

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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Competing interests None declared.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; internally peer reviewed.



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To cite Bronson R. *Med Humanit* 2017;**43**:e18.

Published Online First 24 January 2017

Med Humanit 2017;**43**:e18. doi:10.1136/medhum-2016-011160