

Michel Nostradamus, *The world-famous/ most experienced/ philosopher/ astrologist/ and physician, two books [...]*(1573)

Abstract

First published in French in 1552, Michel Nostradamus' (1503–1556) book of recipes for elixirs, cosmetics, and the like was translated into German twenty years later by the Augsburg physician Jeremias Martius (c. 1535–1585). Martius was supported by the powerful Fugger family, who sent him to Montpellier and Padua to study medicine and to learn French and Italian. The following excerpt is a recipe for golden (blond) hair dye. Blond hair and fair skin were the standard of beauty for Renaissance women. The recipe called for expensive ingredients such as licorice, orange, and saffron. The recipe was supposed to make enough solution for 10–12 women for 1–2 years. It is highly probable that the knowledge and practice of hair dying was reserved for bourgeois and aristocratic households.

Source

Michaelis Nostradamus, *The world-famous, most experienced philosopher, astrologist, and physician, two books in which he gives a true, thorough, and complete report of how one can improve the looks of a malformed body—be it female or male—and make it more youthful and how to prepare all sorts of pleasant smelling potions, powders, oils, soaps, incense, and musk pellets for the medical treatment of a variety of ailments. And in the second part, how one can preserve all kinds of fruit artfully and delightfully in sugar and save them for when they are necessary.* Written by him first in the French language, but now, for the good of our fatherland, translated most faithfully into the common German language by Jeremias Martius, official doctor of medicine in Augsburg. By privilege of the Holy Roman Emperor, not to be reprinted [Augsburg]: M.D.LXXIII (1573).

[...]

How to color hair golden, be it white or black, so that it does not quickly lose the color and is preserved in its perfection and grows so that the root as well as the tip shines yellow.

Chapter XXIII

Take a pound of pulverized beechwood shavings, half a pound of boxwood shavings, eight lot^[1] of fresh licorice, the same amount of very yellow, dried bitter orange peels, eight lot each of swallow-wort and yellow poppy seeds, four lot of the leaves and blossoms of glaucium—an herb similar to the poppy that grows in Syria, one lot of saffron, and half a pound of wheat dough chopped into small pieces. Immerse it all in a lye made of fine ash and boil the solution until it has been reduced by half, and then strain it all together. Next, take a large pot of earthenware and make ten or twelve holes in the base of it. Then take equal parts ash from vines and sifted [wood] ash and put them into a large wooden mortar or whatever you think will work well, pour in some of the lye from above, grind it together well for the better part of a day, but keep it somewhat crumbly. Add rye and wheat straw and continue grinding until the straw has absorbed most of the liquid. Now put these ground ashes into the prepared earthen vessel and stick a stalk of rye through each hole [in the base], and put straw and ash in the bottom of the pot so that it will be full, leaving just enough space that the remaining lye can be poured in. In the

evening, set up a second earthenware pot to catch the liquid which runs out through the holes in the rye haulms. Apply this liquid to the hair and let it dry, and, within three or four days, the hair will be as golden as if it were ducats, but before you use this on your head, wash the hair with a good lye, for the color will not take as well if the hair is coarse and dirty. You should also know that this solution will last for one or two years, and if you use it properly, it [i.e. the quantity of the recipe] should help ten or twelve women because it only takes a little of this to color the hair beautifully. And one need not wash it with anything else, for one with coal black hair will soon have golden hair, and it will remain so for a long time.

NOTES

[1] A unit of measure that means approximately “one spoon full.” A 19th-century Prussian law set the lot to equal one thirtieth of a pound or 16.666 grams, but the exact definition varied over time and geography – translator’s note.

Source of German text: Michaelis Nostradami, *Deß Weitberümbten / Hoherfarnen / Philosophie / Astrologi / vnd Medici / zwey Bücher / darinn warhafftiger / gründtlicher / vnd volkomner bericht gegeben wirdt / wie man erstlich einen vngestalten leib / an Weib vnd Mannspersonen außwendig zieren / schön / vnd junggeschaffen machen / vnd allerley wolriechende / köstliche / krefftige wasser / pulfer / öl / seyffen / rauchkerzlin / disamkuglen / zů mancherley gebrechen dienstlich / artlich zubereyten. Vnd wie man folgens allerley frucht auff das künstlichest / vnd lieblichest / in zucker einmachen / vnd zur notturfft auffbehalten sol.* Erstlich in Französischer sprach von ihme beschriben: Nun aber / vnserem Vatterland zů gütem / in das gemain Teutsch auff das trewlichst verdolmetscht / durch Hieremiam Martium / bestelten Doctorn der Arzney zů Augspurg. Mit Röm. Kay. May. freyheit / nit nach zů Trucken. [Augsburg]: M.D.LXXIII. (1573), pp. 63–66. German text available online at: <http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB00018CB800000000>. Original French text available online at: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1518636t.image>

Translation: Ellen Yutzy Glebe (from the German into English)

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