

NANCE VAN WINCKEL

White Brides, White Mistresses

Fog freezing to the greenery, then a skiff
of snow—clouds that will crumble later
as the snow leopard slips into a boy's
dreaming. Neither the boy nor the animal
knows of the dream. Their fear of each other
doubles their beauty. Their desire stills footfalls
and cloaks deep paw prints.

The leopard's eyes do not close
when she's caressed. But they do
when she's kissed—the kiss is so new.

The boy's arms catch in the snowy pelt
with its surprise of warmth
deeper in. *These are my fingers*, the boy
says, *these are my lips*. He senses
the small thing he is when he enters her,
clinging to her haunches,
knowing she feels him barely.

The pressures of her hungers tighten.
His whispers, her quivers—
these swirl a blizzard about them.

The depths she desires press in on him.
The road there is lit like the first dawn,
and the distance clear: high jagged peaks!
White irises, bridges of ice.