



Théophile Hamel, after Peter Paul Rubens, *The Education of the Virgin*, ca. 1845–46, oil on canvas, 43.5 x 36 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Théophile Hamel (1817–1870) was a painter who learned his trade from fellow Quebec artist Antoine Plamondon (ca. 1804–1895). Hamel's primary focus and source of revenue was painting portraits of wealthy patrons belonging to various social spheres, including

clergymen and businessmen. In the mid-nineteenth century, the education of French Canadian youth, which had hitherto been the responsibility of the clergy, became a contested issue. Patriots, in their mission to outwit the loyalists, sought to provide a more secularized education to its citizens and to reduce the Church's power. These events strongly influenced Hamel's choice of subject matter. *The Education of the Virgin* (ca. 1845–46), a work by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) that Hamel reproduced during a trip to Antwerp, represents the Virgin Mary with her mother, Saint Anne, and father, Joachim, along with a pair of *putti* hovering above. Whereas images of Mary learning were typically set in a temple in accordance with the Gospel of James, this work shows Saint Anne transmitting her knowledge to her daughter. This painting illustrates the perception of Christ's mother as an intelligent and literate woman fit for her maternal role.

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