

Art Therapy Online: ATOL

Adam Thorpe

INTERIOR WITH A YOUNG MAN READING

After the painting by Vilhelm Hammershoi, 1898

Only pretending to be alone, of course,
leaning wanly in the unseen window's
northern light: knuckles as shiny as his black shoes

or the ebony wedge of desk ensnared
by the chair's back, its creamy fan of bars
as thin as his fingers against the dark book

whose words will not come right. His mouth's
got its draw-string, concentrated look,
as if there's nobody here to impress.

It is bright out: the broad pine boards either tick
with heat or are chilled under snow-light
(the season remains unclear). And Vilhelm, of course –

insisting the shoes be polished over and over,
the scrubbed hands be helped with lanoline

to useful highlights – now keeps muttering,

through the slap of brushwork, 'No posing, no posing!

You are quite alone!' His brother's the genius;

he will be forgotten. Will the book's

thin wings take flight? Will the paint

be wet forever, the unknown life

always ahead of him and perhaps shorter

than the oyster light might lead one to expect?

Only the clock's quarterly clearing of its throat

reminds him, from time to time, to ask permission;

to flex his limbs out of cramp and take a step.

The painting can be found at: <http://hirschsprung.dynamicweb.dk/Default.asp?ID=765>

Biography: Adam Thorpe was born in Paris in 1956, and began his professional career as a mime. He is the author of nine novels, two collections of stories and five books of poetry, a stage play performed almost entirely in Berkshire dialect, and numerous radio plays and broadcasts. His first novel, *Ulverton* (1992), received the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize; in 2007 he was shortlisted for prizes in three respective genres: the Forward Poetry Prize, the BBC National Short Story Award and the South Bank Show Award for the year's best novel (*Between Each Breath*). He has so far eluded the Booker longlist. His latest novel is *Hodd* (2009), a darker version of the Robin Hood legend in the form of a medieval document. He lives in France with his family and currently teaches at the Ecole Supérieure des Beaux Arts de Nîmes and at the University of Nîmes. His translation of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* will be published by Vintage Classics in 2011.