# A NOTE ON THE NOSTRADAMUS PROPHECIES

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Experiences of a precognitive type seem to be of events soon to come, rather than of ones more distant in time. They also tend to be of personal, often trivial, matters. Commonly, the event happens in the next day or two. The present writer, using four well known reports of precognitive experiences, found the relationship between nearness in time and the incidence of precognition to be a very close one (Orme 1974). These remarks might also imply that the present writer assumes the validity of at least some precognitive experiences. This assumption is not in fact, necessary before making such studies valuable. If the experiences fall into certain patterns, this is of some significance whatever their ultimate standing as precognitions. However, it goes without saying that even if only one or two precognitive experiences are validated as such, this would have enormous consequences for views on the nature of mind and matter.

One way in which the Nostradamus prophecies vary from the average precognitive report is that they are supposed to deal with famous people and important events. Although they are closely concerned with France, other countries and peoples appear to be noted. The Nostradamus prophecies are of course famous (or infamous depending on your view) but tend to fall outside the usual range of serious psychical research. The prophecies particularly appear in the 10 centuries (or hundreds) of four-line verses known as quatrains. One of the centuries is incomplete. As all commentators agree, the style of writing is obscure and difficult in its use of French that was archaic for its period (1555–1568). There is also the use of Provençal. Greek and Latin words. It is believed that the quatrains are deliberately arranged out of chronological order to aid Nostradamus' own security. But even in themselves the quatrains tend to be ambiguous and vague. Critics may well suggest that this leads to the possibility that actual events can be linked up with the prophecies if enough ingenuity is exercised. Alternatively, the prophecies have always been well known in certain circles (Hitler and the Nazis for example). Consequently, it might even be suggested that some actors on the world stage were deliberately fulfilling what appeared to be their destiny. Another critical point worth making is that many, if not most, of the Nostradamus prophecies appear to refer to events after the prophet's death. Although this is not unknown among serious studies of precognitive experience, it is uncommon.

On the positive side it must be noted that it is quite characteristic of even the best predictions, to be vague and ambiguous. Only after the event does its match with the prediction become (or seem to become) clear. Furthermore only the most sceptical person would not be intrigued by certain of the Nostradamus "predictions", for example, certain of those appearing to refer to Louis XVI, Charles I, Napoleon, Hitler. In particular, mention might be made of the quatrains that have been taken to refer to Henry II and Montgomery (I, 35; III, 30), or Louis XVI's flight to Varennes (IX, 20; IX, 34).

Following the discussions of Laver (1952) and of Cheetham (1973), I have considered from the 10 centuries what could be 265 prophecies identifiable as possibly accurate predictions.

The table shows a summary of the results of allocating these 265 to 50 year periods. It can be seen that the largest proportion are indeed, relatively near in time to Nostradamus (24 per cent) and then the proportion declines to 1700. The trend might be taken as some proof that the Nostradamus prophecies, like other predictions, show a quantifiable decrease in occurrence as the time between the prediction and the predictable event increases. However, after 1700, this trend is broken. Indeed peaks occur between 1750 and 1850—largely due to an increase in events claimed to be associated with the French Revolution and Napoleon (1789–1815). It might be critically added that a further slight peak 1900–1950 could be due to modern commentators too easily finding current or recent events mirrored in the centuries.

Of the 265 events, 42 were selected as being more definite or striking. It can be seen from the table that the percentage per 50 year period is not dramatically different from that obtained with the total 265. This would tend to suggest that the ascription of one prophecy to a particular date and time does not vary much according to how good or direct a hit it appears to be.

As this result is at variance with the expected geometric fall-off pattern, it might be taken as proof that the prophecies (as such) are spurious. Perhaps procedural problems are important. One possibility is that a number of the quatrains appear to be linked and certainly, if one allows fairly ambitious interpreters their way, quite a number of different quatrains can be put together in a sequence. But even so, they rarely actually duplicate a particular event but rather go on to depict further or related events. Yet logically, these events could still be regarded as something like scenes in a larger play. However, attempting to deal with this in different ways did not seem materially to affect the pattern of the results described.

It might be argued, of course, that the Nostradamus prophecies are in any case outside the usual prediction experience. They are on the

whole, from events beyond the percipient's life time and are not (perhaps as a consequence) personal and/or trivial. If such is the case, large scale events such as the French Revolution and the Napoleonic period will indeed loom large on the temporal horizon. Similarly the lesser peak between 1900 and 1950 could reflect the size, even at a temporal distance, of the two world wars. Forming the equivalents of mountains on the temporal landscape they will intrude on awareness more than nearer but smaller events. If the initial assumption is made that at least some of the Nostradamus prophecies match future events, it automatically follows that Nostradamus was able (unlike the ordinary, vicarious dreamer) in some way to focus his attention on more distant future events.

It is of interest that the conditions of occurrence appear to have been much the same for the Nostradamus prophecies as for more precognitions in general. The latter typically occur in a dream or when awareness is in a sense, withdrawn from the outside world. The opening quatrains of the centuries seem to describe a similar state of being. There are other, internal, pointers to the same conclusion. The frequent allusions and double meanings are perhaps not all consciously determined to confuse the reader or potential interrogator but could be examples of well known kinds of dream mechanism that frequently occur. This may lead on to the further speculation that even if Nostradamus could prophesy, he may rarely, if ever, have been able to say—on such a date, this will happen, in a clear, unequivocal way.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Nostradamus prophecies differ from the ordinary run of apparent predictions in three ways. First, they appear to be linked with events that are far away, rather than near to, in time. Second, they largely refer to events beyond Nostradamus' life time. Third, they relate to epic, important events rather than to personal ones.

On the other hand, the circumstances of the predictions seem to be quite typical of that reported for precognitive experiences. In other words they occur, if not in dreams, then in other situations of altered awareness where the mind becomes in some way removed from the external here and now. This state of altered awareness probably accounts (as in dreams) for a great deal of the vagueness, ambiguity and double meaning.

### REFERENCES

Orme, J. E., *Precognition and Time*. J. **SPR**, **47**, 351-365, 1974.
Laver, J., *Nostradamus*. Penguin: London, 1952.
Cheetham, E., *The Prophecies of Nostradamus*. Spearman: London, 1973.

*Number of Possible Predictions in Different Periods*

|         | Total | to 1600 | to 1650 | to 1700 | to 1750 | to 1800 | to 1850 | to 1900 | to 1950 | >1950 | 1789-1815 |
|---------|-------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------|-----------|
|         | 265   | 64      | 21      | 11      | 13      | 50      | 44      | 24      | 36      | 2     | 75        |
| % total |       | 24      | 8       | 4       | 5       | 19      | 17      | 9       | 14      | 1     | 28        |
|         | 42    | 6       | 6       | 2       | 1       | 9       | 7       | 6       | 5       | 0     | 16        |
| % total |       | 14      | 14      | 5       | 2       | 21      | 17      | 14      | 11      | 0     | 38        |