

MADELINE AND THE CITY

BY LILY HOAGLAND

WHEN I WAS six years old, my family announced that we were moving to Paris. Trying to understand what that might entail, I turned to a beloved book about a little French girl's adventures for answers. Caution: The following verse has been known to induce strong rushes of nostalgia.



This page: Adieu to the Ritz #8 by Ludwig Bemelmans.

Opposite page: Illustration from *Madeline and the Bad Hat* depicting the Hameau de Versailles.



*In an old house in Paris that was covered with vines
Lived twelve little girls in two straight lines
In two straight lines they broke their bread
And brushed their teeth and went to bed.
They left the house at half past nine
In two straight lines in rain or shine—
The smallest one was Madeline.*

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As a tomboy of the first water, I didn't necessarily recognize myself in the primly dressed girls, but Madeline's precocious courage resonated with me. It gave me comfort—hey, I figured, if there were girls like her in Paris, maybe I could find some kindred spirits after all. (Turns out that the girls at my school actually did dress that primly, but that's for a different article, "French Schoolgirls Don't Wear Jeans.")

To celebrate the 75th anniversary of Madeline's debut, the New-York Historical Society has gathered her creator's work in the exhibit "Madeline in New York: The Art of Ludwig Bemelmans." Many of the pieces in the show are from the collection of Chuck and Deborah Royce, who have turned their luxury resort in Rhode Island into a museum of illustration, with a particular focus on Bemelmans. Curated by Jane Bayard



Curley, the exhibit features the work of a man who was an author, illustrator, and much more.

"A relentless connoisseur of life, he drew with a child's eye and wrote with the shrewd wit of an adult," says Curley. He was also an astute observer of the people around him and could reveal their essence with a few strokes of his pencil. "Bemelmans' world ranged from yachts and limousines to garrets and subways, and was peopled with moppets, jewel thieves, Ecuadorian Generals, and feather boa-clad vamps. His drawing style, humorous and reductive, captures all this in a flash." That style, coupled with his natural ear for language, ensured that Bemelmans' name would be found in children's libraries for generations.

I confess that even now, in my East Village apartment, the original battered copy of that book from my childhood sits on my bookshelf. I keep traveling, and Madeline's courage keeps coming with me. ♦

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Lady at Table – La Colombe, 1953 (top); Adieu to the Ritz #2, 1950 (bottom).



Two mural panels commissioned by Aristotle Onassis for the children's dining room on his yacht *The Christina*, named for his daughter Christina Onassis.

