

THE LOAN—upon viewing *Jeune fille au chat* (Girl
with a Cat) by Pierre-August Renior

Nikki Herbst

She read her poem
the first real words between us
all the time before measured in near misses, we
almost
listened (same line)
came close to speech. She looked at the girl and the
cat
in the painting, then at me.

Let us measure the time from one veering off to the
next
from her meaning to my meaning
and back to hers
and mine again.
That time in its jagged line, was it wasted?
The time between the artist's glance and the
rendering
of the cat's parallel paws, empty?

Or could it be borrowed
might I have drawn nearer to her
while the image of the tufted red chair and the
striped
socks (same line)
the rough blue skirt, drooping white blouse
and dark eyebrows warped prettily
in the artist's mind?
And could the painter have added a bit of pink to
the white shoulder
while she and I made small talk?