

SPHINX

Outstretched on sun-warm limestone
the sphinx surveys the rabble
seeking admittance to her city,
her adopted city, mighty Thebes,
Thebes which gifts her with gold
and with its chorused prayers,
Thebes which entrusts her to guard
its entrance from the unworthy,
from the riffraff who flinch
at the restless lash of her tail,
who stammer if she, Riddle Mistress,
demands an answer as their fee,
who gaze up in appalled alarm
as if she were a monstrosity,
a deformed mismatched merger
of lioness with woman and eagle,
ignorantly inverting the truth
that lioness, woman, eagle
are refracted distortions
of her pure and perfect form—
she yawns wide, swishes her tail,
waiting for the onset of dusk,
the closing of the city gates,
the stooped old man who comes
burdened with blankets and wine
to share the night watch,
warming the chill hours
with news from home.

—Mary Soon Lee

