



# Otto of the Silver Hand (Illustrated)(Annotated)

*Howard Pyle*

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## **Otto of the Silver Hand (Illustrated)(Annotated)** Howard Pyle

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Otto of the Silver Hand was one of the first historical novels for young adults to present the realities behind the chivalric ideal. Pyle reveals the prevalence of cruelty and vengefulness in medieval society. The lesson that chivalry was not always glorious does not, however, overshadow the high sense of adventure found in the story. The story's unflinching portrayal of the unpleasant aspects of medieval life may shock some young readers, but its well-organized and exciting plot makes for entertaining reading.

The book centers around the life of Otto, the son of German warlord Baron Conrad. Otto's mother, Baroness Matilda, has died in premature labour, brought on by the sight of the Baron's battle wounds, prompting Conrad to take his newborn son to be raised in a nearby monastery. When Otto reaches the age of eleven his father returns to claim him from the gentle monks, taking him back to live in Castle Drachenhausen, ("Dragons' House", in German) the ancestral mountaintop fortress from which the Baron launches his attacks. Here Otto learns of and is horrified by his father's life as a robber baron, and particularly the revelation of how Conrad killed a defeated, surrendering enemy, Baron Frederick, a rival robber baron who with his men was defending a column of merchants in return for the tribute they were paying him.

Shortly thereafter Baron Conrad obeys a summons to the Imperial Court, taking the vast majority of his men-at-arms with him as an impressive escort but leaving Castle Drachenhausen practically undefended as a result. The late Baron Frederick's heir, his nephew Baron Henry, then attacks the castle, burning it to the ground, and taking Otto captive. In the dungeon of his castle, Baron Henry explains to Otto that he has sworn a solemn oath that any member of Baron Conrad's House who fell into his hands would never be able to strike a blow like the one which killed his uncle, Baron Frederick. Because Otto is so young, the Baron keeps this oath by cutting off his right hand instead of killing him, and as an afterthought has a healer sent to tend to him. While Otto is feverish from the pain of his wound, he is comforted by Baron Henry's eight year old daughter, Pauline, who visits his cell.

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