



*A History of Madness in  
Sixteenth-Century Germany*

H.C. ERIK MIDELFORT

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## A History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany

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*Winner of the 1999 Ralph Waldo Emerson Award of Phi Beta Kappa*

This magisterial work explores how Renaissance Germans understood and experienced madness. It focuses on the insanity of the world in general but also on specific disorders; examines the thinking on madness of theologians, jurists, and physicians; and analyzes the vernacular ideas that propelled sufferers to seek help in pilgrimage or newly founded hospitals for the helplessly disordered. In the process, the author uses the history of madness as a lens to illuminate the history of the Renaissance, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the history of poverty and social welfare, and the history of princely courts, state building, and the civilizing process.

"Erik Midelfort's latest book will not disappoint the many scholars in varied disciplines who have eagerly awaited it. This is mature, sensitive scholarship, relentlessly anti-reductionist in its approach to a bedeviling complex of historical questions. Midelfort does not pretend to have exorcised these problems, yet he succeeds brilliantly in exploring the social and intellectual dilemmas posed by early modern insanity. . . . Abundant tables, nicely-chosen illustrations, and an impressive bibliography all attest to the highest scholarly standards. This book belongs in every academic library."

—History: Reviews of New Books

"In this long awaited book, Midelfort explores how sixteenth-century Germans understood madness and mental disorders during the age of the Renaissance and the religious reformations. Operating from the assumption that one cannot understand madness without understanding the social contexts in which it is defined, diagnosed, and treated, the author examines madness in seven chapters, each a model of the integration of intellectual and social history. . . . This important work should be in every university library."

—Choice

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*Cover illustration: Madwoman: Margret, Hanna Eysleis's daughter. Panel painting from the Gnadentafel, Heilige Kapelle, Altötting. 1520. Hans Strauss, Altötting.*

