

Doubtful Sound

*A little before Noon we passed a little Narrow opening in the land,
where there appear'd to be a very Snug Harbour.*

— Captain James Cook's Journal of his First Voyage
Wednesday, March 14, 1770

He had come to a place he knew
he should not go into. Sounded
and had no ground with 70 fathoms Line.
Latitude 45 degrees 13 minutes South,
by his own observation. Windless, a sudden slack
in the sails, all cranks stopped, a soundless
drifting in calm waters, through mist,
by waterfalls, rock and tree islands.

Inland behind this opening were Mountains,
their summits Cover'd with new Snow,
and no wonder the air that morning so cold,
the land on either side of this Harbour rising
a very considerable height, almost perpendicular from the Sea.

He saw clearly no winds could blow there
but what was right in or right out,
that is, Westerly or Easterly, and certainly
it would have been highly imprudent
to put into a place that his ship could not have got out of
but with a wind he'd found to blow but one day in a month.
Some of his seamen wanted him to harbour at any rate,
without in the least Considering
either the present or future Consequences.

He was a man not of temptations but of measures,
exact locations on the chart he charted. He knew winds
to be fickle and men to have passions and instincts—

for fresh food and adventure, for now and again the assurance
of solid ground, some time and space apart.

He trusted his instruments and tables, the fixed stars,
when he could see them and mark them. On his chart
he named this opening Doubtful Harbour,
and drew it as a shallow indentation in the coastline,
not knowing how far or how deep it cut into and divided
the high mountains, not knowing it was a sound
of remarkable beauty, a Siren's song.