

THE PEACOCK FLOUNDER

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(The Boston Aquarium)

They say flounders are camouflaged
to blend in with the bottom of the ocean,
but that can't be true for this one
unless the bottom where he comes from
is covered with Persian rugs.
The aquarium is not: maybe that's why
he doesn't deign to swim down there.
He ripples slowly like a flying carpet,
opening and closing his sideways mouth.

Now and then he swims up to the top
and breaks the mirror surface with bulging,
limpet-like eyes, as if he had to
take in the view above the tank
as a whale or dolphin takes in air.
He almost has the whole tank to himself:
the four or five other fish are not
colorful, and they're so thin that when
they turn toward us they disappear.

With what effort did his eyes push
around to one side, concentrating
a million years of evolution
into a few weeks? And how are we
to understand him if not by a like
effort of the eyes, feeling our gaze
pulled askance by his, our mouths twist
until we realize that we, like him,
are secretly disturbed about our lives.