

POEM

On Viewing a Portrait by Otto Dix

A broad schmiss across his cheek,
full lips, pursed
as if to suppress a smile,
Dr. Hans Koch wears pince nez,
a white coat, collar up,
sleeves rolled to the elbows.

Standing by a chair with metal stirrups,
a white tiled room, instruments
scattered on a nearby table, he waits –
a tourniquet in one hand, glass syringe in the other,
its long needle facing me.

And I am twelve once again,
as my father looks up,
a syringe in his hand when I come in,
back from a ball game, his black bag
open on the kitchen table.

“This is for you! There’s a polio epidemic.
You need gamma globulin, 5 cc in each butt.”

He took care of us all. I hated his office,
the pungent smells, bright examination light,
the stranger he became
with his white coat, his mirrored monocle
through which he gazed at me.

“Stop whining,” as he filled the syringe.
“You need this. Let’s get on with it!”

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