

Watching Dennis Potter Drink

Watching Dennis Potter drink  
liquid morphine from a hip flask  
while being interviewed for the last time,

I became aware of a nerve  
flicking around in the base of my thumb,  
as if there were a tiny animal under the skin.

Then I knew: he was drinking morphine  
because the animal under his skin was real,  
and when it moved it feasted, eating him alive.

He could have taken tablets, or held  
an intravenous drip's exposed vein  
like a transparent microphone cord,

but the hip flask gave his pain-relief style,  
as if he were imbibing an old, smoky Scotch,  
the animal lying down in his blood,

its steady, ravenous work put on hold  
as he spoke candidly about poetry and disease,  
then slipped the flask like a silver Derringer

into the inside pocket of his coat,  
the morphine drained, the animal  
raking his ribs as it shifted in its sleep.

*Anthony Lawrence*