémy and grain dealer Jaume de Nostredame, who was also a prosperous home-grown notary. The latter's family had originally been [Jewish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jew), but Jaume's father, Guy Gassonet, had converted to [Catholicism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholicism) circa 1455, taking the Christian name 'Pierre' and the surname 'Nostredame' (the latter apparently from the saint's-day on which his conversion was solemnized). In this, he was merely following the example of thousands of others, thanks to increasing official French persecution of Jews, many of whom were the descendants of former refugees from Spain, where they were known as the [*Marranos*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marranos). The names of Nostredame's known forebears seem to reflect this. While practice of the ancestral religion was apparently continued in secret, nobody knows whether this applied to Nostredame's family, or whether it still applied to him two generations later. His adult religious leanings suggest, however, that his upbringing was devoutly Catholic.

His known siblings included Delphine, Jehan (*c.*1507-77), Pierre, Hector, Louis (*b.*1522), Bertrand, Jean and Antoine (*b.*1523).

**Student years**

Little is known about Nostredame's childhood, although there is a persistent tradition that he was educated by his maternal great-grandfather Jean de St-Rémy – which is vitiated by the equally persistent tradition that the latter died when the child was only one year old. It is known, however, that at the age of fifteen Nostredame entered the University of [Avignon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avignon) to study for his baccalaureate. After little more than a year (when he would have studied the regular [*Trivium*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trivium) of [grammar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammar), [rhetoric](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhetoric) and [logic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logic), rather than the later [*Quadrivium*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quadrivium) of [geometry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geometry), [arithmetic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arithmetic), [music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music) and [astronomy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astronomy)/[astrology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrology)) he was forced to leave Avignon when the university closed its doors in the face of an outbreak of [the plague](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Death). In 1529, after some years as an [apothecary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apothecary), he entered the University of [Montpellier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montpellier) to study for a doctorate in [medicine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicine). He was promptly expelled again shortly afterwards, though, when it was discovered that he had been an apothecary, which was a 'manual' trade expressly banned by the university statutes. The hand-written expulsion document (*BIU Montpellier, Register S 2 folio 87* – see facsimile on p. 25 of Lemesurier [2] under [**Sources**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nostradamus#Sources)) still exists in the faculty library. After his expulsion, Nostredame continued working, presumably as an apothecary (though some of his publishers and [correspondents](http://search.atomz.com/search/?sp-q=inedites&sp-a=sp1002c832&sp-p=all&sp-f=ISO-8859-1) would later call him 'Doctor'), and became famous for creating a "rose pill" that was widely believed (not least by himself) to protect against the plague.

**Marriage and healing work**

In [1531](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1531) he was invited by [Jules-César Scaliger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_Caesar_Scaliger), a leading [Renaissance scholar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polymath), to come to [Agen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agen). There Nostredame married a woman whose name is still in dispute (possibly Henriette d'Encausse), but who bore him two children. In [1534](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1534), however, his wife and children died, presumably from the plague. After their death he continued to travel, passing through France and possibly [Italy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy).

On his return in 1545, he assisted the prominent physician Louis Serre in his fight against a major plague-outbreak in Marseille, and then tackled further outbreaks of disease on his own in [Salon-de-Provence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salon-de-Provence) and in the regional capital, [Aix-en-Provence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aix-en-Provence). Finally, in [1547](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1547), he settled down in Salon-de-Provence in the house which is still there today, and where he married a rich widow named Anne Ponsarde (nicknamed *Gemelle*, or 'Twinny') and eventually had six children – three daughters (Madeleine, Anne and Diane) and three sons (César, Charles and André). Between 1556 and 1567, Nostredame and his wife would in due course acquire a one-thirteenth share in a huge canal project organized by Adam de Craponne to irrigate largely waterless Salon and the nearby Désert de la Crau from the river [Durance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durance). Parts of the network remain today: thanks to much larger supplementary canals, there is even a hydroelectric station in Salon itself.

**The seer**

After a further visit to Italy, Nostredame began to move away from medicine and towards the occult. Following popular trends, he wrote an [almanac](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Almanac) for [1550](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1550), for the first time Latinizing his name to 'Nostradam*us'*. He was so encouraged by its success that he decided to write one or more annually. Taken together, they are known to have contained at least 6,338 prophecies (most of them, in the event, failed predictions – see Chevignard and Lemesurier [2] under [**Sources**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nostradamus#Sources)), as well as at least eleven annual calendars, all of them starting on January 1 (and not, as is sometimes supposed, in March). It was mainly in reaction to the almanacs that nobility and other prominent persons from far and wide soon started asking for horoscopes and advice from him, though he generally expected *them* to supply the birth-charts on which the horoscopes would be based.

He then began his project of writing one thousand quatrains, which form the prophecies for which he is most famous today. Feeling vulnerable to religious fanatics, however, he devised a method of obscuring his meaning by using "[Virgilianized](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgil)" syntax, word games and a mixture of languages such as [Provençal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proven%C3%A7al_language), [Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek), [Latin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin) and [Italian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_language). For technical reasons connected with their publication in three installments, the last fifty-eight quatrains of the seventh 'Century', or book of 100 verses, have not survived into any extant edition.

The quatrains, published in a book titled *Les Propheties* ('The Prophecies'), received a mixed reaction when they were published. Some people thought Nostradamus was a servant of evil, a fake, or insane, while many of the elite thought his quatrains were spiritually inspired prophecies. [Catherine de Médicis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_de%27_Medici), the queen consort of King [Henri II of France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_II_of_France), was one of Nostradamus' greatest admirers. After reading his almanacs for 1555, which hinted at unnamed threats to the royal family, she summoned him to Paris to explain them, and to draw up horoscopes for her children. At the time, he feared that he would be beheaded, but by the time of his death in [1566](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1566), Catherine had made him Counselor and Physician-in-Ordinary to the King.

Some biographical accounts of Nostradamus' life state that he was afraid of being persecuted for [heresy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heresy) by the [Inquisition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inquisition), but neither [prophecy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prophecy) nor [astrology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrology) fell under this bracket, and he would have been in danger only if he had practiced [magic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic) to support them. In fact, his relations with the [Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church) as a prophet and healer were always excellent. His brief imprisonment at Marignane in late 1561 came about purely because he had published his 1562 almanac without the prior permission of a bishop, contrary to a recent royal decree.

**Final years and death**

By [1566](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1566) Nostradamus' [gout](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gout), which had plagued him painfully for many years and made movement very difficult, turned into [dropsy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edema). In late June he summoned his lawyer to draw up an extensive will bequeathing his property plus 3444 crowns (around $300,000 today) – minus a few debts – to his wife pending her remarriage, in trust for her sons pending their twenty-fifth birthdays and her daughters pending their marriages. This was followed by a much shorter codicil. On the evening of July 1 he is alleged to have told his secretary Jean de Chavigny, "You will not find me alive by sunrise." The next morning he was reportedly found dead, lying on the floor between his bed and a makeshift bench.

**Methods**

Nostradamus claimed to base his predictions on judicial [astrology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrology) – the assessment of the 'astrological quality' of expected future events – but was heavily criticized by professional astrologers for his assumption that 'comparative horoscopy' (comparison of future planetary configurations with the astrology of known past events) could predict the actual events themselves.

Recent research (Brind'Amour [1], Prévost, Gruber, Lemesurier [2] and [3]) has suggested that most of his prophetic work was in fact based on paraphrasing collections of ancient [end-of-the-world](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eschatology) prophecies (mainly [Bible](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible)-based – the end of the world was expected at the time to occur in either 1800 or 1887, or possibly in 2242, depending on the system adopted) and supplementing their insights by projecting known historical events and identifiable anthologies of [omen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omen)-reports into the future with the aid of comparative horoscopy. It is thanks to this that his work contains so many predictions involving ancient figures such as [Sulla](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sulla), [Marius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marius), [Nero](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nero), [Hannibal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hannibal) and so on, as well as descriptions of "battles in the clouds" and "frogs falling from the sky". Astrology itself is mentioned only twice in Nostradamus' *Preface*, and 41 times in the *Centuries* themselves, though rather more in his famously baffling dedicatory *Letter to King Henri II*.

His historical sources include easily identifiable passages from [Livy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livy), [Suetonius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suetonius), [Plutarch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plutarch) and a range of other classical historians, as well as from the chronicles of medieval authors such as Villehardouin and [Froissart](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Froissart). Many of his broader astrological references, by contrast, are taken almost word-for-word from the [*Livre de l'estat et mutations des temps*](http://search.atomz.com/search/?sp-q=Roussat&sp-a=sp1002c832&sp-p=all&sp-f=ISO-8859-1) of 1549/50 by Richard Roussat. Even the planetary tables, already published by professional astrologers, on which he based the birth-charts that he was unable to avoid preparing himself are easily identifiable by their detailed figures, even where (as is usually the case) he gets some of them wrong. (Refer to the seminal analysis of these charts by Brind'Amour, 1993, under [Sources](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nostradamus#Sources#Sources), and compare Gruber's comprehensive critique of Nostradamus’ horoscope for Crown Prince Rudolph Maximilian).

His major prophetic source was evidently the [*Mirabilis liber*](http://www.propheties.it/nostradamus/mirabilis/mirabilis.html) of 1522 (Brind'Amour, Lemesurier [2] and [3]), which contained a range of prophecies by [Pseudo-Methodius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocalypse_of_Pseudo-Methodius), the Tiburtine [Sibyl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sibyl), [Joachim of Fiore](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joachim_of_Fiore), [Savonarola](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Savonarola) and others (his Preface contains no fewer than 24 biblical quotations, all but two of them in exactly the same order as Savonarola). The book had enjoyed considerable success in the 1520s, when it went through half-a-dozen editions (see **Links** below for facsimiles and translations). The obvious question – why the *Mirabilis liber* did not sustain its influence in the way that Nostadamus’ writings did – is explained mainly by the fact that the book (like the Bible) was mostly in Latin and in Gothic script and, to make matters even more complicated for the general reader, contained many abstruse scholastic abbreviations. Nostradamus was, in effect, one of the first to present its prophecies (and others) openly in the French vernacular – as was also happening to the Bible at the time – which is no doubt why he has retained all the credit for them. The *Mirabilis liber*, (some of the predictions of which had already lapsed by the time Nostradamus started writing) was not translated into French until 1831 – and this mainly for scholarly and antiquarian reasons at a time when knowledge of Latin was beginning to die out. See selected English translations from it [here](http://www.propheties.it/nostradamus/mirabilis/mirabilis-en.htm).

Meanwhile, if Nostradamus' many competitors – and he had many – never accused him of copying from it, it was because copying and/or paraphrasing, far from being regarded (as it is today) as mere plagiarism, was regarded at the time as what all good, educated people should do anyway. The whole Renaissance was based on the idea. Copying from the classics in particular, often without acknowledgement, and preferably from memory, was all the rage. Only in the 17th century did people start to be surprised by the fact that much of his output was evidently based on earlier and often classical originals – which was no doubt why, according to the early commentator Théophile de Garencières, his *Prophecies* started to be used as a classroom-reader at that time. Nostradamus, it should be remembered, denied in writing on several occasions that he was a prophet on his own account. In translation:

*Although, my son, I have used the word 'prophet', I would not attribute to myself a title of such lofty sublimity* — Preface to César, 1555

*Not that I would attribute to myself either the name or the role of a prophet* — Preface to César, 1555

*...and some of [the prophets] predicted great and marvelous happenings: [though,] for me, I in no way attribute to myself such a title* — Letter to King Henri II, 1558

*I do but make bold to predict (not that I guarantee the slightest thing at all), thanks to my researches and the consideration of what judicial Astrology promises me and sometimes gives me to know, principally in the form of warnings, so that folk may know that with which the celestial stars do threaten them. Not that I am foolish enough to pretend to be a prophet...* — Open letter to Privy Councillor (later Chancellor) Birague, 15th June 1566

This last is presumably why he entitled his book

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| LES **PROPHETIES** DE M. MICHEL NOSTRADAMUS |

(which, in French, as easily means 'The Prophecies, *by* M. Michel Nostradamus' – which is precisely what they were – as 'The Prophecies *of* M. Michel Nostradamus' – which, except in a few cases, they weren't, other than in the manner of their editing, expression and re-application to the future). Any criticism of Nostradamus for claiming to be a prophet, in other words, would have been for doing what he never claimed to be doing in the first place.

Further material (see Brind'Amour, Gruber, Lemesurier [2] and [3]) was gleaned from the *De honesta disciplina* of 1504 by [Petrus Crinitus](http://www.propheties.it/nostradamus/crinito/crinito.htm), which included extracts from [Psellus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psellus)'s *De daemonibus* and the [*De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_Mysteriis_Aegyptiorum)..." (Concerning the mysteries of Egypt...), a book on Chaldean and Assyrian magic by [Iamblichus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iamblichus), a 4th-century neo-Platonist. Latin versions of both had recently been published in [Lyon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyon), and extracts from both are paraphrased (in the second case almost literally) in his first two verses. While it is true that Nostradamus claimed in 1555 to have burned all the occult works in his library, no one can say exactly what books were destroyed in this fire. The fact that they reportedly burned with an unnaturally brilliant flame suggests, however, that some of them were manuscripts on [vellum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vellum), which was routinely treated with [saltpeter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saltpeter).

Given that his methodology, clearly, was mainly literary, it is doubtful whether Nostradamus used any particular methods for entering a [trance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trance) state, other than [contemplation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contemplation), [meditation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meditation) and incubation (i.e. ritually 'sleeping on it'). His sole description of this process is contained in letter 41 of his collected Latin correspondence, as republished by Jean Dupèbe and translated by Lemesurier [2]. The popular legend that he attempted the ancient methods of flame gazing, water gazing or both simultaneously is based on an uninformed reading of his first two verses (see above), which merely liken his own efforts to those of the Delphic and Branchidic [oracles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oracle). In his dedication to King Henri II Nostradamus describes "emptying my soul, mind and heart of all care, worry and unease through mental calm and tranquility", but his frequent references to the "bronze tripod" of the [Delphic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delphi) rite are usually preceded by the words "as though".

**Works**



A copy of his *Prophecies* dated 1672, located at The P.I. Nixon Medical History Library of The [University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Texas_Health_Science_Center_at_San_Antonio).

***The Prophecies*** - In this book he collected his major, long-term divinations. The first edition was published in [1555](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1555). The second, with 289 further prophetic verses, was printed in [1557](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1557). The third edition, with three hundred new quatrains, was reportedly printed in [1558](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1558), but nowadays only survives as part of the omnibus edition that was published after his death in [1568](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1568). Given printing practices at the time, no two editions turned out to be identical, and it is relatively rare to find even two *copies* that are exactly the same.

The ***Almanacs*** - By far the most popular of his works, these were published annually from 1550 until his death. Often he published two or even three in a single year, entitled either *Almanachs* (detailed predictions), *Prognostications* or *Presages* (more generalized predictions).

Nostradamus was not only a diviner, but a professional healer, too. We know that he wrote at least two books on medical science. One was an alleged "translation" of [Galen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galen), and in his so-called ***Traité des fardemens*** (basically a medical cookbook containing, once again, materials borrowed mainly from others) he included a description of the methods he used to treat the plague – none of which (not even the bloodletting) apparently worked. The same book also describes the preparation of [cosmetics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmetics).

A manuscript normally known as the ***Orus Apollo*** also exists in the [Lyon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyon) municipal library, where upwards of 2000 original documents relating to Nostradamus are stored under the aegis of Michel Chomarat. It is a purported translation of an ancient Greek work on [Egyptian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt) [hieroglyphs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hieroglyphs) based on later, Latin versions, all of them unfortunately ignorant of the true meanings of the ancient Egyptian script, which was not in fact deciphered until the advent of [Champollion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Champollion) in the 19th century.

Since his death, only the *Prophecies* have continued to be popular, but in this case they have been quite extraordinarily so. Indeed, they have seldom, if ever, been out of print. This may be due partly to popular unease about the future, partly to people's desire to see their lives in some kind of over-all cosmic perspective and so to give meaning to them – but above all, possibly, to their vagueness and lack of dating, which enables them to be wheeled out after every major dramatic event and retrospectively claimed as 'hits'.

**Hazards of interpretation**

Skeptics of Nostradamus state that his reputation as a prophet is largely manufactured by modern-day supporters who shoehorn his words into events that have either already occurred or are so imminent as to be inevitable, a process known as "[retroactive clairvoyance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Retroactive_clairvoyance)". It has been stated, probably correctly, that no Nostradamus quatrain has ever been interpreted as predicting a specific event *before* it occurred beyond a very general level (e.g., a fire will occur, a war will start).

A good demonstration of this flexible predicting is to take lyrics written by modern songwriters (e.g., [Bob Dylan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Dylan)) and show that they are equally "prophetic". (For Dylan see *Masters Of War , As I Went Out One Morning, Gates Of Eden, A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall, It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding*), etc.)

Some scholars believe that Nostradamus wrote not to be a prophet, but to comment on events that were happening in his own time, writing in his elusive way – using highly metaphorical and cryptic language – in order to avoid persecution. This is similar to the [Preterite](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preterism) interpretation of the [Book of Revelation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Revelation); [John (the Divine)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_of_Patmos) intended to write only about contemporary events, but over time his writings became seen as prophecies.

The well-known prophecy that "a great and terrifying leader would come out of the sky" in [1999](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1999) and 7 months "to resuscitate the great King from [Angoumois](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angoumois)" has been much over-stated. The phrase *d'effraieur* (of terror) in fact occurs nowhere in the original printing, which merely uses the word *deffraieur* (defraying, hosting). On the basis of Nostradamus's by-now well-known technique of projecting past events into the future, Lemesurier [3] suggests that it therefore refers back to the restoration to health of the captive [Francis I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_I) of France (who was Duke of [Angoulême](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angoul%C3%AAme)) following a surprise visit to his cell by his host, the then Holy Roman Emperor [Charles V](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_V) in 1525. No fewer than five of the planets were in the same signs on both occasions.

The bulk of the quatrains deal with disasters of various sorts. The disasters include plagues, earthquakes, wars, floods, invasions, murders, droughts, battles and many other related themes. Some quatrains cover these in over-all terms; others concern a single person or small group of persons. Some cover a single town, others several towns in several countries. All of them are presented in the context of the supposedly imminent end of the world – a conviction that sparked numerous collections of [end-time prophecies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eschatology) at the time, not least an unpublished collection by [Christopher Columbus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Columbus).

**Misquotes and hoaxes**

Nostradamus enthusiasts have credited him with predicting numerous events in world history, including the [French Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Revolution), the [atom bomb](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_weapon), the rise of [Adolf Hitler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf_Hitler) and the [September 11 attacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11%2C_2001_attacks) on the [World Trade Center](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Trade_Center). Indeed, they regularly make similar claims regarding each new world crisis as it comes along, for the most part shamelessly twisting either the words or the events to fit (see specific examples below). The tradition goes right back to Nostradamus' own day, and naturally does the seer himself no favors.

Nostradamus does not in fact mention any of the above specifically, not even Hitler: the name *Hister*, as he himself explains in his *Presage* for 1554, is merely the classical name for the Lower Danube, while *Pau, Nay, Loron* – often claimed to be an anagram of 'Napaulon Roy'– evidently refers simply to three neighboring towns in south-western France close to the seer's one-time home territory. This linguistic sleight of hand is particularly easy to carry out when the would-be commentator knows no French to start with, especially in its 16th-century form – to say nothing of French geography. Not surprisingly, then, detractors see such 'edited' predictions as examples of [*vaticinium ex eventu*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaticinium_ex_eventu), retroactive clairvoyance and [selective thinking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Selective_thinking), which find non-existent patterns in ambiguous statements. Because of this, it has been claimed that Nostradamus is "100% accurate at predicting events *after* they happen", while the seer has acquired even more disrepute than he possibly deserves.

Certainly, there is a persistent tendency to claim that 'Nostradamus predicted whatever has just happened'. As mentioned above, this applied most recently to the September 11, 2001 attacks on [New York City](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_City). Almost as soon as the event had happened, the relevant Internet sites were deluged with enquiries into whether Nostradamus had predicted the event. In response, Nostradamus enthusiasts started searching for a Nostradamus quatrain that could be said to have done so. The nearest that they could come up with was quatrain VI.97, which in the original 1557 edition ran:

*Cinq & quarante degrés ciel bruslera,*

*Feu approucher de la grand cité neufve,*

*Instant grand flamme esparse saultera,*

*Quant on voudra des* [*Normans*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normans) *faire preuve:*

With *instant* evidently a version of the Latin *instanter* ('violently, vehemently'), a reasonable English translation would thus appear to be:

Five and forty degrees, the sky shall burn:

To great ‘New City’ shall the fire draw nigh.

With vehemence the flames shall spread and churn

When with the [Normans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normans) they conclusions try.