



✓ All the World by Force of Arms

(Tenka Fubu)

Ms. Chapman

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Pd 1

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Dear Reader,

In the records of time, it is said that Japan was “brought under one sword” by a man known as Oda Nobunaga. He is widely recognized as a destroyer, a man filled with cruelty and coldness. Although many incidents have indeed proved this, he is still, with no doubt, one of Japan’s most important historical figures. It was his drive to unite Japan that resulted in the country it is today

Oda Nobunaga was the son of Oda Nobuhide, a minor warlord governing a portion of the Owari Province in a time called the Warring Period. It was an era of perpetual warfare and intense political intrigue, where bloodshed and deaths were just as common as illness. Nobunaga’s later adoption of bizarre behavior and manner caused many to doubt him; at his own father’s funeral, Nobunaga displayed shocking acts of sacrilege such as throwing ceremonial incense at the altar. His conduct turned some of his retainers against him and led to dispute among the family. Despite fierce opposition, Nobunaga still claimed his right to clan leader and became a merciless ruler, even killing his brother to completely solidify his control over the Oda Clan. It was later realized that Nobunaga was a genius at warfare, winning countless battles despite having the odds against him. He continued his relentless campaign, swallowing up province after province and pacifying clan after clan and bringing them all under his rule. He had secured about half the provinces of Japan under one shogunate [in pre-modern Japan, the shogun was a title given to the country’s top military commander] by the time of his death, though the circumstances of his death are still unclear. The majority of assumptions claim that the betrayal of one of his closest retainers, Akechi Mitsuhide, was the main cause. It was also said that Nobunaga, absolutely repudiating the very thought of a traitor staining his name, killed himself before he could be captured and humiliated.

I personally very much enjoyed impersonating this man and the vivid way I imagined, under my own assumptions, what his character would be like. As I wrote this paper, I constantly asked myself questions, like what if he wasn’t truly the brutal man history says he was? What if there was a deeper emotion hiding in the shadows of his usual malice and harshness? Did he enjoy the things he did? It’s awkward to say, but I was utterly fascinated by his actions—and whether it was weird or not, his decisions in his path of life always managed to grab my attention. Thus, like most, I continue to question the reasons behind many of his peculiar yet intriguing actions. It leaves a person (me in this case) desperately wondering, “why would he do that?”, and I wished to fill that yawning gap, even if temporarily. I can only make theories of what Nobunaga was like, the way he talked, and the way he presented himself, although history very obviously hinted that he was a very presumptuous and prideful man. The foundations of my imitations were mostly based on my admiration and respect for his (in my opinion) honorable history and impact on Japan

Prose Poem – An Impossible Reverie, Oda Nobunga's point of view

The beautiful sunset matches the glittering crimson pooling across the ground and as I sheathe my blade, I want to admire it for a while longer. However, I had many things to attend to and much distance to cover before I reach my destinations or I'll have failed my duty as leader. I step over the puddles of red and brush a finger over my nostrils; the metallic odor of rusty blood never dies. But I have gotten so used to it I now have to focus my sense of smell in order to detect it. I quickly stalk back to where the rest of my men were waiting and notice as I pass the fields with no fences, the grooves of white spider lilies burrowed deep in the gaping space between the strips of land. This time I do stop and watch their curled tentacles stretching in the breeze, their delicate stems swaying in sync. It was a beautiful sight, their innocent white glowing in the gloomy scene of death and bloodied flesh. For a moment I forget about the stains on my hands and the swimming dizziness of my head and allow the sea of seemingly pureness drag me down in a sweet numbness. Everything became faint in this fake fantasy, and I find myself wishing, from the slumbering depths of my stony heart, that I could remain like this.

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The Great Fool (750)

Oda Nobunaga wasn't called the greatest soldier of his time for nothing; after all, he was the very one who initiated the unification of Japan along with his two trustworthy subordinates. Besides this major achievement, what other things did he manage to accomplish in his lifetime? How did these accomplishments affect the society Japan once was and is today? Even though this man was dubbed the "Great Fool" for his eccentric tastes in clothing and behavior, he was also known to be one of the greatest rulers of Japan and its grueling history.

Despite Oda Nobunaga's reputation as a ruthless warlord, he did make contributions to other aspects of Japanese life and culture. In the words of author Arimichi Ebisawa, "He had overthrown the old order of fractionized power held by the daimyo [feudal barons] and had paved way for the political and economic unification of the country" (1). By replacing the tradition-bound economy with free trade centers, he successfully broke up the economic stagnation and promoted economic growth and activity. Nobunaga also began to modernize the economy by kicking currency exchange into action, banning barter trade to realize his attempt. Establishing ground rules, Nobunaga prevented unfair practice by setting official standards for exchange and for the value of copper, silver, and gold, which were used as money back in the day.

Subsequently, Nobunaga embraced Western teachings and its creations quite willingly in Japanese culture around the time economy began to improve, as explained in the previous paragraph. "It was near the end of the era of warring states that Europeans first came to Japan," writes historian Thomas Cleary, "that Nobunaga saw the political and military advantage in welcoming Christianity and western technology (14)." A stout-hearted, audacious, and autocratic man, Nobunaga was quick to seize on any promising new invention. Oddly, parts of Nobunaga's interest came from the very fact that he himself was a very exceptional katana [Japanese

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traditional sword] wielder and had a passion in collecting and testing weapons. Indeed, he was the first of the daimyo to organize units equipped with muskets, and as a result, he became the first Japanese leader to appear in Western history records. Although these weapons were inherently unstable [they had a tendency to blow up in one's face], the infamous man was the first Japanese to figure out how to handle the new weapons while applying both offensive and defensive tactics. Finally, he was the first Japanese leader to utilize iron-cladding on his warships, which made them virtually indomitable.

Notably, Nobunaga's interest in European culture wasn't the only thing driving him to welcome it so very enthusiastically into Japan culture—it was more like he regarded the encouragement of Christianity as a further means of restraining the influence of the Buddhist temples. Nobunaga considered Buddhists as a threat to future stability and his position of power. They had evolved into a force that rivalled those of the daimyo, with their temples as their political, economic, and military centers. Thus, Nobunaga took the most significant step towards the unification of the country when he destroyed the Buddhist monastery of Mt. Hiei, one the most powerful Buddhism influences at the time. Playing a substantial role in both the political and military course of Japan, the monks of Mt. Hiei were feared because of their significant impact on Japan, and by slaughtering them had greatly restricted and cut down on the general Buddhism influence. This chain of events and Nobunaga's later created policies had the effect of altering the role of Buddhism in Japanese society. The changes evoked include the elimination of military power, the limitation of economic power, and the subjugation of religious authorities to the central administration.

“His policies laid the foundations for much of the political and economic structure of early modern Japan,” declares Karl F. Friday, “and his enthusiastic patronage of the arts helped shape the high culture of his and the following age.” Oda Nobunaga is popularly remembered as a destroyer, a reputation not entirely undeserved, but his incontrovertible contributions to his homeland—Japan—is something that no one can deny.

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Prose – Third-Person Narrative Scene (During Oda Nobuhide's funeral rite)

The dark and unsettling atmosphere of the room scrabbled at the kneeling forms of the mourners, cold sweat running down their backs from the heat of their stuffy clothing and the perturbing air surrounding them. Their clenched, trembling hands showed the nervousness peeking from their strained composes, their teeth grinding against their dry lips.

Only one seat remained unoccupied, the one seat that should have been the first to be taken. With mutual irritation, all of them were thinking the same thing:

Where was that idiot of a son?

The men, who were silent up till a few minutes ago, were now muttering to one another, no doubt speaking badly of Nobunaga. They had every right to do so—after all, he was beyond late. Disdainful looks painted over the majority of the spectators' faces, impatient time continued to tick by.

“How dare he!” One finally hissed, his fists tightening on his knees. “This is his own father's funeral, for god's sake!”

“Please don't speak in that manner before Lord Nobuhide's presence.” Hirate, an honorable samurai, said in a calm voice, but to be truthful, he himself was filled with a silent rage. For the great lord's own son—the only heir to their clan and legacy—to be late was an unfathomable disgrace. Not only to his reputation, but the clan as a whole.

Mitsuhide, a rather composed man whom maintained the same position for several years, sat with his hands on his lap, staring at the altar looming before him. After several moments of staring, he began chuckling amusedly under his breath. The scheming look that gleamed in his cruel eyes was clear as day, the man not even bothering to conceal it as he straightened and triumphantly scorned at the dead man in the box. The thoughts that ran through his mind were only thoughts of victory, which left him completely vulnerable to the next set of bewildering events.

Right then, a unison of shocked gasps and startled shouts rose and shook the room. The heads that hadn't turned the first time immediately swung around, and their dramatic reactions were no different.

Oda Nobunaga, with his jet black bangs combed back in a very unseemly undercut and the rest of his long hair pulled back into a ponytail, stormed into the room with the most ridiculous attire no one would ever dare to wear to a funeral rite. Like an unwavering flame, the bright crimson flared from his clothing and engulfed Nobunaga's whole body, the sword he carried in his hands shining almost elegantly in the dull room as he streaked across the room.

The audience were astonished to the point where they were unable to move, their wide eyes following Nobunaga's figure as he marched towards his father's altar.

“Nobunaga...sama^[1]!” One man was quick to recover and was brave enough to shout, though his voice was strangled. “May I ask why you have appeared at this specific moment, and

why you've decided to wear such such improper clothing to your own...to Lord Nobuhide's funeral?!"

Nobunaga ignored the man's outburst as he came to a slow stop in front of the altar. The watching faces paled even more than before, all of them staring with nervous, anxious eyes—wondering dreadfully—what he would do next.

His body was motionless as he stared down at his father's memoirs, the fierce look in his orbs enough to send anyone cowering for mercy. He stayed like this for a couple more moments and some of his spectators even dared to hope that he would do nothing, that perhaps dressing inappropriately would be the only thing that they could count against him. But of course, their hopes were dashed hopes.

The shattering sound of glass echoed sharply throughout the hall as Nobunaga swept the objects sitting on the altar off, the crushed pieces scattering near his feet.

No one moved. They were frozen in something beyond the shock they were already yielding to, their mouth opened wide and stayed in a hanging position. It was already an unthinkable act of ignominy, yet it didn't stop there—Nobunaga reached over and grabbed the tipped over thurible, the incense spilled unevenly over the golden surface—and threw the rest of its contents over the altar.

At this point of time, his inexplicable actions were no longer as surprising as it felt the first time, but watching this scene unfold dealt separate blows of shock in each of the witness's hearts. The level of intensity ranged so differently—Hirate, with his usual cool expression gone and replaced by one of horror, was so angry it couldn't even compare to what he felt before—he couldn't speak and could only shake from the fury of his prideful heart. Mitsuhide, sitting in front of Hirate, had a slack jaw, his tiny eyes now stretched and as round as a perfectly shaped peach. The rest of their fellow retainers had faces so red they almost could have outshined a ripe tomato.

But no matter how furious they grew, no matter how much their blood boiled in their quivering bodies, they could not speak out against the presence that now commanded and demanded from them the same loyalty they had for the late Oda Nobuhide.

Oda Nobunaga slowly but surely turned to face them, his audacious scarlet eyes staring down at their still forms with an unfamiliar coldness. He knew what he had just done. And he understood what he had created. But his stare seemed to firmly confirm that he had done what he wanted to do.

They couldn't swallow—the breaths they were holding in was sucked right out of them when they met his brooding gaze with their own. Something in them burned so strongly and ferociously that all the bad talk screaming from the depths of their minds melted away into an awestruck trance.

"Obey me or be killed." The brutal words that slipped from his mouth were no more frightening than his very being, his voice harsh and just as serious. The icy glare that followed

his announcement added to their speechlessness. His vicious eyes released them from its wicked hold and he didn't say anything else as he left the hall, instilling the terrifying moment in each and every one of them.

^[1] -sama is an honorific used in Japan, and is usually used to refer to someone of high status or to someone whom you have great respect for



Prose – First-Person Memoir (Nobunaga's Death Scene)

The angry flames snarled and clawed at the ceiling, the scorching heat sizzling ruthlessly at my skin. The long, black night had burst up in color, the brilliant red, orange, and yellow flaring into the sky like fireworks. If I wasn't stuck in the very middle of it perhaps I would have sat afar and watched it, but death has come to greet me far too soon.

The room I had locked myself away in was now screeching louder than the screams I could hear in the distance, the toasted wood toppling over one another with grating groans. The door was the first to go down, and I spared a dubious glance at the high window in the corner of the room, expecting the disappointment that immediately followed. It too was surrounded like hungry flames.

Knowing silently in my heart that I had only the slimiest chance of getting out alive, I covered my lower face with the unharmed sleeve of my sleepwear—my last attempt to save the tiny amount of oxygen I had left. My eyes could only see the murkiness of heat and fire mingled together, and with my free hand I unconsciously touched my only faithful companion—my katana. It has never left my side, its silver, precious blade gleaming beautifully...never hesitant, never betraying me when I needed it most. I almost chuckled but remembered how ragged my breath was becoming.

It's kind of sad that I have more trust in a weapon rather than a breathing human being.

"Hey, this was his room, right?" Just as I was about to accept this pitiful fate, I heard faint shouts in the hallway, and through the crumbling wood I could see soldiers, scrambling around.

Instead of feeling relief, a brooding hatred replaced the blankness that was about to take over my mind. I woke myself up by placing a hand on the hilt of my sword, the familiarity and tension of drawing a blade and the dragging seconds before battle sending tingles throughout my body. The involuntary shivers forced my mind into an intense, unblemished focus, and I pricked my ears.

Here comes the traitor.

His silhouette appears as soon as I finished calming my nerves, and my practiced eye caught the dull glint of his sword. The fire seemed to grow dimmer as I zeroed in on my one prey, the one I would loathe and curse for eternity.

"Ah, you're still alive." Mitsuhide sounded disappointed as he emerged where the door used to be, a sardonic grin smeared over his face. "I was hoping this fire would do the job, but looks like I have to personally deliver the final blow..." He trailed off mockingly, narrowing his glassy, nescient eyes as he came to a stop a few meters before me.

I didn't speak for a second, but when I did my voice resonated from the deepest, raging wrath in the dark pit of my heart.

“You disgust me.” I spat. Even with those simple words, the dark fury lurking within them was enough to force the cowardly traitor a step back, a fearful expression dashing over his face.

“You’ve waited for this moment for your whole, wretched life.” I drew my sword, slowly tracing an arc before singlehandedly sweeping it before me. I could feel my hatred boiling in my blood, pounding furiously against my veins. “Spare yourself a shred of honor and duel me.”

At my unexpected words, his eyes widened and the confidence that dwindled there before vanished into nothing but his own gutless self; I could taste his newborn horror and fear. A slow, pleasant feeling spread through my body as I watched this, matching my natural instinct to kill and reap.

“Don’t get ahead of yourself!” Mitsuhide recovered himself, sputtering like the lowlife he was “You have no right to command me in this situation!”

I listened to his heavy breathing, my piercing stare seeing straight through him.

Ah, I don’t believe it. I am to die at the hands of this pathetic bastard?

A low laugh cracked from my throat. This might be the last time I would be able to laugh like this, so I allowed myself another loud guffaw. The air was burnt and my lungs burned as they tried to rebuff the air I forced in. I opened my eyes and turned my harsh gaze back to the traitor, watching with a final taste of amusement, as he flinched back.

“Heed my words.” My voice snarled once more, and I approached him steadily, my pupils illuminated by the fire shrouding my body. Shadows danced across my unwavering expression, and I brought the sword to my chest.

“A worthless scum like you will never be able to conquer this world like I have.” One last time, I smirked jubilantly. And finally, one last time, I plunged my faithful blade into the last piece of flesh it would ever cut—my heart.

Notes Page

****Repeated elements and themes in this paper include:** the constant mentioning of blood that relates back to war and turmoil, spider lilies of two colors (red and white) with different meanings, the image of the katana as a primary source of authority and truthfulness, and the faint hints of inhumanity that the majority of pieces within this paper give off.

Blood-I used the impression that blood gives to set a somewhat lamenting tone for the rest of the piece, as if Nobunaga unconsciously buries an immense regret deep within his soul. In my prose poem, it points out that if he had a choice, he wouldn't have chosen the path of bloodshed and war. The feeling of nostalgia and a sense of melancholy mingling with it was supposed to give the reader a mixture of both sadness and loneliness towards Nobunaga. The mentioning of blood in the third-person narrative scene is more literal—it represented the long beginning of conflicts and opposition against Nobunaga's rule, and later the bloody battles it would bring about.

Spider Lilies-I used two types of spider lilies in this paper; red and white. Red is commonly used to symbolized blood and death, and in a sense I used this type of spider lily as I did with blood. But also in a different way, I added meaning to red spider lilies by exemplifying the painful and desperate times Nobunaga had to go through. If the reader glances at my drawing only briefly, they might think that it simply represents the bloodshed he's caused in his lifetime. But, if they were to connect Nobunaga's cold aura and the blood dripping all over the page, they should be able to realize how much bitterness and agony Nobunaga had to experience in the process of unifying Japan. I mentioned white spider lilies in my prose poem, where I pointed out its color completely contrasted against the gory battlefield. This was used to show the innocence that Nobunaga had long lost, and to show how tainted he had become. It also ends with the conclusion that he wished he still had the same pureness from before his life of bloodshed began.

Katana-In most of my pieces, the katana mostly represented the power Nobunaga exerted and exercised over others (this was made most obvious in my third-person narrative). Yet, in my first-person memoir, it gleaned on the fact that Nobunaga had a heart filled with suspicion and distrust. It was a period of war and political intrigue after all, so it wasn't unreasonable. But I wanted to illustrate that he believed solely in a nonliving thing, which was ultimately his sword.

Inhumanity-Throughout this paper I didn't deny the fact that Nobunaga was savage in many more ways than one. I supported the thought that he enjoyed killing and the fleeting moments between life and death, but my goal was to point out that, in order to achieve his ideals, Nobunaga had to sacrifice the humanity he had. This theme is scattered throughout the whole paper, some pieces showing it more obviously than others (third-person narrative, first-person memoir, and drawing).