JANUARY 3, 1688

A Baroque Prelude

As the earth turns, the light of the sun moves from the gray and pale blue of the Pacific onto the forests and fields of the coasts of Japan and Luzon. In the seething energy and hard-won order of the streets of Edo, the great capital city of Japan's hereditary military dictators, the heavy wooden gates of residential quarters are swung open. Chanting and gongs are heard faintly from Buddhist temples. Shopkeepers open their shutters and arrange neat displays of fine wares from all over the country. Depleted roisterers slump away from the pleasure quarters and dodge into alleys as samurai horsemen ride past, their swords clattering.

In Manila, on Luzon, the sound of bells echoes from the great churches in the center of the city, south of the swamps along the Pasig River, and from the more modest ones in the Chinese Christian suburbs north of the river. Junks have begun to arrive from the ports of China. There is talk that there may not be as many as last year because of the growing tension between the Chinese and the rest of the population. How will the faraway authorities in Madrid and Mexico City reply to the litany of Chinese violence and treachery in the Manila authorities' letters? Might there even be another descent of Chinese pirates on this farthest outpost of the Spanish Empire of Catholicism and silver?

Far to the south, on a rocky piece of the northwest coast of Australia, William Dampier, gifted naturalist and barber-surgeon to a gang of buccaneers, is up and about, timing carefully the shifts of the daunting tide races,

keeping an eye on the native people watching warily from a hilltop. He thinks them pitifully primitive, no danger, but certainly material for a great story if he lives to get home. At high tide the midges swarm and get into his eyes.

As the light reaches the great red walls and yellow tile roofs of the imperial palaces of Beijing, a singular procession heads south through the enormous gates. The banners and guardsmen are present in full array. The emperor himself is walking. He is on his way to the open Altar of Heaven, where he will face the cold winter sky and implore High Heaven to take years from his life and bestow them instead on his dying grandmother.

And as the light comes to the Ox Street Mosque on the west side of Beijing and to the airy, tropical mosques of such southern islands as Mindanao and Ambon, the muezzins call the faithful to morning prayer. Several hours later the muezzins' calls echo across Hyderabad in southern India and the splendid camp on its outskirts of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb and his huge army. Some of the emperor's generals are Hindu, but he and most of his generals are Muslims, now bowing toward Mecca in their morning prayers before they turn to the exacting tasks of preparing their forces for another campaign. And now the muezzins' calls are everywhere in every dawn, in Isfahan and Samarkand far to the north, in Mecca, Cairo, Istanbul, in embattled Belgrade, Algiers, Timbuktu.

The Christians' morning bells already are ringing. Glikl bas Judah Leib, in Hamburg, knows that they are not summoning her and her people to worship and usually is up and busy by the time they start ringing. Father Vincenzo Coronelli already has been up and at his devotions in the Convent of St. Francis in Venice and now is planning his day's work of global cartography and far-flung correspondence. Isaac Newton hears the bells of the Cambridge churches and college chapels, lying low to avoid aggravating his conflict with the king, waiting for the reviews of his great book the *Principia*. If the sun comes out, he will note that its noon shadow is a bit shorter now that the winter solstice is past.

Beyond another ocean, in the Americas, many peoples are trying to reshape their old ways of life after the devastations of the Europeans and their diseases. A few Europeans have been dreaming new dreams, other than those of wealth and endless leisure, in the New World. In a beautiful upland valley in the remote Sonora Desert, Father Eusebio Kino watches his Pima neophytes gather for teaching and hopes that the dark cloud to

the north will bring them life-giving rain. And the light passes on again into the immense ocean.

This portrait of one day in one year is a somewhat artificial construct. It starts in the Pacific, where our modern world-circling days start, only because it was (and is) the widest gap in the density of human settlement and activity. In the chapters that follow we shall learn more about these people and places and much more of the world of the one year 1688. But a focus even on one year is an arbitrary exercise, far easier for us than for the people who were alive in 1688. Many of these people would not have referred to the year as "1688." For the Muslims, it was 1099, then 1100. For the Chinese, it was the twenty-sixth, then the twenty-seventh year of the Kangxi reign. The very concept of the world in a single year is an artificial one, and much more so for the late seventeenth century than for the late twentieth. Now news of major events reaches around the globe in seconds or minutes, and we have access to almost any part of the world via global computer and telecommunications networks. In 1688 communication among the continents depended entirely on people and letters carried on sailing ships, which sailed only at certain seasons when the winds were favorable. Communication from one side of the earth to the other—say, a letter from a Dutchman in the East India Company's trading post in Japan to a cousin in the Hudson River valley—was almost certain to take more than a year.

Even today, with all our opportunities for world travel and our instantaneous communications, the number of people who have a steady sense of the world as one world or even of the connections among several major parts of it is not as great as we should like to think. In 1688 a full sense of the variety of the world's places and peoples, of their separations and their connections, was confined to a few Europeans such as the philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, the Jesuit missionaries, the English traveler William Dampier, and the literate urban Europeans who read the growing literature of travel and description of other parts of the world. China's Kangxi emperor and some of his ministers certainly were aware of the Europeans as a new element on the far margins of their "All under Heaven," but hardly at all of Africa and the Americas. The world of Islam stretched from Beijing and Mindanao to the Danube and the Niger but

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reached the New World only when some unfortunate African Muslim survived the middle passage and lived out his or her life in slavery in the Americas. The world of the illiterate farmer of any culture was largely limited to his village and a nearby market town. The world of the Bardi of Western Australia contained a thousand people at most, almost no tools, and a host of spirits and dreams. Thus we find many worlds of human experience within the one geographical world of 1688.

Speed of travel and communication was not the only area of basic difference between our world and that of three hundred years ago. The world of 1688 was much less crowded, with large stretches of forest and grassland where there now are farms and great cities. The courtiers of Versailles could ride out any morning and hunt wolves. It was much quieter, with no electronic amplifiers and no internal-combustion engines. Life expectancies were shorter because no one knew how to prevent the spread of infectious diseases or reduce the hazards of childbirth. Perhaps most fundamentally, no one in the late seventeenth-century world experienced or expected rapid technological change in one lifetime or basic change, even over a longer time span, in the political order or in one's way of life. Almost everyone expected to be and was deeply rooted in and guided by the beliefs and ways of life of his or her ancestors. Where change was sought, it was likely to be in the name of return to the old ways, purification of tradition. Our expectations of change, our sense of the possibility of basic improvement of human life, our fundamental impatience with authority and tradition had just begun to be expressed by a few European intellectuals.

Those few intellectuals were right, however, in sensing the possibilities of fundamental transformation, and in retrospect we can see in the world of 1688 signs of the basic shifts that created our own very different world: the rise of science; the growth of cities and commerce; government policies promoting economic growth; an immense variety of writing and publishing, some of it for broad urban audiences; some very individual and idiosyncratic acceptances and reinterpretations of the great religions; protests against slavery and the subordination of women. All these new developments turn up somewhere, usually more than once, in the chapters that follow. Many readers will be surprised to find somewhat comparable

Behn writing for a vigorous commercial market; highly personal acceptances of great traditions by Wang Fuzhi and by William Penn.

My search for evidence that could be dated to a particular year has contributed to certain omissions and overrepresentations. Illiterate people appear only as recorded by someone else. We have more rulers than ruled, more merchants than farmers. Adventurers with tales to tell, most of them European, make great contributions to our knowledge of the world outside Europe. I have tried, just as I have done ever since I began reading Dutch records about events on the China coast more than forty years ago, to read these records against the grain, not to succumb to the prejudices of the writers. Above all, I have hoped to convey to my reader some of my astonishment at the voices I have heard. Some of them are in the language of this book: Dampier retelling his sharp-eyed observation of the Australian Aborigines; Locke urging us to think sensibly and carefully, especially about the deepest puzzles of reality, knowledge, and political right. For some writing in other European languages—Bayle's passionate linking of free assent and real belief, Vieira's double turn on the Pentecost and speaking in tongues—the language is reasonably transparent. But what about Aphra Behn, quoting in a fictional voice that is partly hers the operatic courage of a rebel slave? Do we really grasp Sor Juana's intricate images and conceits? I have always thought I could catch a bit of the masterful but ironic voice of the Kangxi emperor, but in addition to knowing that his pronouncements always were edited for posterity, I can't really be sure if he was speaking in Chinese or in Manchu. An Indian Sufi's "God damn the tyrant" seems to ring across gulfs of mentality and translation. We can hear Saikaku's detached, ironic voice only because some gifted and erudite translators have struggled with some of the world's most intricately allusive prose.

Of course we don't really hear voices. We're reading, and human speech comes down to us from 1688 only as converted into written texts. Hearing voices when we read is a common but still mysterious experience in our literate cultures. Sometimes if we know the writer or have heard her speak, we recognize that she has managed to capture something of her voice in her written style. This uncanny sense of voices can be especially strong in

a thousand years literate Chinese had been writing poems when they parted from friends and sending more to them when they were apart, poems that were meant to be chanted and to be shared, as if the writer and his reader were together. The late seventeenth century was the heyday of an easy conversational style in French and English prose that owed much to letter writing. John Locke carried the style he used to talk about farming and finances and to be shyly charming to the ladies all the way into his deepest philosophical inquiries. Much fiction writing was cast as series of letters. Many books began with some kind of preface "To the Reader."

Voices can be impersonal, or claim to be so. The Kongo great man reenacts in word and person the knotting of sacred powers in a charm. The muezzin at dawn, the schoolboys in a Quranic school on the banks of the Senegal, a young Turk captured by Christian pirates on the Danube all repeat the words God's Angel dictated to the Prophet. The great Jesuit Vieira claims that it is the Holy Scripture speaking through him. But voices often clearly are inseparable from singular persons and their lives. Some of the names of these individuals appear in chapter titles: Dampier, Saikaku, Locke, Leibniz, Aphra Behn. Not one speaks simply in his or her own voice, but in every case we hear the voice more clearly when we know a bit of the life that produced it.

There are times when the voices are heard only collectively. We know of the mutter and occasional roar of rage and despair from the holds of slave ships. We can imagine the uncanny harmonies of old Russian hymns among the Old Believers before the flames they had lit reached them. Other voices seem to be drowned out by the winds of the Andes howling around the baroque square corners of Potosí, by the kind of storm on the high seas that could finish the adventures of any sharp-eyed wanderer at any time, or by the roar of one of the great rivers flooding down out of the heart of a continent to the ocean. For Europeans on the coasts of Africa and the Americas, the great rivers spoke of the mysteries of their sources and the promises of riches upstream. For one visionary European, the Amazon was the path to a possible paradise on earth. Even the Yangtze and the Mississippi were better understood than the Senegal, the Gambia, the Niger, and the Congo; the shapes of Africa and the individual voices of Africans

baroque in their intricacy. Quite a few people in different parts of the world in 1688 had a new sense of the ability of rational people to look in the eye the intricacies and ironies of human nature, to give elegant accounts of the orbits of sun, moon, stars, and even the terrifying irregularities of comets. "Baroque" comes to stand for many things, not least the formal interweaving of uncannily individual voices. It is tempting to call Saikaku, with all his layers of irony and allusion, baroque. We begin with the baroque conceits of Sor Juana, and near the end the great passionate voice of the Song of Solomon becomes a sacred line tracing beautiful patterns, and voices join in weaving around the words of the Psalmist harmonies of celebration and longing. We end with a Purcell anthem for the doomed House of Stuart, expressing, but in no way resolving, human hope and risk, from kingdoms to unborn infants.