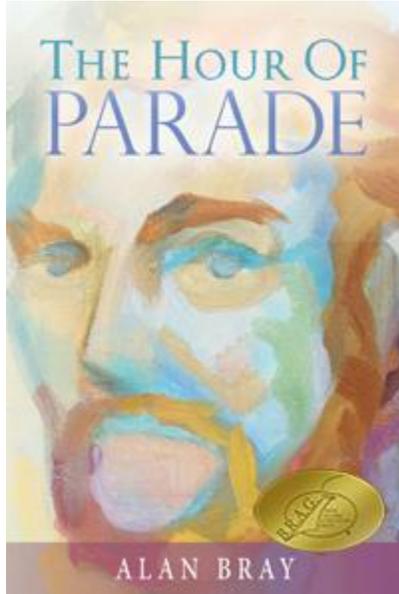


## Napoleon Series Reviews

### The Hour of Parade

Bray, Alan. *The Hour of Parade*. North Charleston: Create Space, 2013. 304 pages. ISBN# 9781490463223 \$15. Paperback.



This is not your standard modern novel of the Napoleonic Wars. There is little action and virtually all of it takes place off of the battlefield. It is the story of a Russian hussar, Major Alexi Ruzhensky, who is wounded at Austerlitz. His younger brother, a cadet in his regiment was killed in individual combat by a French hussar officer, named Louis Valsin, shortly before the battle. While lying in a hospital he receives word from his father that he expects him to track down his brother's killer and kill him. After recovering from his wound, Major Ruzhensky travels to Munich in search of the French officer. Once there he takes a lover and eventually finds the man who killed his brother. Instead of extracting revenge, he contrives an excuse to meet Valsin, so that he can learn more about him.

It does not take long for the two to realize that they have much in common and they become friends. As their friendship develops, Alexi continues to put off telling Valsin his real reason for coming to Munich, hoping in the end he will not have to challenge him to a duel. But there is more to this story than just a tale of revenge. Alexi is haunted by memories of his fiancé who committed suicide when he wouldn't marry her. He is obsessed with what he sees are parallels between his life and that of St. Preux, whose love for Julie d'Étange is told in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's novel *Julie* that was first published in 1761. As he gets to know him, Alexi falls in love with Valsin's mistress and soon he loses any desire to seek revenge. Yet he is conflicted, for honor demands that he kill the Frenchman.

What is really striking about *The Hour of Parade* is the author's rich language to describe even the most mundane scenes. A typical passage describing a night time street is:

"The gutters ran with gurgling torrents. Like a wash of varnish, a coat of moisture remained on the cobbles. Faint light from lanterns made the street glisten and shimmer, made pockets of mist appear, full of shapes. In her chest, the night air was a rheum of fog."<sup>1</sup>

The author use this rich language to capture what it was like to live in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, both as a civilian and a soldier. His detailed descriptions of their everyday activities, whether it is getting dress, walking through the streets of Munich, or eating a meal, he deftly draws the reader into their lives. By including in the narrative the daily duties that the junior French officers go about and their easy banter, he adds an authenticity for the military setting to his story telling that similar novels lack.

---

<sup>1</sup> Page 152

Mr. Bray begins each chapter with a quote from the novel *Julie*, the novel Alexi reads throughout the book. At first I was not sure why the author did that, but then I realized that they foretold the mood of the chapter.

The summary on the back cover of the book promised an explosive ending. It did. I can usually predict how a book will end, but *The Hour of Parade* took me totally by surprise.

If you are looking for another Richard Sharpe book, this is not for you. But if you like dark tales of friendship and betrayal that are reminiscence of the classics, especially Victor Hugo or Alexandre Dumas, you will definitely enjoy *The Hour of Parade*.

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: January 2015