



# Nostradamus: How an Obscure Renaissance Astrologer Became the Modern Prophet of Doom

*Stéphane Gerson*

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We all know the name *Nostradamus*, but who was he really? Why did his predictions become so influential in Renaissance Europe and then keep resurfacing for nearly five centuries? And what does Nostradamus's endurance in the West say about us and our own world?

In *Nostradamus: How an Obscure Renaissance Astrologer Became the Modern Prophet of Doom*, historian Stéphane Gerson takes readers on a journey back in time to explore the life and afterlife of Michel de Nostredame, the astrologer whose *Prophecies* have been interpreted, adopted by successive media, and eventually transformed into the Gospel of Doom for the modern age. Whenever we seem to enter a new era, whenever the premises of our worldview are questioned or imperiled, Nostradamus offers certainty and solace. In 1666, guests at posh English dinner parties discussed his quatrain about the Great Fire of London. In 1942, the Jewish writer Irène Némirovsky latched her hopes for survival to Nostradamus' prediction that the war would soon end. And on September 12, 2001, teenagers proclaimed on the streets of Brooklyn that "this guy, Nostradamus" had seen the 9/11 attacks coming.

Through prodigious research in European and American archives, Gerson shows that Nostradamus — a creature of the modern West rather than a vestige from some antediluvian era — tells us more about our past and our present than about our future. In chronicling the life of this mystifying figure and the lasting fascination with his predictions, Gerson's book becomes a historical biography of a belief: the faith that we can know tomorrow and master our anxieties through the powers of an extraordinary but ever more elusive seer.

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