

Burr Study Guide

Burr by Gore Vidal

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Contents

[Burr Study Guide..... 1](#)

[Contents..... 2](#)

[Plot Summary..... 4](#)

[1833, Chapter One..... 6](#)

[1833, Chapter Two..... 8](#)

[1833, Chapter Three..... 9](#)

[1833, Chapter Four..... 10](#)

[1833, Chapter Five - Six..... 11](#)

[1833, Chapter Seven..... 13](#)

[1833, Chapter Eight - Nine..... 15](#)

[1833, Chapter Ten - Eleven..... 17](#)

[1833, Chapter Twelve..... 19](#)

[1834, Chapter One..... 22](#)

[1834, Chapter Two..... 23](#)

[1834, Chapter Three..... 24](#)

[1834, Chapter Four - Five..... 25](#)

[1834, Chapter Six - Nine..... 27](#)

[1834, Chapter Ten - Eleven..... 28](#)

[1834, Chapter Twelve..... 29](#)

[1834, Chapter Thirteen - Fourteen..... 31](#)

[1834, Chapter Fifteen - Seventeen..... 33](#)

[1834, Chapter Eighteen..... 34](#)

[1834, Chapter Nineteen..... 36](#)

[1834, Chapter Twenty - Twenty-four..... 37](#)

[1834, Chapter Twenty-five - Twenty-six..... 39](#)



[1834, Chapter Twenty-seven.....41](#)

[1834, Chapter Twenty-eight - Thirty-one.....42](#)

[1834, Chapter Thirty-two.....44](#)

[1834, Chapter Thirty-three - Thirty-four.....45](#)

[1834, Chapter Thirty-five - Thirty-six.....47](#)

[1835, Chapter One.....49](#)

[1835, Chapter Two.....50](#)

[1835, Chapter Three - Four.....51](#)

[1835, Chapter Five.....52](#)

[1835, Chapter Six - Seven.....53](#)

[1835, Chapter Eight - Ten.....54](#)

[1835, Chapter Eleven - Fifteen.....55](#)

[1836, Chapter One - Four.....56](#)

[1836, Chapter Five - Eleven.....57](#)

[1840.....58](#)

[Characters.....59](#)

[Objects/Places.....66](#)

[Themes.....68](#)

[Style.....70](#)

[Quotes.....74](#)

[Topics for Discussion.....77](#)



Plot Summary

Burr: A Novel by Gore Vidal is a piece of historical fiction that has much of its basis in fact and over ten years of research into the lives of those discussed in the book. The main character is a young law clerk named Charlie Schuyler. Charlie is also an aspiring writer and journalist and uses his position as Burr's law clerk to accumulate information about Burr's past life. When the novel opens, Burr is seventy-seven years old and has lived through the Revolutionary War, a vice presidency, a duel that killed his rival, Alexander Hamilton, and a trial for treason against the United States for conspiring to separate the western states from the union. Charlie's friend and mentor, William Leggett, is the editor of the *Evening Post*, a newspaper that covers all things political. Leggett wishes to control the 1836 election of the President and does not wish for Martin van Buren to win. With this end in mind, Leggett tells Charlie to get information from Aaron Burr that proves that he is van Buren's father. The more Charlie delves into Burr's life through the dictation of his memoirs, the more he realizes just how much he admires the man that most people seem to hate. Burr is delighted to have Charlie work on his biography and is actively involved in the project. Through Burr's memoirs the reader is taken on a journey through the past of the American Revolution, of Burr's rise in the political arena, of his vice presidential election that could have netted him the presidency, and his attempt to become King of Mexico or the President of the Western States.

The book is a complex story of the present mixed in with recollections of the past told through the voice of the main narrator, Charlie Schuyler, who at twenty-five is still very young and naive. Charlie uses both William Leggett and Aaron Burr as his mentors, and from these two very strong and passionate men, Charlie learns much of the world. He learns that Washington is not the strong and able military and presidential leader that history books would suggest. He learns that the election process is flawed and subject to falsification. An introduction to Constitutional law is accomplished with the story of Burr's trial for treason and all the methods that Thomas Jefferson used to convict Burr that directly defied the Constitution. The battle between the executive branch and judicial branch of government is exciting and surprising.

While the text appears to cover only the years between 1834 and 1840, the story really begins in 1775, when Burr joins the Continental Army and fights alongside the likes of Benedict Arnold, Jamie Wilkinson and General Lee. The story follows Burr through the days of the Revolution and the first two administrations under George Washington and then John Adams before Adams and Thomas Jefferson are inaugurated in 1800. Because of Burr's honesty and integrity, Jefferson becomes president rather than Aaron Burr. Had the election been swayed by even one vote, the very history of the American people could have been very, very different.

As Charlie learns more about Burr through his work on the man's biography, he grows and learns from one of the most intelligent men of that time. Despite Burr's bad reputation, Charlie finds that he really enjoys spending time with Colonel Burr and can hardly wait to hear the next installment of the memoirs that Burr dictates to Charlie.



Unknown to Burr, Charlie is working on an anonymous pamphlet that will discredit Martin van Buren and likely cause him to lose the presidential election. Despite Charlie's regard for Aaron Burr, he is still interested in making a living by writing, and he has been offered a great deal of money to produce just such a pamphlet. As time goes by, Charlie begins to have some doubts about what he is doing, but does not see a way out. Providence shines on Charlie very close to the deadline, and Charlie is able to sell his manuscript to a publisher, who plans to use its own well-known author as the supposed writer of the manuscript, so that no one will ever know Charlie is the one who did the research on the Burr book. Charlie is greatly relieved that he is able to rid himself of the burden without betraying his mentor.

At the end of Burr's life, he continues to groom Charlie for his life; even mentoring him before his presidential dinner with Andrew Jackson and Martin van Buren, the first time Charlie has ever been in the White House. Throughout the book the reader is aware of Burr's interest in young people and his desire to help them to become better than they are. Burr has influenced Charlie's life almost from the time he was born. In fact, the very end of the book gives the reader information about Charlie that shocks everyone.



1833, Chapter One

1833, Chapter One Summary

Burr: A Novel by Gore Vidal is a piece of historical fiction that has much of its basis in fact and over ten years of research into the lives of those discussed in the book. The main character is a young law clerk named Charlie Schuyler. Charlie is also an aspiring writer and journalist and uses his position as Burr's law clerk to accumulate information about Burr's past life. When the novel opens, Burr is seventy-seven years old and has lived through the Revolutionary War, a vice presidency, a duel that killed his rival, Alexander Hamilton, and a trial for treason against the United States for conspiring to separate the western states from the union. Charlie's friend and mentor, William Leggett, is the editor of the Evening Post, a newspaper that covers all things political. Leggett wishes to control the 1836 election of the office of president and does not wish for Martin van Buren to win. With this end in mind, Leggett tells Charlie to get information from Aaron Burr that proves that Burr is van Buren's father. The more Charlie delves into Burr's life through the dictation of his memoirs, the more he realizes just how much he admires the man that most people seem to hate. Burr is delighted to have Charlie work on his biography and is actively involved in the project. Through Burr's memoirs the reader is taken on a journey through the past of the American Revolution, of Burr's rise in the political arena, of his vice presidential election that could have netted him the presidency, and his attempt to become King of Mexico or the President of the Western States.

Aaron Burr, age seventy-seven, marries Eliza Jumel on July 1, 1833. The ceremony takes place at Madame Jumel's home on Washington Heights. Burr's first marriage was over fifty years ago to Theodosia Provost. Twenty-nine years ago Burr was Vice President to Thomas Jefferson, fought a duel with General Alexander Hamilton and killed him. Twenty-six years ago, Burr was arrested on the order of President Jefferson and charged with the treasonous intention of breaking up the United States but was found to be innocent of treason.

Charlie is a "none-too-efficient law clerk" but aspires to be a writer. Idolizing Washington Irving's writing style, Charlie attempts to cover the news of Burr's wedding for his boss, Leggett, who has lately become interested in Burr's affairs and wishes for Charlie to come up with articles for "The Evening Post." That night, after the wedding, Charlie reflects on the strange turn of events that landed him at the Jumel mansion for the night. His time with Burr shows Colonel Burr to be a man of the people, known by nearly all of them on sight, a fact Charlie witnessed earlier in the day when Burr stopped by the apple-woman's cart for an apple. Burr's tendency with Charlie is to talk about anything that happens to come to his head. He tells Charlie that he loves the company of women. He also reflects on the graves of those who have died before him, buried in the graveyard of Trinity Church. Burr really startles Charlie with his knowledge that Charlie is working on a biography of Burr's life. He tells Charlie that he does not mind, that he



would really like to tell the "true" story of the revolution before it is too late. Burr jumps from topic to topic and Charlie must really work to stay abreast of his changes.

1833, Chapter One Analysis

Charlie is the point of view character through which the reader sees the historical character of Aaron Burr. Charlie's intention of creating a biography on Burr's life allows the reader to see the main character, Aaron Burr, through the eyes of another character, who functions as the narrator of the story, and someone who is slightly removed, but close enough to the main character to give a fair accounting of the man's life. His position as a law clerk and aspiring writer makes him a perfect candidate for the position. Vidal's writing style is revealed in this first chapter, creating an unexpected story-telling experience with Burr jumping from topic to topic, past to present and back again, with Charlie attempting to understand the jumps and striving to keep up with him. Charlie is a young man; Burr is nearing eighty and still has the mental capacity of the young, very bright attorney he had once been.

The reader must work hard to keep pace with Vidal's changes in perspective, with Charlie in the present, interacting with Burr, then Charlie writing about what has happened in the form of a written memoir, creating a dizzying circle of perspectives for the reader, but once that is accomplished, the reader will appreciate the unique writing style. It is not an easy writing style to understand, but well worth the effort.



1833, Chapter Two

1833, Chapter Two Summary

Chapter Two opens with Burr, Charlie and Dr. Bogart in the carriage headed to Madame Jumel's mansion for the upcoming nuptials. Charlie Schuyler, at the behest of Leggett, has been commanded to describe everything that he observes about Colonel Burr, and he does this to the best of his abilities. He describes how Madame Jumel pretends to be distraught at Burr's announcement that they will be married that evening; however, her reluctance is easily overcome, and they were married in a brief ceremony followed by a truly magnificent wedding feast. The feast indicates that the cook, at least, is prepared for the nuptials, even if Madame Jumel pretends not to be. Charlie speculates on the nature of the marriage, finding it interesting that Colonel Burr has been talking to a banker about purchasing a share of some Texas land for fifty-thousand dollars, and Charlie knows that Burr has money trouble. Now, having married Madame Jumel, Burr's money troubles appear to be a thing of the past. Burr and his new bride review how they met and when; dates that each hold to be the truth and yet do not match. Madame Jumel, now Mrs. Burr speaks of her association with Napoleon, referring to an opportunity the great man had to escape using the very ship upon which she was sailing but did not and sadly met his fate. She refers to a traveling carriage, his military trunk and a clock she owns as having been Napoleon's personal property. Charlie is told later by Burr that Madame Jumel has never met Napoleon, but it was true that he could have used her ship as an escape, but was unlucky in that regard. Burr gently chastises Charlie for asking a direct question of Madame Jumel about her relationship with Napoleon.

1833, Chapter Two Analysis

Vidal uses the second chapter in this part of the book to show Burr's seemingly spontaneous act of getting married, but in actual fact it had been planned down to the very last detail, so much so that the cook of Madame Jumel's household knew enough to prepare a wedding feast. The story also demonstrates Burr's gentleness with women, his razor sharp mind, and his fatherly, or perhaps brotherly, remonstrance of Charlie's questioning of Burr's new wife. It is a beautiful portrait of a truly human man—one who has deep feelings, possible subterfuge, and kindness toward a young and inexperienced man. He also takes a poke at General Washington, briefly commenting on his ineptitude as a leader.



1833, Chapter Three

1833, Chapter Three Summary

Charlie is disappointed that Mr. Leggett does not wish to publish his account of Burr's wedding in "The Evening Post," and proposes that Charlie try to persuade Mr. Bryant, the assistant editor of the paper. Charlie wins only one line for the wedding, but does learn that the two men are very interested in getting any information they can regarding Aaron Burr. Charlie is told very bluntly that Aaron Burr is Martin van Buren's biological father, that he had impregnated Mrs. van Buren many years ago, and his affiliation with the family is much more than as a family friend. They two newspaper men encourage Charlie to use his relationship with Burr to find proof that he is van Buren's father. Mr. Bryant likes Burr, but Leggett does not, nor does he support van Buren as the next president of the country. As a newspaper man, Leggett understands the power of the press and intends to use Charlie for his own purposes of altering the course of history by keeping van Buren out of the position of President. When Charlie asks if his story on Burr will be printed in the paper, Leggett informs him that he has an alternate publisher, one who is willing to pay Charlie a great deal of money for an expose on Aaron Burr.

1833, Chapter Three Analysis

The power of the newspaper is made very clear in this chapter, with Leggett and Bryant both scheming to have their young reporter utilize his friendly relationship with Burr to further the needs of their paper and likely shape the future of the country. Charlie feels some regard for Burr, and is a little reluctant to use his relationship with the great man for monetary purposes, but when he discovers that he will be paid well, he decides that it is all for the good. He considers whether or not he is betraying the Colonel, and decides that he probably is, but he is not hurting the man, and that is how Charlie salves his conscience. He does not yet realize just how much he will be betraying a man who will come to mean a great deal to him in the future.



1833, Chapter Four

1833, Chapter Four Summary

The reader is greeted with Burr in his office discussing the role of Charlie writing the memoirs Burr has yet to find time to write. They do not get very far when word comes that Mrs. Burr is in a carriage downstairs. Aaron Burr bolts out the back door, telling Charlie to lie and say that he is in court. Charlie tells Burr's wife that her husband has just left the building; whereupon, he is unceremoniously dumped into her carriage by her groom and taken for a ride, so she can cry on his shoulder about how her husband has taken six-thousand dollars for his Texas land settlement scheme. The reader has to wonder just how much of what Burr tells is the entire truth and yet has to wonder the same about his wife. Sam Swartwout, the collector of the port of New York, appointed to his position by President Jackson, which was a surprise to many as Swartwout is a devoted Burrite, encourages Charlie to finish his law studies, as Charlie is working under the greatest mind of the country. Charlie also learns that Burr has truly loved only one woman, his daughter.

1833, Chapter Four Analysis

The point of Chapter Four is to show that Burr is a complicated man with many ideas, many beliefs and the owner of many truths. For him, the truth is what works best for him in a given situation. The reader feels very sympathetically toward Burr and yet, has some misgivings about how he has taken the money from his wife's investment for his own purposes. Charlie continues to be pulled in other directions. Mrs. Burr asks Charlie to be her friend and support her position that Burr is not to invest in Texas and settle it with Germans. The reader has to wonder where Charlie's loyalties lie.



1833, Chapter Five - Six

1833, Chapter Five - Six Summary

Charlie makes his way to Mrs. Rosanna Townsend's establishment, which is a house of ill-repute. He has been to her brothel numerous times before, but he chooses to believe that he is really there for research purposes, to get information regarding Colonel Burr from the Madame. She claims to have known both Burr and Alexander Hamilton in the Biblical sense, but gives Charlie no further information. Charlie chooses to stay and meet one of Mrs. Townsend's new girls, Helen Jewett, fresh from the country, and he immediately falls in love with the young prostitute. Instead of finding information, Charlie believes that he has found love.

Burr has given Charlie part of his memoir manuscript, telling Charlie that the real truth about the Revolutionary War must be told before everything becomes blurred. Burr, at nineteen years of age in 1775, is ready for war. What he does not understand is how George Washington, a Virginian, was put in charge of the Continental Army, which is essentially comprised of New Englanders. His first encounter with Washington is a shock for Burr. At 43, Washington looks like an old man already, his eyes sunken and vacant. He is strong enough to break up a fight between two men, and his demeanor at that time is that of a general, which Burr believes is his one good quality. Burr describes the city of tents and lean-to's and the overall shambles of the army quarters. His description gives the impression that the American military is merely a joke. Burr's feelings about Washington and the war in general are oddly caustic for so young a man. He believes that there really were few true "patriots" in 1775, the rich were for British rule, the poor did not care one way or the other. By the end of the war, Burr states that there were no patriots left, the good ones have already died, and everyone else is simply weary of war.

Burr and Ogden are assigned to Lieutenant-Colonel Christopher Green's company, under the command of Colonel Benedict Arnold. Arnold's intention is to free Quebec in Canada, but the Canadians prefer the English to the Americans, mostly because of America's intolerance of Canada's Catholicism. Arnold's other fault is that his map is inaccurate, and the river they chose to use for travel is far too rough and wild. Late in October, the Dead River floods, and the men are in a state of mutiny. Arnold gives them the choice to turn back or press on, but he is a clever man, and the men see the futility of turning back, as snow is upon them. Because Lieutenant-Colonel Enos has gone to Massachusetts, they have only five-hundred troops. Arnold still believes they can force the British to surrender, but the British are merely amused. Burr compares Arnold to Bonaparte, but believes that his failure is due to lack of luck more than anything else.

Burr recalls how he is ordered downriver to deliver a letter to General Montgomery and sets out for a solo journey. He denies disguising himself as a priest or becoming involved with an Indian princess, who gives her life to save him. He wonders why it feels as though his identity has been stolen and so many untrue stories are spun about his



adventures. Montgomery's three-hundred troops join Arnold, and they continue to plan an assault on the fort at Quebec. Initially, things were benevolent and promising, but a premature firing of a friendly canon struck Montgomery dead, and the remainder of the troops running in retreat. Burr is convinced that had they continued the assault as he ordered that Canada would be part of the United States. Over two-hundred men die in the disaster, and most of the remaining troops are injured. Burr is promoted to brigade-major and considered a war hero.

The story returns to 1833, and is told from Charlie's point of view. He remarks to Burr that he enjoyed Burr's account of the invasion of Canada, and Burr seems to not be present to him at first. He is somewhat vague and his age is showing. He is cold, and blames General Washington for his current feelings of chill, saying that Washington did not like him and always assigned him to unpleasant places on purpose. Burr's troubles with his wife appear to continue. Charlie asks for more pages of the memoir, but Burr claims to have forgotten where he has put them.

1833, Chapter Five - Six Analysis

Charlie's motivation for finding information about Burr is unclear. He wishes to please his mentor, Leggett, and he finds pleasant recreation at Mrs. Townsend's establishment after he has queried her regarding Colonel Burr. Yet, his real motivation seems to be that he is fascinated with the man. The chapter then turns to the manuscript that Burr has given to Charlie. This portion of the chapter is told from Burr's point of view in first person, fifty-eight years previously, but because it is a memoir, it is written as if it were happening now. Keeping abreast of these sorts of changes keeps the reader alert. The early days of the Revolutionary War take on a very different tone than that usually found in scholastic history books. There is brief talk of failed attempts in present-day history books; however, most everything in today's books is told from a positive, conquering perspective. Vidal's position is to tell the story as truthfully as he possibly can with all the research he has conducted, using documents and transcriptions to support his positions.

Chapter Six is a mere five, short paragraphs. It serves to break up the long memoir narrative of the previous chapter. It also serves to show that Burr supported Benedict Arnold's position as a military leader, and the reader has to wonder if this is because he and Arnold shared similar military strategy in the Canada campaign.



1833, Chapter Seven

1833, Chapter Seven Summary

Burr's father was the president of Princeton College, when it was known as Jersey City College. Charlie has become concerned about the Texas land leases; if they are no good, then Burr will have lost most of his wife's fortune—a fact supported by Nelson Chase's report that Burr and his wife have frequent fights at the Mansion. Charlie refers to Burr as infinitely patient with children and with judges who still hold him responsible for Alexander Hamilton's death.

Burr's memoir begins again with Burr deciding in 1776, that Benedict Arnold is out of his mind, requesting that the British surrender. As his volunteer time is up, he leaves Canada and returns to New York, where reporting to General Washington he meets Martha Washington and Alexander Hamilton. He sizes up Hamilton immediately, as if knowing the future at the time of their meeting; they both resented each other for aspiring to the same position, that of the president. He rues the fact that fate caused them to be enemies when they might have been friends. Burr's meeting with Washington results in Burr giving his account of why they failed to take Quebec. Burr's reason is that they failed to take his advice on how best to attack the fort. Washington is not impressed with Burr's military prowess; however, Washington has no knowledge of military campaigns and fails to appreciate Burr's perceived opinion of his own brilliance. Washington is a failure as a tobacco farmer, perpetually short of money and is disliked by his own mother. Burr's new assignment to Washington is to write his letters to Congress asking for non-forthcoming funds to continue the war for ten hours a day, a task Burr fails to appreciate.

Burr is happier working with General Israel Putnam. Burr lives at Putnam's house where Putnam is host to a young girl by the name of Margaret Moncrieffe, the daughter of a major in the British army and the cousin to General Montgomery. Burr discovers her to be a spy in their midst and encourages Putnam to send her further afield. By the end of 1776, the British General Howe has assembled 34,000 men on Staten Island, intending to seize New York City. Washington asks Burr his opinion of what to do, and Burr says to raze New York and force Howe and his troops to come further inland. Washington thinks this too cowardly an approach and proceeds with an attack with only two groups of tragically outnumbered troops. Washington's first battle is a miserable failure, and they must retreat in humiliation or risk losing every life. Washington moved back as far as Morris Mansion on the Haarlen Heights, which is now the home of Colonel and Mrs. Burr. Burr considers this to be the absolutely lowest point in Washington's career, even worse than the Valley Forge incident to come. Burr ends this segment of the memoir with a note to Charlie that he will burrow into his trunks and find more papers for him.



1833, Chapter Seven Analysis

Burr's memoir gives the reader an excellent view of the very early days of the Revolutionary War, where everything appeared to be in chaos, no one with any sort of military knowledge is in charge of military endeavors. From Burr's position in this memoir, it seems strikingly amazing that the British did not prevail. Washington's seeming incompetence continues to astonish the reader that he is able to convince men to follow him as a general. Year after year, Washington's inept guidance seems to have placed America in a very difficult position in Burr's opinion. Burr's character here is shown to be one of absolute truth. Rather than yhr cloying and fawning advisers Washington is used to, Burr is rather as annoying as his name indicates. He even has the audacity to go over Washington's head to request a transfer from duties under Washington as he did not like the idea of a desk job when he craved military glory.



1833, Chapter Eight - Nine

1833, Chapter Eight - Nine Summary

Burr's investment in the Texans land scheme is lost, and his partners in the plan come to his office looking for him. Charlie is able to put them off. Later that day Charlie is summoned by Mrs. Burr to meet at the City Hotel, where she rages at him that Burr has taken and sold her second carriage and horses for half of what they are worth. Over tea, supplemented with rum, and her hysterics, Charlie learns of his mentor's misdeeds, including his keeping a mistress in Jersey City, a fact that Mrs. Burr actually condones to Charlie's astonishment. She sees the seventy-seven-year old Burr as a man and a capable one at that. She does not mind the women, but she does mind how easily he is able to lose money, her money.

After she departs, Charlie encounters Dr. Bogart, who has not seen the couple since their wedding. He insists on telling Charlie about Burr's first marriage to the older, deformed, and cancer-ridden Theodosia Prevost, who had borne five children for her first husband. Bogart's memory of Burr as a young man brings the image of Burr in his youth alive for Charlie. He was thin, wiry, strong and very, very bright. All the girls of the time were more than a little in love with Burr. Theodosia was no exception and the two married after the war ended. Charlie pumps this unexpected source for more information about Burr and the Revolution. According to Bogart, Burr was a war hero for his actions in attempting to retrieve General Montgomery's body at Quebec.

Upon returning to the office, Charlie is able to open Burr's trunk, finding in it old letters and a thousand-page journal intended to be a gift for his daughter upon her return to the States. The letters give an accounting of the death of Burr's grandson and the subsequent death of his beloved daughter, Theodosia. The journal is unread until Charlie opens it and reads a page. He is bewildered to discover it to be a recounting of time spent in Europe with a prostitute. He finds it strange that the relationship between father and daughter to be so intimate.

Burr returns to the office and assumes that his wife has told Charlie everything, which is a correct assumption. Burr admits to being apart from his wife, but that it is only temporary. He informs Charlie that he would be spending time with a rising silversmith. Charlie surprises Burr for the first time correctly guessing the young man to be Burr's illegitimate son, Aaron Columbus Burr. Burr is anxious to see his son, but has no wish to see the boy's mother. Columbus Burr is the father to two small children, and Burr's tenderness when he mentions them causes Charlie to speculate that Burr prefers the company of children to that of women. Burr also confesses to his affair with Jane McManus because they have been discovered by Jane's maid, who has been paid to give evidence against Burr so Mrs. Burr can divorce him. Nelson Chase, Burr's employee is assisting Madame Burr. Charlie tells Burr that it is not so much the women that Madame minds, but his inability to manage money. Burr brushes that off as something of no importance. He starts to mention a new scheme to Charlie but then



remembers discretion and stops. Charlie wishes he had a hint so that he could warn him should the scheme be ill-advised.

1833, Chapter Eight - Nine Analysis

Charlie's suspicions that the Texas land scheme might fall through have come true, and Burr's partners in the plan have come to his office looking for him, and likely the money they, too, have lost in the deal. Burr is absent from the office for the Texas land people; he is also not available to his wife, who also seeks him at the office, but finds a sympathetic ear in Charlie telling him of Burr's latest money losing events. She threatens to divorce Burr unless he returns the money in full for her carriage and horses. Charlie is getting a very clear picture of Burr, who seems to be so full of good intentions, but his inability to finish a financial deal to his advantage seems to be a life-long problem for him. His picture of Burr is further augmented when he visits with Dr. Bogart, who seems to recall the days of the Revolution with rather more vigor and interest than his present-day life. It seems that Burr is correct; the truth about the Revolution must be recorded before everything is seen through they eyes of sentimentality, where the real facts of the time have become obscured by the events of the current day. Dr. Bogart seems to wish to be able to return to the days of the Revolution, to the days when there were heroes.

Burr's joviality in the face of his wife's fury causes the reader to wonder if Burr really has no idea how to deal with women. It would appear that he married Madame Jumel for her charms and her money, but that he has no idea how to go about a day-by-day relationship. His desire to spend time with his son, Columbus Burr, is a bit of foreshadowing because he has chosen to spend time with Charlie, who is also his son, but Charlie is unaware of that fact. Burr loves his children, and he loves his grandchildren, seeming to be much more comfortable in their presence than in the presence of all women except for his daughter.



1833, Chapter Ten - Eleven

1833, Chapter Ten - Eleven Summary

Charlie has been given an assignment by Leggett; he is to meet with his idol, Washington Irving. Charlie is a little surprised to find that Irving no longer resembles the slender, dreamy-eyed young man of his school books. Irving inquires of Charlie as to the origin of his last name, and Charlie hastens to assure him that his father was a tavern keeper in Greenwich village, and he does not hail from the celebrated Schuylers. Irving states that he is partial to the Dutch, but is disappointed that Charlie cannot speak Dutch and mourns that they are becoming a homogeneous people. He refers to his visit with van Buren at Kinderhook, and Charlie takes advantage of this and moves the conversation to Burr, the reason for his visit. Irving tells Charlie that Burr was always one willing to support artists, both Burr and his daughter. Irving speaks of Theodosia with tremendous admiration. Charlie tries to press Irving for a connection between van Buren and Burr, but Irving is a political beast and is hoping for a possible position as Secretary of State in van Buren's cabinet. He will not betray any confidences, and becomes guarded with Charlie. He reveals that both Burr and Henry Clay were at the Park Theater the previous evening. Henry Clay had successfully defended Burr against the charge of murder after the duel with Hamilton, but paid a hefty professional price for it. Irving alludes that Burr's acquaintance is not seen favorably for someone with political aspirations. He feels that Burr has lived too long and is an embarrassment to a great many people. Irving believes that the "truth" is not always the best way to present history.

Matthew L. Davis comes to Burr's office and Burr asks Charlie to provide Davis with his notes on the Revolution. Burr takes great delight in the idea that two men are almost vying for the privilege to write his biography. Burr shares his concerns about the increasing number of immigrants arriving, but Davis is pleased as the increasing numbers will help win elections. Burr tries to persuade Davis as to the dangers of the Roman Catholics outnumbering Americans by two to one, but Davis laughs off his concerns and says that they will be made into Americans.

Charlie is sent out on an errand and accidentally meets his father, from whom he is estranged. Burr knows this but not the reason for it. Burr and Charlie discuss the encounter at the theater the previous evening and Burr is amused that two men fear him, one who is currently president, Jackson, and one who wishes to be, Henry Clay. At the very end of the chapter Burr collapses.

1833, Chapter Ten - Eleven Analysis

More hints and clues for Charlie, but it is evident that he fails to see them. Charlie is Dutch, so is van Buren; they are both blond haired, blue-eyed boys, sons of a dark father. Charlie is nearly speechless when he first meets his idol, Washington Irving, but



after speaking to him for a time, realizes that Irving is human, and is prone to the human condition of wishing that things were different from what they are. Irving is of the decided opinion that Burr has lived far too long, and so many people still suffer for their acquaintance with him. Perhaps Irving would paint Burr as a hero had he died a dozen years before.

Burr is giving Charlie and Davis permission to write his biography by giving out his notes on the Revolution, and this is very pleasing to Burr. He really wants the story to be known. Charlie's estrangement with his father is not explained, but the warmth and friendliness of Burr's relationship with Charlie is a striking contrast, as perhaps it should be. It gives the reader reason to consider Burr's motivation for mentoring Charlie.



1833, Chapter Twelve

1833, Chapter Twelve Summary

Burr is back home with his wife and recovering quite well from his stroke. His only remaining malady is that his left leg is still partially paralyzed. Perhaps because Burr realizes his remaining days are dwindling, he gives Charlie the remainder of his notes from the War. Much of what he had written was lost at sea with his daughter, but he asks that Charlie make the notes available to Matthew Davis as well. The remainder of the chapter is comprised of bits and pieces of papers noting Burr's memoirs.

General Knox Memoir - Henry Knox is a Boston bookseller and studiously attached to General Washington. He is the chief artillery officer but knows nothing of his job. Burr witnesses Knox's ineptitude at Kips Bay on September 15, 1776. Caught in the confusion of battle, Burr rides to locate Washington. Instead, he finds Knox and the entire brigade dug into the earth and cowering. Knowing the order to retreat to Haarlem had been given, Burr seeks the commanding officer, who is Knox. The two men argue, Burr because he knows the brigade will be slaughtered, Knox because he is afraid to move but attached to his status as the commander. Burr puts the choice to the men, and they choose to move to Haarlem. Burr leads them to safety and Knox is infuriated. Washington knows of Burr's assistance, but Burr receives no official commendation. Knox is made chief of artillery and a Brigadier-General.

Night Riders - Memoir - In July 1777. Burr finally receives his commission as a Lieutenant-Colonel from General Washington. Burr is irritated at the delay as most officers junior to him in Quebec have already been promoted ahead of him. General Washington rewards those who revere him and rebukes those who do not. Burr has aligned himself with General Charles Lee, a rival of General Washington, and sinks. The Knoxes of the war rise to great heights. The rest sink. Burr is assigned to a regiment on the Ramp River as second in command. The primary commander, Malcom, wants a paternal, removed position, so he locates himself and his family some twenty miles away and allows Burr to take command. Both men are happy. Burr is only twenty-one. So far, Washington has lost New York City to the British and suffered another defeat at White Plains. Had he just let go of what he had already lost and moved on to secure Philadelphia, Burr believes they could have held that city. Instead, Washington fights to regain his lost ground for over a year. Most younger officers want Washington relieved of command. Some, like Burr, support General Lee. While Washington dithers, Burr and his unit use Indian stealth and surprise night tactics to weak havoc on the British. In this way, Burr contributes to the cause of the war.

Winter 1777-1778. Valley Forge Memoir—In September 1777, Washington lost Philadelphia to the British; Congress moves to Baltimore. Most Philadelphians hope the British will just hang General Washington so their lives can get back to normal. By now, most Americans are very tired of the war. Burr reports to Washington, interrupting a meeting of would-be suppliers of his starving army. He thanks Burr for his night raids



into Jersey. Burr requests that he be granted permission to take his two-hundred men to Staten Island to practice some of the same techniques on the British there. Washington orders him to have his men build wooden cabins to afford shelter at Valley Forge. Hamilton is now securely fastened to Washington. Jamie, still Burr's friend, has been promoted to brigadier-general for bringing to Congress the news that British General Burgoyne's unit has surrendered. Winter. Snow. Cold. Even in his later years, Burr remembers the bone chilling cold of that winter. Burr and Jamie Wilkinson discuss Washington, and Burr is surprised that Jamie backs the plotters who wish to replace Washington.

The Affair at the Gulf Memoir - As a reward for his past successes, Burr is given command of the most problematic regiment stationed at the Gulf, the point through which the British will come. Burr works his new regiment so hard that they plot a mutiny, intending murder. Burr takes precautions, and on a surprise assembly call at midnight, some of the men involved raise their muskets and fire upon Burr. Their bullets have been removed. Burr, with his sword, slices off the arm of one of the men. The man, arm amputated, is sent home. Burr's regiment is now heeled. Washington considers court martial for Burr's actions but is dissuaded. Washington, acting on Burr's plan to harass Staten Island, sends the ignorant Lord Stirling in to do the task. Not having Burr's knowledge of the terrain, he fails miserably.

Monmouth Court House Memoir - Burr recalls his own personal disaster on June 28, 1778. Washington, General Lee, the Marquis de Lafayette, Benedict Arnold, General Gates, Lord Stirling, James Monroe and General Lee discuss the situation of the British vacating Philadelphia and returning to New York. France has entered the war on the side of the U.S. and the British are nervous. General Lee suggests merely allowing the British to leave Philadelphia. Washington, chafing under the burden of all of his military losses, insists on attacking, but chooses to divide the troops in a most confusing manner and allows Lafayette, fresh from France, to lead an attack rather than giving command to the proven General Lee. Burr is assigned to Lord Stirling's division and spends the day waiting under the blistering sun, suffering more casualties from heatstroke than battle. Conflicting orders all around turn what Burr had anticipated to be a clear-cut victory into a rout and another defeat. Lee is court-martialed for disobedience. Burr, among others, protest in support of Lee. Few of Lee's supporters are ever promoted. Washington's greatest military victory is over his rivals rather than the enemy. Hamilton's assessment of Washington's greatest trait is, "Oh, Burr, Self-love! Self-love! What else makes a god?" Page 96, 1833 Chapter 12.

Burr's health has deteriorated to the point that he sends his resignation to Washington on March 10, 1779, which Washington accepts.

Through Enemy Lines Memoir - May 1779, Congress rests easy now, believing that because the French have entered the war, victory is shortly to be had. What do not take into account are Washington's military ineptitudes, guaranteeing another defeat, as well as the lack of men in the army. Of the fourteen thousand he commanded at Monmouth, Washington's army numbers only twenty-five hundred men. The war is to continue for



another three miserably long years. "Fortunately our people have always preferred legend to reality." Page 98, 1833 Chapter 12.

Benedict Arnold noted June 4, 1833 Memoir - Autumn 1780. The story of Benedict Arnold is unfolding; a battlefield genius with a bad temper and passed over for promotion repeatedly and denied military command because of his foot injury. Bitter and angry, Arnold has become a spy for the British and asks for command of West Point, whose only significance is that it watches the river and functions as a point of communication. A perfect post for a spy. When he is discovered, he boards the British ship "Vulture" and leaves his wife, Peggy, and child behind. Feigning madness, Peggy seeks out Burr and Theodosia as a refuge. Without her "madness" Peggy would have been jailed as the wife of a traitor. It turns out, however, that Peggy is the original spy, having had an affair with Major Andre on the side of the British, and with his help wins Benedict Arnold over to the side of the British. Peggy firmly believes the British will prevail. Burr assures her the British will lose and she will have to return to England.

1833, Chapter Twelve Analysis

Burr and Washington never saw eye to eye, and as with all men who stand up to Washington, Burr suffers militarily for his independent thinking. Over and over again, Burr watches as Washington leads men into a doomed battle. Burr believes that had General Lee been in command the war would have ended much sooner than it does. Most Americans are not really Americans yet; they are still British, and do not really understand the battle over their independence. They see independence as a life without enough food, of war and suspicion everywhere they turn. It really is a handful of men who direct the course of the war and the birth of a new nation. All the individuals populating the new nation are merely along for the ride. Burr's memoirs serve to demonstrate that even among that handful of men, there was no true agreement as to the proper course of direction. The elite among America's new military compete against one another, forming an alliance with this general or that one, hoping that their choice will be the one to rise to the top and they will be along for the ride. Burr, having chosen General Lee, does not rise as high as Alexander Hamilton does. Much of history is distilled into a few cogent sentences or paragraphs of an incident. History does not take the time to make a detailed foray into the minds and hearts of the individuals involved, what they were experiencing and why.



1834, Chapter One

1834, Chapter One Summary

Burr returns to his office accompanied by two creditors who are dismissed without payment. He is cheerful, chipper, with news that he and his wife will go separate ways for a time until he pays her back her horses and carriage. He and Charlie attend the theater that evening where they run into William Leggett. A discussion of dueling arises, and Leggett presses his advantage by forcing Burr to give an accounting of his duel with Alexander Hamilton. Burr claims to have been unable to hit a barn door with any accuracy. He says that the only reason he won the duel is due to his calm. "Mr. Leggett, the principal difference between my friend Hamilton and me was that at the crucial moment, his hand shook and mine never does." Page 109, 1834, Chapter One. After the theater the Colonel manages to secure a boat to convey him to the Jersey shore, and Charlie and Leggett end up at Mrs. Townsend's house. Charlie renews his acquaintance with Helen. He promises to help her to leave Mrs. Townsend.

1834, Chapter One Analysis

Burr has recovered from his stroke, and ready to continue on with his life. He faces ghosts from his past at all turns, especially when he meets with Mr. Leggett. The reader should find it very interesting that Burr is on such friendly terms with Charlie, knowing that he also works for one of the most vicious editors in town, who is determined to use every unfavorable story from Burr's past to hurt Burr and anyone Burr might support politically. Burr is a very sharp man; it must give him some kind of pleasure to use Charlie for his own uses while foiling Leggett in his quest for unsavory facts regarding anyone Burr might have spawned, specifically van Buren.



1834, Chapter Two

1834, Chapter Two Summary

April. Charlie and Burr speak of reconstructing Burr's memories, but Burr still delays. Charlie worries because from time to time Burr is forgetful, and Burr without his acclaimed mind is no longer the monumental man he once was. At lunch one day, Charlie meets with Leggett, Washington Irving, Verplanck and a few other men where they discuss and debate politics for a time. Irving asks Charlie if he would like to see Richmond Hill, Burr's old home, in the interest of continuing their discussion of Aaron Burr. During the carriage ride there, Irving relates a thirty-year old story about Elma Sands, who was found murdered at the bottom of a well. Levi Weeks was accused and confessed to enjoying her favors, but not of murdering her. His defense team consisted of Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr. Together they convinced both the jury and the judge of the truth of the young man's story, even though it was a fabrication. After the trial, the judge and the two defense attorneys were approached outside the courthouse by a friend of Elma's, who cursed them in Elma's name. The judge vanished never to be seen again. Alexander Hamilton died in the duel with Aaron Burr. And Burr simply lives on and on and on. At Richmond House, now a theater, Irving walks through it seeing it as it had once been. It becomes very clear to Charlie that Irving had been infatuated with Theodosia, Burr's daughter. Charlie mentions Leggett in order to bring Irving back to the present, and the illustrious writer urges Charlie to stop trying to prove that Burr is van Buren's father. He claims that there is no truth in it. Irving appears to wish for van Buren's success and any association with Burr is likely to tarnish it.

1834, Chapter Two Analysis

Irving tells Charlie to drop his endeavors to associate Burr with van Buren. His stories about Burr indicate that he believes Burr to cast a blight on anything he touches. It is possible he even blames Burr for Theodosia's death, or for the loss of her, even though there is nothing to support that belief. Irving is a peaceable man and for him to dissuade Charlie from pursuing the Burr story gives Charlie the belief that perhaps there may be some truth to the stories.



1834, Chapter Three

1834, Chapter Three Summary

There is intense rioting in the streets for three days, and on the last of the three-day election for mayor of New York City, Burr sends Charlie to give Matt Davis some papers. The Whigs are responsible for creating a mock-up of a frigate they call the "Constitution" and fight for possession of it with the Irish mobs as it is a symbol of what each side purports to protect. Matt Davis is jubilant, believing that Verplanck, his choice for mayor, will be elected that day, and they will then be able to put Henry Clay in the office of president in 1836. In his joy, Davis seems not to be aware of the extent of the rioting that has erupted all over the city. He teases Charlie about the two of them being in competition to get Burr's biography printed. Charlie realizes he (Charlie) really is thinking of writing it, rather than simply trying to get information for Leggett in order to tarnish van Buren's name and cause him to lose the election. Davis admits to feelings of nostalgia with the city so divided, quite like it was during the Burr and Hamilton days.

1834, Chapter Three Analysis

It seems as if Burr is correct that in creating a democracy comprised of immigrants, all is turning to chaos. The city is in a complete state of rioting, a sign that things are changing. Burr reflects that it used to be that only one thousand people were allowed to vote for governor. To allow everyone to vote is a new concept, and the power seems to have created monsters out of men. The people are empowered and frightened at the same time due to that power. The birth of a new nation is not without pain.



1834, Chapter Four - Five

1834, Chapter Four - Five Summary

Verplanck, the Whig candidate, loses the election for Mayor by one hundred seventy-nine votes out of thirty-five thousand votes altogether cast. Tammany Hall is the winner; however, the Whigs have taken the city's common council. Burr explains to Charlie how the Whigs, who stood for American Independence and Tories, who supported British rule subdivided over basic constitutional issues. Some Whigs want a weaker federal government, more personal rights and are anti-Federalist, while other Whigs support a strong federal government and become Federalists, like Alexander Hamilton. The Tory-Federalists became republican and call themselves Whigs. The Anti-Federalist republicans are now Jacksonian democrats. After his discourse on the names of the changing political parties, Charlie asks if Burr favors van Buren, which he does. Burr feels that Henry Clay is corrupt.

Charlie takes his prostitute, Helen Jewett, out to the gardens, where they see the devastation of the rioting all over the entire city. Helen lies to Mrs. Townsend, telling her that she has an aunt in town she needs to visit in order to get the time off to spend the evening with Charlie. Charlie asks her about her family. Helen gives her sad story that her father is not known to her and her mother is a drunk, who works for a dressmaker, accounting for Helen's desire to set herself up in a dressmaking shop. The story of Charlie's estrangement from his father is revealed. He had five siblings, none of whom lived past early childhood. This was hard on his mother and there were constant fights between his parents. One cold November night after a fight, his father locked her out of the house. She fell ill and died as a result of that treatment. Charlie did not know for a week about her death. When he returned home, he and his father fought, and he never saw his father again until just recently with the refrain of "murderer" running through his head. He takes Helen back to Mrs. Townsend's determined to somehow free her from her prison of prostitution.

1834, Chapter Four - Five Analysis

Burr is a supporter of Tammany Hall, though never actually a member. He believes in its politics and wishes for the defeat of the Whigs. Tammany Hall is the precursor to the Democratic party, and the Whigs the precursor to the Republican party. A split political governing unit has its birth in early American government. Burr's overt endorsement of van Buren can be due to his political beliefs, but it could also be because it would be his son in the office of president, an honor denied him.

Charlie enjoys his outing with Helen and yet worries that by showing her what life can be like outside the brothel, she will return to her life inside the brothel even more discontent than before. At first this seems to be the case. Then they encounter one of Mrs. Townsend's customers in a compromising situation with another man. Helen can

hardly wait to get back and tell the girls that her suspicions about that particular customer are correct. The relationship of both Charlie and Helen to their families gives the reader a clue to Charlie's intense desire to create a family with Helen, to assuage his unhappy childhood.



1834, Chapter Six - Nine

1834, Chapter Six - Nine Summary

Charlie reads over the pages Matthew Davis has given to him and finds virtually nothing new. He summarizes Burr's life after the war: After the British depart New York City, Burr bends the rules and is admitted to the bar early, on January 19, 1782, marries Theodosia Prevost, who is ten years his senior, later that year. On June 21, 1783, his daughter, also named Theodosia, is born. In 1791, he secures Richmond Hill House as a summer home for them.

Burr is a successful lawyer from the beginning, and his rivalry with Alexander Hamilton continues. They are both ambitious and in the law. Burr is the more clever and intellectual of the two, not prone to droning or moralizing. Hamilton is more esoteric, prone to very long dissertations. On occasion the two men worked together on a case. What Charlie does find interesting in Davis' notes is a copy of a letter penned by Burr on March 11, 1782, postmarked Kinderhook where van Buren was born December 5, 1782. The time interval is nine months.

Watching the demolition of a block of houses being razed to make way for Mr. Astor's large hotel, Charlie and Burr talk about the past. Charlie is feeling the pressure from Leggett to get the vital information about Burr's connection with van Buren. Burr seems to have the need to share one regret with Charlie; in thinking one could not be hurt by a lie, he never corrected anyone who slandered him. Burr marvels that the slanderous lies persist to this day.

The Colonel and Charlie establish how they will work together

1834, Chapter Six - Nine Analysis

Vidal gives a brief history of Burr's personal and early professional life and a note that serves to give evidence that Burr was in the vicinity of van Buren's mother at the time of Martin van Buren's conception. The note is sure to give Leggett just what he is looking for. Leggett works to get the information from Charlie that will undermine van Buren's campaign and also tries to dissuade Charlie from writing a sympathetic biography of Burr. Per Leggett, Americans need to know that America is the greatest country in which to live, that Washington is the greatest man in history and anything that supports Burr will be a shock to the readers who need to believe what they are told. Leggett is a firm believer that the common man should be told what to believe, not given choices. Work on Burr's biography continues to move forward despite Leggett's belief that it will do the American public no good.



1834, Chapter Ten - Eleven

1834, Chapter Ten - Eleven Summary

Memoirs of Aaron Burr - One

All are gathered in New York City to witness General Washington's triumphant entry into the city he had lost to the British seven years before. Burr reflects on the comedic spectacle of the attempts to raise the flag on a pole greased by two British soldiers. Several other mishaps caused Washington to feel aggrieved. The young country had, as its only example, the pomp and circumstance of the royalty of England, and some people felt it appropriate to address Washington as "His Excellency." Washington himself wanted "His Mightiness" but the house of representatives pointed out that the Constitution clearly states he is to simply be called "The President."

Memoirs of Aaron Burr - Two

It is 1787. Burr speaks of Publius, who is comprised of three men, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and James Madison, who write articles in the newspapers in support of a strong Federalist government. Burr states that the formation of a strong Federal government originated with Washington, who wants to be at the very top of that strong central government. Burr is writing the true history of the Revolutionary War and every morning at five am, he goes to the State Department to study and copy documents until ten in the morning. Questions arise, and so Burr requests an interview with Washington to help clear up his issues. Burr is granted the interview, but Washington's answers are evasive. He challenges Burr on his position of support of the French people in their revolution. Burr tries to get Washington to see how the people have a choice in how to be ruled, but Washington will hear none of it. Burr asserts that he favors a looser federal structure. Washington's response is to bar Burr from the State Department, preventing him from making any more copies of the war documents.

1834, Chapter Ten - Eleven Analysis

The newness of America's ruling power is the reason for the chaos. Now that America is independent, the infant country will founder and struggle on its way to a unique identity. Some, like Washington, believe pomp and circumstance are appropriate for the leader of the newest country of the world. Others, like Hamilton, have other ideas. Washington is the president of a new country and fears anything that will remove power from his position. A federalist government will give Washington the stable power base he desires. The onset of the French Revolution with the peasants revolting against the ruling aristocracy frightens him. Again, Burr is on the wrong side of the argument, moving him far away from Washington's stand. The country needs men like Burr, but men like Washington will not reward such perceived subversiveness.



1834, Chapter Twelve

1834, Chapter Twelve Summary

Memoirs of Aaron Burr - Three

Burr is reluctant to become a political leader in the early days. Burr's interest is in providing for his wife and daughter; the law is what he knows. Within a year though, he is elected to the Assembly, a term he serves reluctantly. His public career waxes and wanes according to the whims of those he knows around him, and based on his own personal loyalties. While Burr is a reluctant politician, Hamilton is in his element in the political arena. Coming from a poor and illegitimate background, Hamilton desires only to live among the rich and powerful, though the rich aristocracy sees him only as a means to an end. Should Hamilton cater to the needs of the working man, he could have the untold success he seeks. Burr is an anti-Federalist and he finally realizes that he is being groomed for the office of president. It is not an unpalatable thought and so he accepts his destiny. He does not fear Hamilton—he should have feared Jefferson.

Memoirs of Aaron Burr - Four

Burr watches as Hamilton works to control the new government. Hamilton has already placed his wife's father, as well as another friend, in the Senate. His control over the executive and legislative branches is worrisome to the anti-Federalists, who fear he is working to recreate the British governing system. Because Thomas Jefferson is against Hamilton, Burr believes him to be an ally. Jefferson is a man of words and writes about everything. At one point he hires an editor for a paper called the "National Gazette." Hamilton is shocked because the articles in the paper are anti-government in nature. Burr marvels at Jefferson's capability to truly believe something he says at the time he says it, but manages to forget this at some point in the future. In this case, he denies he has anything to do with the National Gazette. John Adams tells Burr that Jefferson's motivations are to promote himself in the eyes of the people, by stirring them up against Hamilton. For now, Burr is pleased with his relationship with Jefferson.

1834, Chapter Twelve Analysis

Initially, Burr's political ascent is due to owing favors to one political ally or another, but his aspirations are merely to make a living for his family. However, as time passes, Burr recognizes his gifts and when he compares them to his nemesis Hamilton, he realizes that he is actually better suited for the office of president as he has the needs of the people truly at heart. Hamilton seeks only to serve the rich and powerful. Burr's tendency to serve all men continues throughout his life.

What Burr does not realize is that there is no room for friendship at these political levels. Jefferson paints Hamilton as a monarchist, who wishes to be a king, when the Federalist party is simply working toward a strong federal government. Jefferson says



that Hamilton is corrupt, all the while establishing his own corrupt plan for the presidency. He uses Burr to establish Democratic societies in the Tammany Society, using the example of the popularity of the French Revolution as fodder. Jefferson proposes that they stand together against the Hamiltonians. Hamilton quite rightly fears Jefferson and works to bring Burr over to his side. Burr remains independent, though aligning himself with Jefferson.



1834, Chapter Thirteen - Fourteen

1834, Chapter Thirteen - Fourteen Summary

Memoirs of Aaron Burr - Five

Early America is not allowed to give birth to a new governing nation without the state of world affairs intruding. France is in the midst of the French Revolution. France was also America's chief ally. The revolution in France worries the Tories turned Federalists. Initially they wished for British rule, but with independence won, a strong Federal government will have to suffice. The influence of France's revolution begins to permeate American society, from calling one another "citizen" and "citizeness" to an elevation of station to the point of common rudeness preventing an impression of a class system. With France now at war with England and other European countries, Washington declares the U.S. to be a neutral country. This decision gives rise to two distinct parties: The Federalists, who are pro-British, anti-France and the Republicans, who are the reverse. At one point, Burr and James Monroe are attacked by some French sailors, their lives spared only by the approach of another group of people. Burr wishes to have the men arrested, Monroe demurs, believing such an act to play into the hands of Hamilton. There are even calls for Washington to be beheaded, and the mightiest man in the world is now booed in public.

Memoirs of Aaron Burr - Six

At the end of the summer of 1793, Burr visits Jefferson at the capitol in Philadelphia. Despite the yellow fever epidemic, Burr agrees to the meeting. With Jefferson are Dr. James Hutchison and Jonathan Sergeant, two leading republicans. The topics of conversation at dinner include Hamilton's dismal military record, which Burr is compelled to protest as he did admire Hamilton's performance during the war. Jefferson commends Freneau's attack on Washington. Feneau portrays him as a monarch, leading the president into a rage of denial. Jefferson then quizzes Burr on his legal understanding of the Constitution as it pertains to Hamilton's proposal of a federal bank. Jefferson then shocks all present when he reveals that he has resigned from Washington's cabinet. Burr, knowing it for the cunning move that it is, is suspicious of Jefferson's motives. The discussion turns to the topic of New Orleans at the mouth of the Mississippi River, and Jefferson's opinion that it must be obtained for the good of the country. Burr is shocked that Jefferson would consider so bold a move, but then understands when Jefferson explains how he will manipulate the French government to raise men and arms to occupy New Orleans and take it from Spain. Jefferson also asserts that if the plan fails, he will disavow knowing the names of those involved. Burr still fears a war with Spain, and Dr. Hutchison reveals Jefferson's backup plan—to claim that since Spain controls Creek Indian territory and cannot control the savages, that will leave the U.S. Government with no choice but to protect their people. Yellow fever claims the life of Dr. Hutchison the day after the meeting and John Seargeant falls victim



to the fever a couple weeks later, leaving Jefferson and Burr as the only witnesses to the discussion.

1834, Chapter Thirteen - Fourteen Analysis

A good study of early government formation in American history demonstrates how groups of people will always have differing opinions. Early America suffers greatly in her governing infancy, resulting in a clear division into a two-party system. It is also a study of how public opinion is fickle in regards to George Washington, previously the most revered man in the world. If the world can be fickle toward the most powerful man, the reader must wonder what the fate of a less powerful man will be. Burr is truly taken aback at Jefferson's total disregard for the sanctity of a nation such as Spain, and how he is willing to use France as a pawn in his game to secure the mouth of the Mississippi for American commerce. While Burr believes that it is the right thing to do, he is still concerned about doing things the right way. Jefferson has a tendency to do things the way that will get him the results he wants without regard to the law.



1834, Chapter Fifteen - Seventeen

1834, Chapter Fifteen - Seventeen Summary

Memoirs of Aaron Burr - Seven

Burr first meets James Madison when Burr is thirteen in 1769, Madison is eighteen. Both are at Princeton at about the same time, but not well acquainted then. In 1794, Burr's wife dies and James Monroe is appointed minister to France. Burr had hoped the post would go to him; as everyone knows to be the American representative in another country means having all of America represented by what that individual says. Burr is smart enough to understand that Washington is still protecting his own interests. Since his wife's death, Burr has been a boarder at Mrs. Payne's house and present, too, is her recently-widowed daughter. Burr is not interested in her daughter, but remembers his very shy friend, James Madison who had once asked Burr why he is so attractive to the ladies. Seeing an opportunity to put his shy friend Madison together with Mrs. Payne's daughter, Dolley, Burr suggests to each that the other wishes to meet. Dolley Madison remains a devoted friend of both Burr and his daughter. July 12, 1834 is the date Burr's wife files for divorce, naming Jane McManus as his mistress. To make matters worse, she has hired Alexander Hamilton's son, also named Alexander Hamilton to represent her in the case. Charlie and Leggett are caught in a riot of an angry, anti-Abolitionist mob as they attacked and set fire to a black church. New Yorkers are not so much against the abolition of slavery as much as they are against being told how to feel. The two men run back to Charlie's boarding-house to get the mud and chicken feather filth off. There, Charlie shows him some of his papers on Burr. Leggett is thrilled with the letter putting Burr in the vicinity of Kinderhook at the time van Buren was conceived. Despite his consumptive illness that is draining away his life, Leggett is very excited by the news that could defeat van Buren in the presidential race in 1836.

1834, Chapter Fifteen - Seventeen Analysis

Another piece of the history puzzle is put in place with Burr's account of how James and Dolley Madison come together. It appears to be one of the few good deeds recorded of his life. Burr is still as sharp mentally as he ever was, filing for counter suit against his wife, naming her numerous lovers. He has forgotten he sold her horse and carriage, another piece of evidence that Burr and money seldom remain joined. Municipal chaos still reigns in the infant government as evidenced by the rioting against the Abolitionists. Leggett's illness grows progressively worse, and his desire to sabotage van Buren inversely increases. It is as if that goal is keeping him alive. Charlie needs more proof than circumstantial evidence; he has learned something from Burr.



1834, Chapter Eighteen

1834, Chapter Eighteen Summary

Memoirs of Aaron Burr - Eight

Burr visits Thomas Jefferson at his home at Monticello in 1795, where Burr is treated to a great many unsavory insights into the man's inconsistent character. Jefferson is a man who mistreats his horses yet treats his slaves with a fatherly hand, perhaps because he is the father or grandfather to many of them. Burr is shocked to see so many "bright" slaves, slaves whose skin is actually lighter than Burr's own skin. Jefferson fears an uprising of slaves and believes they should be returned to Africa or the Indies, and yet he is completely dependent on them for his lifestyle. Jefferson never frees his slaves but does allow them to purchase their freedom. Such is the man Burr looks to for assistance in securing a position as vice-president to him. Jefferson promises to do what he can in the election, but out of four candidates, Burr comes in fourth with only one vote from Virginia. James Adams is elected president with seventy-one votes; Jefferson is elected vice-president with sixty-nine votes, and Burr comes in last with thirty votes.

Memoirs of Aaron Burr - Nine

Alexander Hamilton has long had a problem with which women he chooses to sleep. One such woman, Mrs. James Reynolds, told him a story of an abusive husband, from whom she wished to flee. Hamilton goes to see her and is seduced into her bed. Not long after, he begins to receive letters stating that her husband has discovered all and will take the story to George Washington. It is blackmail and Hamilton pays. Unfortunately for him, he does not use his own money, but the money from the U.S. Treasury. Initially the matter is investigated and then closed with only James Monroe, one other congressman and Hamilton aware of the facts of the situation. It should have ended there, but Monroe tells Jefferson, who has always hated Hamilton, and Jefferson uses the facts to have a pamphlet published to ruin Hamilton's career. Hamilton, suspecting Monroe of being behind the pamphlet, calls Monroe out to a duel. Monroe approaches Burr to be his second at the duel. Burr is not happy about dueling and suggests a way out for Monroe, who is eager for a reprieve. Burr meets a very nervous and shaken Hamilton and is surprised when Hamilton tells Burr how much he dislikes dueling. This is amusing to Burr because Hamilton has called out two other men—Charles Lee and Commodore Nicholson. He swears to Hamilton that Monroe had nothing to do with the pamphlet and immediately Hamilton suspects Thomas Jefferson.

1834, Chapter Eighteen Analysis

Burr, for being such an astute attorney, allows Jefferson to promise to do many things and then must watch as something completely different results. Burr has now learned not to trust Jefferson and yet knows that politically they must remain allied. Politics



makes for strange friendships. Two points immediately become evident in the second memoir of this chapter. First that Hamilton and Jefferson despise one another at this time in their lives, while Burr and Hamilton appear to be friends. Second, Hamilton is known for calling out other men to a duel, so how ironic that Hamilton is discussing dueling with Burr, considering that the two will duel seven years later, which will result in Hamilton's death. Notice Hamilton's demeanor at the thought of the duel. Burr has already stated that his (Burr's) hand never shakes.



1834, Chapter Nineteen

1834, Chapter Nineteen Summary

Memoirs of Aaron Burr - Ten

By 1800, the Adams administration has ensured that there will be no re-election. The worst laws passed are known as the Alien and Sedition Acts in response to the fears sparked by the French Revolution. These Acts give the government the power to: (1) arrest foreigners during a time of war and deport them, (2) increase the number of years it takes to become an American citizen, and (3) the Sedition act effectively prevents freedom of the press by forbidding any negative press against the government and its officers. With the Adams administration on the way out, Burr sees the opportunity for Jefferson and him to be elected to the offices of President and Vice-president. Because he has given his word not to work against Thomas Jefferson, he agrees to be vice-president and promises all the New York vote for Jefferson. At first Jefferson demurs, saying that he will see what he can do about guaranteeing the Virginia votes for Burr. Burr then threatens to run as President, and this brings Jefferson to heel with a promise of the Virginia votes for Burr.

1834, Chapter Nineteen Analysis

Burr is basically an honest man and he believes, for all his faults that Jefferson, too, is a man of his word. His very worst threat is to run for the office of president himself. What he believes is that time is on his side. He is younger than Jefferson. He holds Jefferson to the promise made to him. Burr, for being such an astute attorney, shows little judgment regarding a man whose singular ambition is to be the head of the new country, and have as much power as the office will avail him. The reader is required to question whether Burr's lack of judgment is because he reveres the leader of the country, or whether he has a true belief in the office of the President.



1834, Chapter Twenty - Twenty-four

1834, Chapter Twenty - Twenty-four Summary

Charlie writes stories ostensibly as "Old Patroon," a conservative and censorious New Yorker. He speculates on Hamilton's parentage.

Memoir of Aaron Burr - Eleven

Burr works the political machine of New York to persuade the most famous men sympathetic to him to run for office, effectively planting the votes for Jefferson in the New York legislature. The election of 1800, shows Jefferson and Burr tie, each with seventy-three votes. Had Burr not secured the New York votes for Jefferson, he would have received the majority of votes and been elected president. With the election a tie, Burr works very hard to keep his word to Jefferson that he will not put himself up for President, only for vice president. The ironic situation became even more farcical because the deciding vote falls to Alexander Hamilton, who hates both Burr and Jefferson. Burr's daughter urges Burr to make a bid for the Presidency, telling him that if he fails to do so, he will regret it for the remainder of his life. Burr's editorial comment to the memoir supports her prediction. Burr refuses to break his word. The decision is made by Hamilton, choosing Jefferson over Burr.

Memoirs of Aaron Burr - Twelve

Early in March 1801, Burr arrives with Theodosia and her husband, in the new capital for the inauguration of Jefferson as President and himself as vice-president. Adams has seen fit to leave before the newly-elected heads of state are inaugurated. Jefferson has spent a great deal of time on his inaugural address but seems to be nervous. A cousin of his, John Marshall was appointed Chief Justice of the U.S. by Adams before he left office; therefore, Jefferson's disapproving cousin is to administer the oath of office to the newly-elected president and vice president. Jefferson strangely remarks that he and Burr are on the brink of the actual Revolution. The inauguration is difficult to observe, as Jefferson gave his address in a voice so low that Burr and Marshall could hardly hear, much less the assembled Congress. Both are sworn into office and promise to uphold the Constitution of the United States.

Charlie receives a note from Matt Davis, summoning Charlie to the City Hotel, where he proceeds to tell Charlie that Burr and van Buren had had a private meeting the day before in a room at the hotel. Charlie affects disinterest and asks Davis about Burr's life with Jefferson immediately after the inauguration. Davis tells Charlie that Jefferson broke his word to support Burr's people with any appointments to office. When asked why, Davis replies because Burr got an equal number of votes and then continued to keep his word, Jefferson felt threatened. Jefferson had also determined to keep Virginia in the presidency by supporting and controlling the next two presidents. Davis then introduces Charlie to Reginald Gower, a publisher who offers Charlie a thousand dollars



for a spurious pamphlet on Burr to be printed before October. With half of the promised money as a retainer in his pocket, Charlie goes to see Mrs. Townsend and Helen. From Mrs. Townsend he obtains a clue about Columbus Burr and from Helen he obtains an agreement about moving out of Mrs. Townsend's house. Charlie does not tell Helen about the money.

Charlie seeks out silversmith Aaron Columbus Burr, presenting himself as a customer of Mrs. Townsend to allay his concerns, and as a man about to be married looking for silver gifts. Columbus Burr is delighted to talk to Charlie for hours. Charlie is able to glean that Aaron Burr and van Buren had taken a boat to Albany in 1828, where Burr has van Buren act as his junior associate in a case. On the ride back, Columbus reports that Burr and van Buren talk of politics, and Burr gives van Buren advice on how to achieve the office of Secretary of State.

Leggett is pleased with Charlie's progress, though suspicious of Matt Davis being involved in the same endeavor. Giving Charlie some anonymous pamphlets to study, Leggett shows Charlie the ropes of anonymous slander and libel. At Charlie's protest that it is hard to besmirch the name of a man he admires, Leggett merely states that he cannot hurt the Colonel, that Burr is accustomed to slander.

1834, Chapter Twenty - Twenty-four Analysis

The reader has to wonder what the direction of the country might have been had Burr won the election rather than Jefferson. Burr, while painted a devil, seems to have the needs of the common man at heart, while Jefferson has one goal and one goal only—to be the most powerful man in the world. The birth of a new government really is in the hands of a very few men, many of them relatives of one another, either by blood or marriage. Jefferson's cousin, John Marshall, is to play a very important role in Jefferson's promise to uphold the Constitution of the U.S. Jefferson's sworn promise to uphold the Constitution is to figure very heavily into Burr's future.

Matt Davis is greatly attached to idea of printing a pamphlet denouncing van Buren. He is very much behind Henry Clay for president. Charlie learns that Jefferson was not an honorable man; whereas, Burr had behaved admirably. It makes little sense that men who lie and cheat to get into office are seen as great men while those who behave honorably are painted as the devil's companion. Charlie is highly motivated to find a direct connection between Burr and van Buren; money always talks. he meets with Burr's son, Columbus Burr, but finds only more circumstantial evidence. Perhaps it is lucky for Burr that Charlie has studied enough law to know what constitutes proof. It is ironic that Charlie should meet a half brother in order to find evidence that van Buren is Burr's son, making van Buren another half brother to Charlie, if the allegation proves true. Charlie's resistance to Leggett shows that the boy is developing some backbone. Charlie finds himself liking Leggett less and less, while his admiration for Burr continues to increase.



1834, Chapter Twenty-five - Twenty-six

1834, Chapter Twenty-five - Twenty-six Summary

Charlie's subterfuge with his research on the Colonel continues and all that Burr will tell him about the meeting with van Buren is that the man needed legal advice. Charlie is torn between violating the trust of his mentor and the wealth he will acquire with the writing of the pamphlet. Charlie's personal life has improved. Helen agrees to live with him by telling Mrs. Townsend she is pregnant; Mrs. Townsend is willing to take her back when she is "restored."

Memoirs of Aaron Burr-Thirteen

Within six months of taking office, Jefferson renews his alliance with the powerful Clinton family of New York. The similarity in their political style is that they both take a ruthless approach to a goal. Burr sees that Jefferson is working to remove Burr from politics. Even with this treatment, Burr remains loyal to Jefferson and refuses to gossip about him, especially to Hamilton. Burr finally recognizes that Hamilton is not merely a rival, but an unfriendly, even dangerous rival. This does not stop Burr from gathering information from Hamilton regarding how Washington had distrusted Jefferson to the extent that Washington desired to be rid of him. Their discussion explores the various intricacies of politics showing Burr's actions to be perceived as either pro-Federalist or pro-Republican, depending on how a bill is worded. Burr's perspective is somewhat different; he is a man who votes and works according to his conscience. Burr loses the support of the Federalists in Congress who are sympathetic to him. Burr's genius and his downfall is his ability to clearly see both sides of a matter rather than a single perspective. Burr believes he will make a successful bid for governor of New York.

Charlie receives Leggett in his room at the boarding house. He now has Helen living with him and is experiencing some dismay that she refuses to do any sort of housework. Leggett believes that they have enough information to prepare the anonymous pamphlet against van Buren. The two conspire to add additional lies about van Buren—saying that he has an Indian lover. Charlie is having some doubts and considers leaving the country with Helen.

1834, Chapter Twenty-five - Twenty-six Analysis

It is imperative for the reader to understand that the novel is written from Burr's perspective, and must, therefore, be sympathetic to him as a character. What must surprise the reader is Burr's seeming naiveté in continuing to believe the words of political heavyweights such as Hamilton and Jefferson. Despite being betrayed repeatedly, Burr still believes in the process of the government that has been established by the Constitution will govern the actions of all. Burr's idealistic position is a good one; the average person must have trust in the due process of law. What is



disturbing is how easily men such as Hamilton and Jefferson can recreate the law, bending it to suit their needs.

Vidal's scene where Charlie is living with his prostitute, made possible by him writing a pamphlet which betrays his benefactor is the height of irony. Charlie's desire has been to publish and acquire Helen for himself rather than sharing her with multiple other men at Mrs. Townsend's house. Both dreams are coming true by acceding to Leggett's demands. The reader should try to draw a comparison between Charlie and some of the famous men in Burr's memoirs. Which of them have been willing to compromise their values in order to attain something they desire?



1834, Chapter Twenty-seven

1834, Chapter Twenty-seven Summary

Memoirs of Aaron Burr - Fourteen

By the end of 1803, Burr sees that Jefferson is determined to boot him out of political life. Having eliminated taxes, Jefferson's re-election is certain. Burr meets with Jefferson in January 1804, to discuss his future. While Jefferson denies he has made other plans for vice president, he does not have any alternatives for Burr either. Burr reminds Jefferson of his role in securing Jefferson the presidency and now asks his first personal favor. Jefferson vacillates stating that positions have been filled, and there really is nothing he can offer Burr. Burr's final threat is to go back to New York and offer himself as a Republican candidate for governor.

1834, Chapter Twenty-seven Analysis

There is a saying that total power leads to total corruption. Jefferson, once in office, refuses to honor any promises he made to Burr and at this time, with his re-election secure, he has no need of Burr and so refuses to appoint him to any position. This leaves Burr with little choice but to continue breaking his own trail.



1834, Chapter Twenty-eight - Thirty-one

1834, Chapter Twenty-eight - Thirty-one Summary

Memoirs of Aaron Burr - Fifteen

Jefferson's understanding of the Constitution is unique. Jefferson is a strong believer in States' rights, and if a state disagrees with the federal government, the state has the right to nullify that federal law or secede if nullification does not work. Jefferson's deal with France that doubled the American territory with the Louisiana Purchase completely violates the intent of the Constitution. One senator feels that if the President can buy a state, there is nothing to stop him from selling a state. The rivalry between Burr and Hamilton reaches a point of no return. Throughout their fifteen-year rivalry, Burr has allowed Hamilton to write or say anything Hamilton wished about Burr, and Burr made no response. Finally Hamilton crosses the line, and Burr, incensed, demands an answer. Hamilton dithers for a couple days, then sends a response that dilutes anything he may have said to be within the realm of political competition. At that time, Burr discovers exactly what Hamilton said of him and determines his only recourse is a duel. The famous duel between Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton is scheduled to happen in two weeks, on July 11, 1804.

Burr and Charlie take a break from the dictation of Burr's memoirs to go to the location of the famous duel. Burr recalls how he had put his affairs in order; six boxes of his notes on his life should anyone wish to write a biography (now at the bottom of the sea). Burr confides to Charlie that he knew he would win the duel. Burr re-enacts the duel down to the whispers used to prevent detection as dueling was illegal at that time. Hamilton is given every opportunity, and he chooses the poorer position with the sun in his eyes. Hamilton fires first and hits a branch over Burr's head. Burr's bullet pierces Hamilton's liver and spine. In his vision of the past, Burr speaks to Charlie as Hamilton, explaining that Burr did not go to Hamilton's aid because he could see that Hamilton finally realized all the evil he had done to Burr, and that is why Burr could do nothing but what he did; aim and kill. Hamilton, however, died victorious; prior to the duel he had written a letter stating that he would fire second (a lie) or not at all (another lie) because morally he disapproved of dueling (a third lie). His final lie was to the bishop before he died that he met Burr for the duel with no intent to do Burr harm.

Charlie meets Sam Swartwout to ask the all powerful question that motivated Burr to take such drastic action. He really needs to know what caused Burr to break his life-long habit of ignoring all slanderous and libelous rumors and take offense so intensely as to ask for a duel in the name of honor. "Why, he said that Aaron Burr was the lover of his own daughter, Theodosia." Page 271, 1834 Chapter 30.

Burr has had a second stroke, only this time it leaves him paralyzed below the waist. He orders Charlie and Mr. Craft are not to tell his wife. Furthermore, he intends life to go on



as usual with any questions regarding his condition to be attributed to an old war wound that is acting up.

1834, Chapter Twenty-eight - Thirty-one Analysis

The reader is not told exactly what Hamilton said of Burr but only the fact that Burr's fifteen years in office have netted him hundreds of slanderous and libelous slurs he has chosen not to answer. Hamilton's latest has to be particularly heinous. Vidal uses an interesting literary technique in chapter Twenty-nine of slipping through Burr's memory of the past, the present of his narrative and Charlie's response to both. Several times Charlie believes that Burr actually thinks him to be one of the participants of that day thirty years ago. It heightens the drama of an already dramatic situation. Hamilton's character follows him even to death; the truth and what the public believed is quite disparate.

For a man such as Burr to break his habitual response to the point of dueling with and killing a man, there had to have been a powerful motivation. What Sam tells Charlie shocks the reader. However, Charlie half wonders if it might be true. This is a perfect example of how a lifetime of slanderous stories creates a false reality in the minds of the people, Charlie included. With this second stroke, Burr has no wish to notify his wife. His marriage is truly over, as he had his stroke while visiting Jane McManus. Time is growing short for everyone; for Charlie to get his pamphlet written, for Burr to get his biography dictated, and for Leggett, who is also dying.



1834, Chapter Thirty-two

1834, Chapter Thirty-two Summary

After the duel, Burr's career in eastern politics is over and his old friend and military companion, Brigadier-General James Wilkinson talks to Burr regarding a conquest of the west. In 1787, Wilkinson takes a secret oath swearing his loyalty to Spain, a common enough step for American merchants in Louisiana. Jamie has ideas of taking the western states, combining them with Louisiana, and creating an independent state or territory; later this is called the Spanish Conspiracy. At the time they speak, Burr finds Wilkinson's idea intriguing and yet cannot understand why the people of New Orleans wish to break with the administration. Burr reveals that he has heard bits and pieces of this plan since 1794, from Jamie, written to him in code, at Jamie's insistence. Burr also recalls the caution with which Wilkinson was assigned because of his relationship to the Dons of Spain. Burr then realizes that Hamilton had been as eager as anyone to conquer Mexico, including himself. Wilkinson appeals to Burr to be the leader of the Mexican conquest. Burr believes that even Thomas Jefferson will be interested in liberating Mexico, but cautions Colonel Williamson that unless Spain is at war with the U.S., there can be no attack on Mexico. His answer is to have Burr talk to Anthony Merry, the British Minister to the U.S., who asks Burr directly to take the lead in "liberating" the colonial people from Spain's abuse of power. Burr agrees that with the help of the British navy, Mexico would be free of both Spanish and American rule. He also tells Merry that he does believe that the western states will be a separate nation, that if they choose, they have the right to secede from the Union. Burr also states that Jefferson shares this belief. Burr does, however, refrain from committing himself to breaking up the union.

1834, Chapter Thirty-two Analysis

This is the beginning of the next phase of Burr's life where he is talked into heading a planned invasion into Mexico. This makes him a traitor to the U.S. in the eyes of Thomas Jefferson. Because Burr has a certain goal in mind, he allows his co-conspirators to believe what they wish in order to attain their assistance. This is another episode in Burr's life where he fails to make full use of his cerebral powers before joining Wilkinson in his plot.



1834, Chapter Thirty-three - Thirty-four

1834, Chapter Thirty-three - Thirty-four Summary

Charlie notes that recording Burr's memoirs is more difficult than before as the Colonel has lost some of his abilities and easily loses his train of thought on some days. Then the next day he is as sharp as ever. Burr explains that Jefferson's version of the events was that Burr had presented himself to Merry as a British agent with division of the union on his mind. He further expounds that Merry wanted Burr to agree to his plan so much that he convinced himself that Burr had agreed. Burr tells Charlie that all he wanted from Britain was a British fleet and money.

Memoirs of Aaron Burr - Seventeen

Burr prefaces this memoir as the great American tragedy - The Treason of Aaron Burr. In August of 1804, Burr goes on an extended expedition, traveling to St. Augustine, Florida and finally back up to Washington City, where he dines with Jefferson. In their discussion of the Constitution, Burr tells Jefferson he feels the greatest weakness of that document to be that the states have the right to nullify federal law or to secede. Jefferson argues that even if they choose to secede, they would still be American "cousins" if not brothers. Burr personally feels the second flaw of the Constitution is the power given to the President, but knowing that will further alienate him from Jefferson, he focuses on the power of the judiciary instead, on which subject Jefferson agrees. While Jefferson wishes to move and remove justices at will, Burr actually believes that a judiciary system independent of the other two branches of government is the better choice.

Burr gives the appearance of going along with Jefferson in the trial of the Supreme Court Justice, Samuel Chase, who had the audacity to believe that there are limitations on legislative powers, specifically presidential powers. Jefferson cannot tolerate this. In return for his accord, Burr asks for government appointments for three men: his brother-in-law, James Brown to be named Secretary of the Louisiana Territory, his stepson J. B. Prevost to be named judge of Superior Court in New Orleans, and Jamie Wilkinson as governor of the Louisiana Territory. All his requested appointments are filled prior to the trial. Because there is no real case against Judge Chase, he is acquitted. On that note, Burr takes leave of the Senate and his political life. He has other plans for his life now.

1834, Chapter Thirty-three - Thirty-four Analysis

In Vidal's unique presentation of the novel, he intersperses chapters of memoir and history with more current events at the end of Burr's life. In this way, the reader sees history as it unfolds, then later Burr gives further perspective into the earlier history with the benefit of hindsight. Despite Burr's request for three appointments, the reader is compelled to feel that his dealings are still legitimate, fair and honorable. It does raise



the question of his motives, however, that all of the appointments are in the west, specifically in Louisiana. Because Burr is a believable and credible character, the reader is compelled to believe that he has the best of motives in these requests, but it does put the reader on the alert.



1834, Chapter Thirty-five - Thirty-six

1834, Chapter Thirty-five - Thirty-six Summary

Charlie and Davis continue their discussion of Burr's memoirs and the pamphlet Charlie is writing. Davis is oblique when Charlie asks a direct question. He is, after all, a rival. Spring 1805, finds Jefferson and the people of the Creole south wanting war with Spain in order to acquire the Floridas (as it was called then). Burr begins the adventure of his life, pulling together leaders such as Jamie Wilkinson, John Smith, Jonathan Dayton and future president General Andrew Jackson, all of whom believe that a war with Spain is necessary to liberate Louisiana and Mexico from Spanish domination and possibly have Burr become president of the western states.

All the men give Burr the support and information he needs to go forward with their plans. Wilkinson's plan is to get Spain to believe that the old Spanish Conspiracy has been revived. What Burr is not aware of is that by allowing Jamie Wilkinson to direct Burr, he is falling into Jefferson's trap; that Burr is trying to divide the nation. In order to keep Britain involved, Burr does tell Merry what he wants to hear, that the westerners are anxious to set themselves apart from the east. Burr meets with Jefferson and tells him with as much accuracy and detail as possible what has been going on in the west, as he feels Jefferson needs to know. As President he can do more with the information than Burr can. Burr actually asks Jefferson for permission to raise an army with Wilkinson to go out and liberate Mexico. Jefferson says that his hands are tied unless there is a war with Spain; he also tells Burr that he is considering a deal with Bonaparte to buy the Floridas for two million dollars, much less than a war will cost. Jefferson's advice to Burr: "Be quick, be successful, and do not implicate the government." Page 319, 1834 Chapter 36. Burr is willing now to abandon all thoughts of Mexico. He appeals to Jefferson for an appointment and is turned down, coldly and completely. For Burr to remind Jefferson that Jefferson's presidency was attained by Burr's efforts gives Jefferson all the fire he needs to betray Burr with finality. Jefferson is derisive that Burr kept his word at the time of that election and indicates that it does not matter how he became President. He is President.

1834, Chapter Thirty-five - Thirty-six Analysis

Charlie's intention to go forward with the memoirs and the pamphlet are as determined as ever. He still intends to leave the U.S., giving the reader the impression he is ashamed of some of his work, likely the pamphlet. Charlie also foreshadows his doubts about his relationship with Helen. Burr has conducted himself as an honorable man throughout his entire political career. He has suffered from time to time for it. His worst suffering is at the hands of the very man he helped to win the presidency. Burr does have a great interest in expanding out west, but his first loyalty is to Jefferson to whom he tells everything. Rather than being grateful, Jefferson turns on Burr with a

vengeance. Jefferson's later denials of knowing of Burr's plans with regard to the west and Spain prove him to be as deceptive a politician as was in office at that time.



1835, Chapter One

1835, Chapter One Summary

Charlie is introducing Helen as his wife whenever they go out, which is rare. Even though Charlie knows he will be ruined if anyone of import discovers Helen's occupation, he feels he has achieved a goal, and he enjoys the danger. On a visit to the Shakespeare Tavern, Charlie is alone and is greeted with great enthusiasm by the top writers and actors of the city. He cannot believe the acclaim he receives for his Old Patroon piece on tasting a love apple. Sam Swartwout is there and regales Charlie with his opinion that Texas is where things are happening now. The attorney for Sam's Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company, by the name of Houston, a protégé of Jackson, is in Texas plotting to liberate Texas from Mexico. Charlie now understands why Colonel Burr needed the money from his marriage to the wealthy Madame Jumel; Burr had information about Texas from President Jackson that no one else had. The idea is to allow Texas to claim its independence from Mexico and allow Texas to then claim its western boundary that goes all the way to the Pacific, claiming then the Californias (as that area was called then) and the fishing waters and ports off the Pacific coast. Then the republic of Texas will be allowed to join the United States, adding more territory than was obtained in the Louisiana Purchase. Then Sam tells Charlie to sell his book to a publisher he knows rather than publishing anything harmful to the Colonel. Helen now really is pregnant.

1835, Chapter One Analysis

Charlie, while not a politician, is as heavily embroiled in stories and politics as Aaron Burr ever was. He enjoys the masquerade of introducing a prostitute as his wife. He is passionately interested in writing the truth of Burr's life, but the subterfuge is threatening to drown him. Sam Houston is setting out to accomplish what Burr wanted to do thirty years before.



1835, Chapter Two

1835, Chapter Two Summary

Memoirs of Aaron Burr - Nineteen

First week of August in 1806, Burr sets out for the west, his future. Wilkinson's promise to start a war with Spain as soon as Burr sent word is why Burr's letter was in evidence at his trial. Wilkinson tries to erase the sentence that proves Wilkinson's complicity, but it is still legible. This helps Burr's case. Wilkinson's orders from both Burr and Jefferson are exactly the same, to create a commotion with the Spanish on the Sabine River. This was a ready-made situation for Wilkinson because in February of 1806, the Spanish had crossed the Sabine and occupied two American outposts. Wilkinson was to have removed them on orders of the Secretary of War, but he did not. Not realizing how badly events are unraveling, Burr makes the mistake of speaking ill of Jefferson and the administration to Colonel George Morgan, who reports to the President that Burr intends to drown Jefferson.

Back at Blennerhassett's island, Burr has established a workshop of activity making cornmeal and assimilating barrels of provisions. At the end of September, Wilkinson finally sends word to the Spanish to remove themselves from the American posts, and the Spanish obey without a murmur. At the end of October, Wilkinson sends Jefferson a letter detailing Burr's western plot to seize New Orleans. Jefferson notifies all western governors to be on guard for the traitorous Burr, who has yet to commit treason. Jeffersonian logic is at work. By the end of the year, the entire plan is in shambles, and even General Jackson is afraid of the political repercussions from associating his name with Burr. Burr tells Jackson that Jefferson knows all. Then Jackson asks Burr if he knows that Wilkinson is a Spanish spy and has been for fifteen years. The U.S. Military has been in the hands of a Spanish spy. This explains Spain vacating the American posts so easily.

1835, Chapter Two Analysis

Initially Burr feels he is in a really good position, that he has Jefferson's blessing to invade Mexico, and he has Wilkinson's word that he will initiate the war with Spain so that Burr's invasion is justified. By now, Burr really should know better. Jefferson has done nothing but betray Burr on all fronts, and the reader has to wonder why Burr believes Jefferson to be honorable in this situation. The person who truly surprises Burr is Wilkinson. For the head of the American military to have been a Spanish spy and in Spanish employ for over a dozen years is shocking. For Burr to be betrayed by a spy should have put him in good graces with the administration. Sadly, Jefferson's administration will tolerate no black eyes, and so it is Burr's fault that he does not make that discovery, even though Jefferson has been apprised of Wilkinson's identification as a spy for six months.



1835, Chapter Three - Four

1835, Chapter Three - Four Summary

Mr. Leggett is home and very ill. Charlie is in conference with Mr. Bryant as standing editor, who has agreed to purchase Charlie's unsolved murder case on Elma Sands, unashamedly taken from Colonel Burr's memoirs. Mr. Bryant is aware of Charlie's work on the pamphlet and warns him that it could harm many people. Charlie tells Mr. Bryant he is to be married and that he will be giving up the five-thousand dollars he needs to set up house with his bride if he does not publish. Mr. Bryant is open to the possibility of raising the money to keep Charlie from publishing. Charlie goes to see Leggett on his sick bed and is told the same thing as Mr. Bryant. He is not to publish the pamphlet and in return he will receive an official appointment, perhaps a consulship.

1835, Chapter Three - Four Analysis

Charlie is now gifted at deception. His desire to be free of all the politics and subterfuge prompts him to claim that he is giving up five times what he was actually offered for the pamphlet. While Charlie professes to hate politics, he has become an expert at the very same game. Charlie feels used by both Mr. Bryant and Mr. Leggett but still listens to them. He has no reason yet not to believe them.



1835, Chapter Five

1835, Chapter Five Summary

Memoirs of Aaron Burr - Twenty

Burr surrenders to the governor of the Mississippi Territory January 17, 1807 knowing his life expectancy would be short indeed in Wilkinson's hands. Burr's "army" consists of fewer than fifty men with only hunting rifles, hardly the warmonger Jefferson had warned was coming. Cleared of charges at his first trial, Burr goes into hiding in the forests of Mississippi to avoid being killed by Wilkinson's men. He is captured on February 19, 1807, and taken to Fort Stoddert. Most of Burr's guards see him as a hero; they hate the Spanish Dons and hate Wilkinson even more for being a spy. Burr is very well treated while in custody. Richmond, Virginia is where Burr is tried for treason. Jefferson never was a Constitutional scholar, and he repeatedly sets aside the law of the land to ensure Burr's conviction. Luther Martin, the best trial attorney of the time, serves as Burr's defense council and presents the case to the Supreme Court. Chief Justice John Marshall finds no act of treason to have occurred. Before the trial, Jefferson takes the role of prosecutor working in vain to find proof of Burr's separatist intentions. Burr uses the precedent that three times he has been tried for treason and three times acquitted. At the trial, Burr's defense petitions the president for documents vital to Burr's defense. This has never been done before, and the prosecution is shocked at Burr's audacity. Luther Martin's defense of Burr rivals that of the greatest actor of all time. As a true orator, he is able to hold the jury and courtroom entranced. A great furor erupts over whether a president can be called into court. John Marshall delineates the difference between a king and a president and determines that a president can be called into court. Burr's case brings to the public's attention the issue between the power of the President versus the power of the Supreme Court. Jamie Wilkinson's evidence nearly tears the case apart, and the jury foreman asks that the Chief Justice indict Wilkinson for treason. With a vote of nine to seven, Wilkinson narrowly escapes being indicted for treason himself. On June 24, Burr is indicted for the misdemeanor of aggression toward a Spanish territory and for treason against the United States.

1835, Chapter Five Analysis

This portion of Aaron Burr's trial is a glorious example of testing the Constitution and determining its mettle. The Chief Justice presiding over the trial is none other than Thomas Jefferson's cousin, John Marshall, who swore Burr and Jefferson into office five years earlier. The jury foreman is John Randolph, another cousin of Jefferson. Fortunately for Burr, the three men are not close despite being related. John Marshall remembers Jefferson's attempt to indict Chief Justice Chase for believing that the powers of the executive branch are limited. Jefferson discovers during Burr's trial that others on the Supreme Court believe the same way as Chase.



1835, Chapter Six - Seven

1835, Chapter Six - Seven Summary

Charlie and Sam discuss Burr's intention to separate the western states from the union and Sam enlightens Charlie. Not only did Burr discuss it, but everyone did, including John Marshall and John Randolph. Sam introduces Charlie to the publisher, who is willing to pay Charlie fifty-four hundred dollars for his work on the biography on Aaron Burr and have his author, none other than Davy Crockett, publish it.

Memoirs of Aaron Burr - Twenty-one

The Constitution states very clearly that in order to be convicted of treason, two individuals must bear witness to the traitor. Jefferson's haste to implicate Burr had him date Burr's treasonous act to be done in December of 1806, on Blennerhasset's Island. This is impossible to obtain witnesses as Burr is not on the island in December. All the prosecution can do is to describe some of the activity on the island. They then try for a "constructive treason" case, which is completely unconstitutional. The chapter then reviews the different individuals brought to testify against Burr, some of whom perjured themselves. The questions regarding the Constitutional definitions and the constitutionality of specific points of law are discussed in great detail. Burr is neither found guilty, nor is he acquitted. He is, however, a free man.

1835, Chapter Six - Seven Analysis

This helps Charlie to understand that Burr's ideas were really the thoughts of the highbrow minds of the day. All of history is comprised of conquering and obtaining new lands. Charlie is now rich. He and Helen can live abroad. He has not betrayed Burr; Crockett's storytelling technique is so much a tall tale that Charlie is sure no one will believe the story. All Chapter Seven is a beautiful portrait of the wording of the Constitution, a document only twenty years old at that time, and how it is tested and challenged by one of the most interesting and unusual cases the young country has seen. The personal points each wishes to make must first be proven to be constitutionally sound, before they can be applied to the case. Burr has every faith in the law. It is man that concerns him.



1835, Chapter Eight - Ten

1835, Chapter Eight - Ten Summary

Burr is never tried for his misdemeanor of wanting to invade Mexico. He is a free, but shadowed man. In June, 1808 Burr disguises himself as Mr. H. E. Edwards and sails for Europe, where he lives for four years, uncomfortable, poor and watched by the various foreign governments. June 1, 1835, Martin van Buren and "Tecumseh" Johnson are nominated for president and vice president by the Democratic convention.

Charlie and Helen are visited by George Fuller, a professor of phrenology; a study of bumps on the skull. A very long discussion follows as to which bumps represent what human characteristic. Then Helen screams, she has miscarried the baby. After Helen's miscarriage her spirits are very low. Leggett assures Charlie of van Buren's appreciation for his restraint on publishing the pamphlet. Matt Davis and his publisher, Reginald Gower, are appropriately suspicious of Charlie, but Charlie does not care. He merely states he has no wish to harm the Colonel.

1835, Chapter Eight - Ten Analysis

Burr's story is nearly over and his body is weary. For Burr to live through the excitement of life was draining, to relive it for Charlie's biography is exhausting. Charlie faces the loss of his goal; van Buren is nominated. He also faces the loss of his child and perhaps his dream. Charlie's effort to decide an election has left the political machinations unchanged but did put money in his pocket. It is safe to say that Charlie has learned a lesson in economics.



1835, Chapter Eleven - Fifteen

1835, Chapter Eleven - Fifteen Summary

July through December 1835

Helen leaves Charlie and goes back to Mrs. Townsend, who refuses to let Charlie see her. She does tell Charlie that Helen had been coming to see her once a week after she had moved in with Charlie. Mrs. Townsend is delighted to tell Charlie that Helen was very unhappy living with him. Charlie turns back to Leggett and covering political news. In December, a great fire burns seven-hundred buildings in the city, and all the insurance companies are now bankrupt. Charlie compares Leggett to Burr in that Burr demonstrated his nobility in the way he has always endured misfortune, and Leggett in that he is striking out against the rulers and leaders of the country. Charlie brings the two men together, where they talk as equals.

1835, Chapter Eleven - Fifteen Analysis

Charlie is bereft and wretched. He has spent the past four years in the presence of two passionate men and their passion has sustained them throughout their very long lives. Charlie discovers that he has no passion; and he is very young.



1836, Chapter One - Four

1836, Chapter One - Four Summary

April 11, 1836, Sunday

Charlie is shocked out of bed one morning when two policemen come to arrest him for the murder of Helen Jewett. He is named by Mrs. Townsend, even though she knows she misidentified him. She admits her mistake and Charlie is released. The real murderer is Richard Robinson, the boy Helen and Charlie had seen in an intimate situation with another man the night Charlie took Helen out of Mrs. Townsend's house. Charlie tries to have Mr. Bryant print an account of his false arrest, and he demurs. Charlie heeds his wisdom. Aaron Burr is required to move to Staten Island as the house in which he was boarding is to be torn down. He heads to Staten Island, and on the journey there Charlie cannot believe that Burr will ever again jump up, ready for his next adventure.

1836, Chapter One - Four Analysis

Charlie is discovering that his life really is just beginning, that living means to experience feeling and sometimes that feeling is pain. Conversely, Burr is at the end of his life and he knows it. He really has no wish to continue on.



1836, Chapter Five - Eleven

1836, Chapter Five - Eleven Summary

The trial of Richard Robinson lasts only three days and like the trial of Elma Sands, the accused is found not guilty because he was led astray by a fallen woman. Charlie is beside himself with frustrated, impotent anger. Charlie then receives an invitation to dinner with the President at the White House, an invitation he accepts with alacrity. Burr continues to decline, but is still interested enough in life to write a note of condolence to Dolley Madison, whose husband, James Madison, just died. He also gives Charlie advice on how to comport himself at the White House. Face to face with van Buren, Charlie can see the resemblance to Burr. He also notes that he and the vice president are exactly the same height. Van Buren then asks after the Colonel and says that he will go visit him, which shocks Charlie. No man with political aspirations would willingly associate himself with Burr. Van Buren tells Charlie that Burr is most fond of Charlie. They enjoy a sumptuous dinner and conversation. There is brief talk of Colonel Davy Crockett's book, but Crockett's death has overshadowed much of what was in the book Charlie spent so long researching.

On September 14, 1836 Aaron Burr dies at two in the afternoon. As a final ironic touch, his divorce decree from Eliza Bowen, aka Madame Jumel, arrives one hour after his death.

1836, Chapter Five - Eleven Analysis

For Charlie, his life is changing. With Helen's death he felt bereft and with no wish to go on. But all that had been set in place with Burr's assistance begins to take Charlie to new places. He dines with President Andrew Jackson and vice president Marty van Buren. He is assured of an appointment by Leggett, who claims to know the character of the vice president.

Burr's life is over.

Charlie's is just beginning



1840

1840 Summary

Still wishing he could write like Washington Irving, Charlie is now the American consul at Amalfi on the coast of Italy and is stunned when Sam Swartwout arrives to see him early in December 1840. The celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception is about to begin, and Charlie must put in an appearance. Initially he wonders if he needs to contact the police but then realizes that Sam simply wishes to see him and intends him absolutely no harm. They talk casually, discussing Charlie's vice-consul position at Antwerp, Belgium, of the book Charlie wrote about the lowlands while at Antwerp before Sam finally comes to the point of his visit. In 1837, he had invested everything he had in the coal mines in England, and the depression wiped him out. In 1839, he had disappeared from his position as the collector of the Port of New York, and it was discovered that one and one quarter million dollars disappeared with him. Because of his crime, the Whig candidate, William Henry Harrison defeated President Van Buren in the election the previous month, and as a result, Charlie will be losing his job as consul at Amalfi. Charlie is not feeling very sympathetically toward Sam over the loss of his consulship. Charlie's wife, Carolina, is a native Italian and they are expecting their first child in June. Discussion then turns to William Leggett, who had died, but the letter Charlie got had been water-logged and the details dissolved in the ink. Sam acknowledges that Van Buren had been kind to Leggett even though Leggett had, at one point, been very much against his presidential candidacy. Finally, Swartwout asks about Charlie's book about Colonel Burr, and Charlie stalls indicating that he is waiting for Mr. Davis to publish his book first. With the discussion turned toward Burr, Sam persists with the topic, revealing his awareness that Burr had been very fond of Charlie, and had written to Martin van Buren about Charlie from Staten Island where Burr lay dying. Sam reveals that Burr asked van Buren to give Charlie the consulship at Amalfi because van Buren is Charlie's big brother. Charlie is shocked. Sam is surprised. He thought Charlie knew that Aaron Burr was his father. All Charlie can think about during the celebration of the fiesta are all the words that lay unsaid between him and his father; Burr's reason tact, Charlie's reason ignorance.

1840 Analysis

The chapter of the year 1840, ties up all the loose ends from the story. The position that Charlie holds in Amalfi is one of dignity, and Sam reveals that he got it because of President van Buren and because he is van Buren's little brother. Being van Buren's little brother makes Charlie Aaron Burr's son, something Charlie never discovered while Aaron Burr was alive. This causes the reader to consider going back through the book to see if there are any clues to this information scattered throughout the book. Sam's motivation to come and see Charlie is slightly unbelievable, but his visit is necessary as he has the information about Charlie's parentage that must be revealed, shocking the reader, a very nice twist on Vidal's part.



Characters

Charlie Schuyler

The structure of Vidal's book, *Burr: A Novel* is unique. The book has a grand total of seventy-five chapters, and is comprised of five parts, designated by a year of Aaron Burr's life. Each part ranges from six pages for the part recording the year 1840, to the part covering the year 1835, comprised of 36 chapters and a grand total of two hundred seventeen pages. The story-telling style incorporates Charlie's observations, what he writes for "The Evening Post," of his interactions with Burr and other characters when the story is being told from Charlie's point of view. During the memoir sections, the first person perspective is always that of Aaron Burr as a young man. His recollections as an older man, looking back on his life are told to Charlie as the narrator, back in his first person perspective position.

The first part begins in 1833, and Burr is seventy-seven years old. This part of the story is told from the perspective of the narrator, Charlie Schuyler, Burr's assistant. Charlie is an avid fan of Washington Irving's writing style, and his entire life is devoted to recording as much as he can in as much detail as possible, mimicking Irving's style but always feeling that he has fallen short. Vidal uses Charlie as Burr's biographer, and the book moves from the time period at the end of Burr's long life back to the days of the beginning of the Revolutionary War in 1775. The book bounces back and forth with changes in year occurring in the same chapter, with short headings indicating that the memoir is now the article of record. The book ends with the year 1840, when Aaron Burr is dead, and Charlie discovers that he is the younger brother of Martin van Buren, and the son of Aaron Burr.

Several stories are told in the book. One is the story of the life of Charlie Schuyler, another the story of Burr's life as seen through the eyes of others, and then Burr's life as seen through his own eyes, and lastly, it is a story of a country in its governing infancy.

Vidal uses this structure to retain the interest of the reader, to demonstrate the older Burr's understanding and perspective on his life and the varying accounts of the events that render him notorious. It is vital for the reader to experience the events as they happen, hence the use of the first person narrative of the memoir. By providing the unique perspective of the understanding of the events as they unfold, Vidal creates a very believable understanding of the years of the colorful and unique Aaron Burr as seen from the perspective at the end of his life. Charlie's unique position of being Burr's confidante allows him to put Burr's understanding of his life in light of an observer who has more facts than most. As a result, Burr's life is seen in a much more sympathetic way than that demonstrated in today's history books. The book is somewhat difficult to read, but with persistence and understanding of the style, the reader will finish feeling richly rewarded.



Aaron Burr

Colonel Aaron Burr - a seventy-seven year old man, marrying for the second time at the beginning of the book, which takes place in July 1833. Burr is a lawyer, having lived most of his life in New York State. He joined the Continental Army under George Washington in 1775, and was later commanded by Benedict Arnold. He was part of the ill-fated march on Quebec and was considered a war hero for attempting to recover the body of General Montgomery, who fell during the attack on the fort. He suffered through the long winter at Valley Forge and resigned from the military a year later. He married a widow, named Theodosia Prevost and had with her one daughter, also named Theodosia.

According to Burr's second wife, Madame Jumel, the only love of Burr's life was his daughter Theodosia, who died at sea many years before the story opens. Burr leads a legal and political life as one of the most colorful characters of the government of early America. He dueled with and killed Alexander Hamilton. He was tried for treason against the United States, testing the Constitution to its very limits within the first twenty years of the young country's life. Burr enjoys women, but more than that, he is truly passionate about teaching young people. He is said to be the father of Martin van Buren, a political figure he seems to go out of his way to assist. He also takes one Charlie Schuyler under his wing during his last years and dictates as much of his memoir of the Revolutionary War years and the early years of the government of the United States as he has experienced it. Burr is a man of the people, hated by many, loved by more.

William Leggett

William Leggett - Thirty-two years of age, seven years older than Charlie Schuyler. He once had aspirations to be an actor, but failed that endeavor, therefore became a journalist and initially wrote reviews of theater. He became famous for his writing style, and is the editor of "The Evening Post," giving Charlie Schuyler the assignment of covering everything he can about Aaron Burr, preferably anything that would discredit Martin van Buren as a presidential candidate. He is a powerful man in his own right, though slowly dying at his young age from both a bout of yellow fever contracted while in the Navy and now with consumption.

Martin van Buren

Martin van Buren - Son of Aaron Burr, eighth President of the United States, elder brother to Charlie Schuyler.



Madame Jumel

Madame Jumel - the widow of Steven Jumel, a wine merchant, and the richest woman in New York city, reputed to have had her start at a brothel in Rhode Island. Madame Jumel becomes Mrs. Aaron Burr on July 1, 1833.

Dr. Bogart

Dr. Bogart - The clergyman who accompanied Aaron Burr and Charlie Schuyler to Washington Heights to perform the marriage ceremony between Burr and Madame Jumel.

John Hancock

John Hancock - president of the Continental Congress, recommended Matthias Ogden and Aaron Burr to the Attention of General Washington.

Dolly Quincy

Dolly Quincy - future wife of John Hancock.

George Washington

George Washington - The appointed General from Virginia of the Continental Army comprised of New England men. His leadership whips the riffraff into an army, but he is reluctant to march into battle unless his men outnumber the enemy two to one. The general who rises to the top during the war and becomes the first President of the United States.

Sam Swartwout

Sam Swartwout - the collector of taxes for the New York Port. A gentleman in the book, but becomes a persona non grata after he steals one and one quarter million dollars from the port's account to cover his losses in the depression in England. He had invested heavily in the coal mines in England and lost all his money.

Matthias Ogden

Matthias Ogden - Friend of Aaron Burr, they go together to join Washington's Continental Army in 1775.



Captain Jamie Wilkinson

Captain Jamie Wilkinson - An eighteen-year-old boy, who is a captain in General Washington's Army in 1775. He and Aaron Burr become friends in the early days of the Revolutionary War. Later, it is discovered that Jamie is a paid Spanish Spy and serves as the highest officer in charge of America's military. Wilkinson's betrayal of Aaron Burr to President Thomas Jefferson results in the accusation of treason against Burr.

Mrs. Rosanna Townsend

Mrs. Rosanna Townsend - The owner of the brothel that Charlie and Mr. Leggett like to frequent. It is at her establishment that Charlie meets Helen Jewett, with whom he falls in love. Mrs. Townsend is an unusual woman who studies books such as "A Pilgrim's Progress" and other works of philosophy and theology.

Helen Jewett

Helen Jewett - The prostitute that Charlie meets at Mrs. Townsend's brothel, and he falls in love with her. She is not in love with Charlie, but does agree to leave Mrs. Townsend to live with Charlie after she discovers that she is pregnant, but once she loses the baby, she returns to Mrs. Townsend's and refuses to see Charlie again. She is murdered by Richard Robinson, one of Mrs. Townsend's clients.

Dan Morgan

Dan Morgan - from Virginia, an officer in Burr's company in 1775, a famed Indian-killer, approximately forty years old.

Benedict Arnold

Benedict Arnold - the first true hero of the Revolutionary war, previously an apothecary in New Haven. His quest to free Quebec seems reasonable initially but is doomed to failure for a variety of reasons, one of them being religion. Arnold is a brilliant military strategist; however, his genius goes unrewarded time after time and soon he becomes an easy target for the British, and he becomes a British spy.

Lieutenant-Colonel Roger Enos

Lieutenant-Colonel Roger Enos - another officer in Burr's company who lost Canada for us.



Jonathan Dayton

Jonathan Dayton - Burr's companion on the march to Canada in 1775, under Benedict Arnold's command. He becomes a speaker of the house and a New Jersey Senator.

Nelson Chase

Nelson Chase - works for Aaron Burr in his law office.

Matthew L. Davis

Matthew L. Davis - a newspaper editor and a lifelong supporter of Burr.

Martha Washington

Martha Washington - wife of George Washington, a very wealthy widow when she married George, who had no money to call his own.

General Israel Putnam

General Israel Putnam - a former tavern keeper who has a tendency to repeat himself, especially his famous line telling the men not to shoot "till you see the whites of their eyes!" at Bunker Hill.

Margaret Moncrieffe

Margaret Moncrieffe, the daughter of a major in the British army and the cousin to General Montgomery. She is a spy staying at General Putnam's house, sending pictures of flowers to her father, which are actually communications of troop movements.

Jane McManus

Jane McManus - the woman with whom Burr has an affair in Jersey City. Jane's maid was in the employ of Mr. Nelson Chase, who paid her to acquire evidence of Burr's infidelity so that Madame could initiate divorce proceedings against Burr.

Henry Clay

Henry Clay - The attorney who defends Burr against the murder charge after his ill-fated duel with Alexander Hamilton. In 1833, Clay wishes to run for president and has no wish to see Burr, or be seen with him.



Henry Knox

Henry Knox - formerly a Boston bookseller. He becomes General Washington's chief artillery officer, not due to any particular skill, but because of his fawning nature.

Elma Sands

Elma Sands - a young woman, who was killed by Levi Weeks; her name was dishonored during Hamilton's and Burr's defense case.

Levi Woods

Levi Woods - the young man who killed Elma Sands, but is successful in defending himself with the help of Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr by defaming her name.

Theodosia Burr Alston

Theodosia Burr Alston - Aaron Burr's only legitimate daughter, a remarkable girl and woman, and the only love of Aaron Burr's life.

John Adams

John Adams - The second president of the United States, from Massachusetts.

James Madison

James Madison -An acquaintance of Burr, who has trouble meeting women. Asks Burr about his obvious appeal to the opposite sex.

Mrs. Dolley Todd (aka) Dolley Madison

Mrs. Dolley Todd (aka) Dolley Madison - The daughter of Burr's landlady, who is just recently widowed, and is introduced to James Madison. Their romance blossoms.

John Marshall

John Marshall- Thomas Jefferson's cousin, appointed by John Adams to the office of Chief Justice of the United States.



Aaron Columbus Burr

Aaron Columbus Burr - Aaron Burr's illegitimate son whose mother named him for his father.

Harman Blennerhassett

Harman Blennerhassett - owner of Blennerhassett Island, and a fellow prisoner of Burr's when they are both indicted on charges of treason.

Anthony Merry

Anthony Merry - The British ambassador who has designs on Mexico and wishes to work with Burr on his plan to raid and free Mexico.



Objects/Places

Madame Jumel's Mansion

Madame Jumel's Mansion - on Washington Heights in New York City where Madame Jumel and Aaron Burr celebrate their nuptials on July 31, 1833.

Trinity Church Cemetery

Where Alexander Hamilton is buried.

Burr's Biography

To be written by Charlie Schuyler, the purpose of which is to record the facts of the Revolutionary War.

The Evening Post

The newspaper edited by William Leggett and by whom Charlie hopes to be published.

Mrs. Townsend's Home

Mrs. Townsend's home at 41 Thomas Street, a brothel where Charlie meets Helen Jewett.

Kinderhook

Where Martin van Buren was born, and where Colonel Burr used to lodge.

Texas Territory

Where Burr hoped to make a fortune purchasing land grants and then selling them to German immigrants.

Quebec Fort

Here, where the failed attempt of the Continental Army to seize the fort and annex Canada to the U.S. occurs.



Continental Army

The first U.S. Army composed of New Englanders, commanded by the Virginian, General George Washington.

Valley Forge

Valley Forge - The hillside just outside of Philadelphia where Washington's men spent a really grueling winter during 1777 - 1778. Most of the men had inadequate clothing, shelter and food.

Richmond Hill

The home Burr purchased early in his marriage as a summer home, but lost due to mismanagement of his money.

Tory

People who support Britain in the Revolutionary War

Whig

People who fight for independence in the Revolutionary War

Federalist

The people who initially supported Britain in the war, and who still believe in a strong central government, much like the British form of rule.

Anti-Federalist

Those who do not support a strong central government, but prefer a looser federal structure and more power at the level of the state.

Love Apple

Tomato, once thought to be poisonous.



Themes

Belief in Oneself is a Sure Road to Success.

Belief in one's ability to succeed is important to achieving any goal. Charlie Schuyler is a young man of twenty-five when the book opens. His most intense desire is to become a writer, and he knows that his abilities working as a law clerk are not very good. His passion lies elsewhere. He studies the works of Washington Irving; he has Leggett as a mentor, who is an excellent journalist. Charlie notices that Mrs. Townsend reads "Pilgrim's Progress" and other theological and philosophical works, which makes him think. His dedication to his goal is obvious throughout the entire book. He jumps at the opportunity to record all he can about Aaron Burr, for an unauthorized biography to be published by an unknown publisher. Even though he feels a few qualms about writing about his new mentor, his desire to be published is far greater. Even when he decides that he must provide a home and a living for Helen and their child, he does not really return to law; instead, he continues to pursue his desire to write and be published, clearly believing in his abilities. His desire to see his words in print is obvious throughout the entire book. That Charlie finally achieves his goal is revealed at the end of the book when Sam Swartwout mentions that he has seen his book published, one that Charlie had written while he was in Antwerp.

Aaron Burr is no different in his success based on his belief in himself. His situation is somewhat different in that the reader is exposed to a much greater expanse of Aaron Burr's life than that of Charlie's. A man's life is comprised of a series of both successes and failures. It is what that man decides to do after a failure that decides his ultimate success. Aaron Burr is known to be highly intelligent, a man of the people, and he desires that the government be one of the people. He shows how Thomas Jefferson had been motivated more by the desire for personal gain than for the ultimate good of the country. Despite his many setbacks, Aaron Burr feels that his life has been a success, and he is anxious to see how the country grows. Had he not had the firm belief in his abilities, Aaron Burr could have faded miserably into oblivion, but he chose the route of notoriety because he believed in himself, in his abilities and in what he believed.

Recorded History is not Always Accurate

Charlie Schuyler is to be Aaron Burr's biographer, a job he covets for his own personal reasons. Aaron Burr is making use of that desire because his desire is to have his story told in his own words about the early days of the United States, during the war for independence, otherwise known as the Revolutionary War. Charlie's desire for the biography is to become published and earn some accolades for such an accomplishment. Aaron Burr's desire for publication is that he believes that the true nature of the Revolutionary War will be obscured by romantics and idealists alike. He is



afraid that the full story of the ultimate struggle for freedom will become diluted and altered.

The stories that Charlie has heard of the war years come mostly from his editor, Mr. Leggett, and Leggett's understanding of key issues is very different from those held by Colonel Burr. Already the tall tales of General Washington and Thomas Jefferson have overshadowed Burr's own personal experience with the two men. This does lead the reader to question whether or not history changes as one's perspective of events changes.

Consider Burr's early opinion that Benedict Arnold is the first hero of the Revolutionary War. That Burr feels differently a year later in 1776, does not change his original opinion of Arnold. Benedict's final acts brand him a traitor in the eyes of Charlie's generation, and yet Burr can account for event after event where Arnold was a genius in the battlefield and was badly treated by the new government he was working so hard to establish. What is the truth?

Truth is a Matter of Opinion

This theme is similar to the previous one regarding the truth of history. The same concern can be held in a more recent historical event, even that which has happened in the same generation, year, month, week or even day. A man's perception is his reality, and Mr. Leggett believes Colonel Aaron to be a blackguard, dishonest and disreputable. Leggett also believes that Martin van Buren is Burr's son and is cast from the same mold as Aaron Burr and should never be president. Leggett's assistant editor, Mr. Davies, is actually sympathetic towards Aaron Burr and supports van Buren's candidacy for the office of president. The two men have reasons for their beliefs, but their motivation seems to be purely political; that is, they each wish that the man they back will be made the next president of the United States. Can both men be right? Can both men be wrong? In this case it is relatively easy to see that they both have good points to consider and the truth of the matter lies somewhere in-between the two extreme beliefs.

Another point to consider concerns the duel between General Alexander Hamilton and Colonel Aaron Burr, Vice President of the United States. For most of his life, Burr took the position that a political figure will be talked about, that there is a certain amount of slander and libel that will be thrown at that individual, and Burr's opinion is that it really does not matter what is said. Even lies cannot really hurt someone. Hamilton made it his life's work to cast aspersions on Burr and Burr's beliefs. Burr takes everything that Hamilton has ever said about him and returned nothing for the insults. Finally, though, Hamilton crosses the line and made a statement that Burr and his daughter were lovers. This slanderous and libelous statement hurts not only Burr, but his daughter. While Hamilton may have wondered if this might be a truth, his right to state it is in question. Charlie does wonder if there might be some truth in Hamilton's statement, which is one more demonstration that what is sometimes said to be truth can merely be opinion.



Style

Point of View

Burr: A Novel is told from the first person perspective of the narrator, Charlie, when he is present. Vidal also chooses to use first person perspective during the memoirs of Aaron Burr, where Burr is first person narrator. This use of two separate first person points of view is vital to the understanding of the theme of truth being somewhere between a belief held and a belief rejected. Burr's perspective during his memoirs is tempered by Charlie's perspective when discussing the events either with Burr himself or someone else who played a part in the events. The reader is allowed to see inside the hearts of these two characters in a very unique way, and the result is the discovery that neither narrator is totally reliable. Their views are biased by their emotions and experiences, much like a real human would be. Charlie firmly believes that Helen wishes to be his wife, and she even says the words, but she eventually runs back to Mrs. Townsend. Burr believes himself to be a strong and important cog in the wheel of the fight for independence of the young nation. Most everyone else believes him to be a traitor, deceitful, a murderer and a philanderer.

The story is told through the sometimes rambling, sometimes kinetic thoughts of Aaron Burr. Even though Charlie is the narrator, he is not the major character of the story. However, none of Burr's thoughts could come to the reader without being filtered through Charlie, either from his perspective or through his reading of Burr's memoirs. The chapters skip around through the years, sometimes in 1833 - 1836, and then jumping to the years 1775 - 1778. As Charlie is the narrator and is only twenty-five, he was not alive during the Revolutionary War, and so the memoirs of Aaron Burr of his life during that time are read in Charlie's present life, but take the reader back over fifty years in history.

Setting

The setting of *Burr: A Novel* is in the early days of independence of the United States. The story begins in Washington in 1833, where the reader is introduced to the character of Charlie Schulyer, a legal assistant and aspiring writer, who has been tasked with the job of discovering anything unsavory about Aaron Burr that he can, and take it to his editor, Marty Leggitt. Leggitt is a follower of politics and an influential man in his journalistic circles, who wishes to prevent van Buren from becoming president. He makes use of Charlie's close association with Aaron Burr to discredit van Buren and put his chosen man in office.

The story opens with the very best and very worst of the political world. The best of the political world are the men who have fought and continue to fight for a truly independent nation, establishing a form of government that will last many lifetimes. The worst of the political world is obvious in the form of Leggett, a man who chooses to support a



candidate other than the popular one and is determined to use his influence in the literary world to discredit a possibly good candidate.

The story is told during the infancy of the government of the United States, beginning in 1833 and ending in 1840. What makes the setting unusual is the use of Aaron Burr's memoirs that take the reader back to the actual time of the Revolutionary War, 1775, and follow along in Aaron Burr's footsteps as he serves under the command of Benedict Arnold and attempts to secure Canada for the United States. The reader also tags along as Burr is shown to have appeared to commit treason in his attempt to rule Texas. The story shows a feud between the President, Thomas Jefferson, and his vice president, Aaron Burr, who achieve the position based on the number of votes they receive, not as a matter of choice. Both men received an equal number of votes, and Alexander Hamilton cast his tie-breaking vote for Thomas Jefferson, giving him the presidency.

When the story is being told from the point of view of Charlie Schuyler, the setting is mostly in New York, where Charlie and Burr live during the latter years of Burr's life. When the story is being told from Burr's point of view, the setting varies from the march to Canada, to the western area (Texas, Louisiana), where his alleged plot to create a separate country takes place, to where Burr moves around the country in his efforts to raise funds, men and supplies to fight a war against Mexico, and of course, in Washington City (now known as Washington, D.C.).

The setting of the story moves around in time and around the country throughout the book, but the essential point of the story is how the country was founded by men, who being human, were therefore flawed. Every famous man in the history books has some really great attributes, and some serious flaws. Telling the story in the time and place of the events as they happen give the reader a sense of immediacy and understanding of what happens behind the scenes as a government is born.

Language and Meaning

The language and meaning of *Burr: A Novel* is rich, challenging and convoluted. When Charlie is in the presence of Aaron Burr, the reader gets the sense that Burr is a hyperactive child, even at the opening of the novel, when Burr is seventy-seven. Burr is a man of high energy, capacious intelligence and acerbic wit. There will be times when a passage must be re-read in order to understand what Burr is saying and to what he is referring, as he does not always give the reader a direct reference. The language, spoken in the vernacular of Burr, Leggett and Charlie Schuyler, create a condition of believability for the reader. Each character has a specific speaking style that makes it relatively easy to follow the convoluted story-telling style.

Burr is a well-educated man, and his conversations illustrate his vast knowledge and intelligence. He is of keen wit and makes decidedly acerbic observations of the famous men of his day, observations that will never be found in a history book. This personalizes the character of Burr completely. Charlie is an aspiring writer and all his observations are colored by that desire as he is constantly comparing his efforts to



those of Washington Irving. Leggett is a journalist first and editor second, and he is determined to see to it that van Buren is never made president. It is at his behest that Charlie has the excuse he needs to spend time with the great man. Much of Charlie's observations are biased by Leggett's demands that he find unsavory facts about Burr.

The reader realizes that the truth of the entire story lies somewhere in the middle of all that is written. However, as with individuals in real life, each of Vidal's characters firmly believe that their position is the one of truth. Charlie is the only character who realizes the flaw of his beliefs at the very end of the book when he discovers that he is the illegitimate son of Aaron Burr.

Structure

The book has a grand total of seventy-five chapters, and is comprised of five parts, designated by a year of Aaron Burr's life. Each part ranges from six pages for the part recording the year 1840, to the part covering the year 1835, comprised of 36 chapters and a grand total of two hundred seventeen pages. The story-telling style incorporates Charlie's observations, what he writes for "The Evening Post," of his interactions with Burr and other characters when the story is being told from Charlie's point of view. During the memoir sections, the first person perspective is always that of Aaron Burr as a young man. His recollections as an older man, looking back on his life are told to Charlie as the narrator, in Charlie's first person perspective position.

The first part begins in 1833, and Burr is seventy-seven years old. This part of the story is told from the perspective of the narrator, Charlie Schuyler, Burr's assistant. Charlie is an avid fan of Washington Irving's writing style, and his entire life is devoted to recording as much as he can in as much detail as possible, mimicking Irving's style but always feeling that he has fallen short. Vidal uses Charlie as Burr's biographer, and the book moves from the time period at the end of Burr's long life back to the days of the beginning of the Revolutionary War in 1775. The book bounces back and forth with changes in year occurring in the same chapter, with short headings indicating that the memoir is now the article of record. The book ends with the year 1840; Aaron Burr is dead, and Charlie discovers that he is the younger brother of Martin van Buren, and the son of Aaron Burr.

Several stories are really told in the book. One is the story of the life of Charlie Schuyler, another is the story of Burr's life as seen through the eyes of others, and then Burr's life as seen through his own eyes, and lastly, it is a story of a country in its governing infancy.

Vidal uses this structure to retain the interest of the reader, to demonstrate the older Burr's understanding and perspective on his life and the varying accounts of the events that render him notorious. It is vital for the reader to experience the events as they happen, hence the use of the first person narrative of the memoir. By providing the unique perspective of the understanding of the events as they unfold, Vidal creates a very believable understanding of the life of the colorful and unique Aaron Burr as seen

from the perspective at the end of his life. Charlie's unique position of being Burr's confidante allows him to put Burr's understanding of his life in light of an observer who has more facts than most. As a result, Burr's life is seen in a much more sympathetic way than that demonstrated in today's history books. The book is somewhat difficult to read, but with persistence and understanding of the style, the reader will finish feeling richly rewarded.



Quotes

"He knows so much; tells so little. Well, I have made up my mind to know what he knows before the end." Page 6, 1833 Chapter 1.

"That was General Washington's office in seventeen seventy-six. He lived in this house for three months, during which he managed to lose New York City to the British. But despite his incompetence, the gods always supported him in the end. I suspect Cromwell was right: the man who does not know where he's going goes farthest. Talleyrand used to tell me that for the great man all is accident. Obviously, he was not a great man since he survived by careful planning, by never showing his true feelings. You must learn that art, Charlie." Page 14, 1833 Chapter Two.

"Positions be damned! Matty will do what he has to do to be nominated and win. He is the perfect politician. On the surface. But I tell you, beneath Matty's pinky-blond Dutch exterior, behind that seraphic smile, there lurks something very odd, very rotten, very Aaron Burrish." Page 18, 1833 Chapter Three

"I am afraid that as people grow old there is a tendency for them to believe that what the past ought to have been it was." Page 22, 1833 Chapter Four.

"We were like brothers (yes, Cain and Abel come to mind with the difference that each was part-Cain, part-Abel). At first meeting I knew Hamilton straight through. I suspect that he knew me as well, and could not endure the knowledge that of the two of us I alone had the means and talent to be what he most wanted to be, the president. He had come to hate not only my capacity but my opportunity. Yet I wonder if he knew all along that I would fail, saw the flaw in me as I saw the one in him? Speculation is idle now. Like brothers, yes; but unlike, too. He was envious. I am not. Thwarted ambition never turned me sour as it did Hamilton, who at the end could not endure the American world I was helping to make and so, quite irrationally, made me out to be that hideous reality incarnate. Curious to think that we would almost certainly have been friends had we not been two young "heroes" at the beginning of a new nation, each aware that at the summit there is place for only one. As it turned out, neither of us was to reach the highest place. I hurled Hamilton from the mountain-side, and myself fell." Page 54, 1833 Chapter Seven.

"Yet isn't it better that we make our own useful version of our history and put it away—in the attic, as it were—the sadder, less edifying details?". Page 74, 1833 Chapter Ten.

"I have often reflected how curious it was that James Wilkinson, a born politician, should rise to the very peak of the American army and I, a born soldier, to the peak of American politics. Each lived the life the other should have led." Page 87, 1833 Chapter Twelve.

"For once, Charlie, I wish that I had sired a proper son. There is a good deal to be said for filial piety, no matter how infelicitous. Naturally, I assume that any son of mine would write better than this boy who sounds like a combination of his father at his most windy,



and his grandfather Schuyler at his most confused. Well, I shall be my own son—with your help." Page 140, 1834 Chapter 10.

"You must understand that it was Jefferson's dream to annex Canada, Cuba, Mexico, and Texas. He also favoured (sic) some sort of dominion over South America, as did Hamilton, as did I." Page 183, 1834 Chapter 15.

"During the last session of the Third Congress I led the battle in the Senate against ratification of Jay's treaty with England. The treaty was clumsily drawn and to our disadvantage. It actually contained a clause forbidding us to export cotton in American ships. In effect, the treaty made us a colony again. It also revealed for the first time the deep and irreconcilable division between the Republican and the Federalist parties—and they were now actual political parties, no longer simply factions. One was pro-French; the other pro-British. One wanted a loose confederation of states; the other a strong central administration; one was made up of independent farmers in alliance with city workers; the other was devoted to trade and manufacturing. One was Jefferson; the other Hamilton." Page 193, 1834 Chapter 18.

"He probably wished you a good day, and good fortune. Matty Van has fine manners. He ought to. I took enough time with him. Though I fear not enough with you." Page 229, 1834 Chapter 21.

"As I grew older, I realized that my family admired Burr more than not and that my mother was pleased when he took a fancy to me, gave me books to read, encouraged me to attend Columbia College and take up the law. But my first glimpse of him at a table close to the pump-room fire was the devil himself, and I half-expected him to leave not by way of the door but up the chimney with the flames." Page 267, 1834 Chapter 29.

"After Hamilton's death, I remained at Richmond Hill for ten days. I confess that I was not prepared for the response to our interview. Apparently no one had ever fought a duel in the whole history of the United States until Aaron Burr invented this diabolic game in order to murder the greatest American that ever lived (after George Washington, of course). Over night the arrogant, mob-detesting Hamilton was metamorphosed into a Christ-like figure with me as the Judas—no, the Caiaphas who so villainously dispatched the godhead to its heavenly father (George Washington again) at Weehawk, our new Jerusalem's most unlikely Golgotha." Page 275, 1834 Chapter 32.

"Jackson damned Jefferson thoroughly. Then: 'Personally, I would take the chance. Either you win Mexico and Jefferson writes you a real nice letter as one president to another or you get yourself hanged by the Dons and have no more interest in letters from Washington City.'" Page 311, 1834 Chapter 36.

"Unfortunately, I was not able to be a king—though I very nearly was a president—but in my way I have been lucky for I have always been able to indulge my true passion which is to teach others, to take pleasure in bringing out the best in men and women, to make them alive, and though I did not achieve any sort of kingdom in this world, I have



established small human dominions along my way, proved to the doubting that women had souls, and trained a hundred boys to make the best of their life, without complaint, or dishonor." Page 347, 1835 Chapter 5.

"But there was no wish that I could make that I have not already been granted by my father Aaron Burr." Page 428, 1840.



Topics for Discussion

Regarding the election of the Jefferson and Burr election, how did Jefferson obtain the winning vote? Explain.

Do Burr's recollections of his activities during the Revolutionary War seem familiar? What would the United States be like today if Canada had been won at that time?

Did Charlie demonstrate good sense or ethics when he agreed to "spy" on Aaron Burr and write a biography of him, selling it to the highest bidder? Why or why not?

Compare and contrast the man, Aaron Burr, in Vidal's book with the man known in the history books. Which seems to be more accurate?

Describe Charlie's infatuation over Helen Jewett. What mistakes did he make? What did he do right? Why did he lose his love?

Discuss Burr's personality in regard to women. Did he steal from his wife?

Talk about Burr and his apparent inability to forge lasting personal relationships. What reasons can you find in the text to support your answers?

Does Gore Vidal deal fairly with George Washington? Do some additional research and determine whether Washington was a military genius or a military failure.

Do you believe that Leggett's methods of trying to place his choice of man in the office of president were justified and ethical? Why or why not? Does that happen today?

Discuss the importance of the press and the influence it has on politics.

Discuss the relationship between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr. Compare and contrast the ideas presented in the book and those that are taught in traditional history books. Which do you believe? Why?

Do you feel that the author played fair with you as the reader? Do you feel that you have an accurate portrayal of the historical events presented in the book? Why or why not?

Discuss Charlie's relationship with Aaron Burr. Do the facts at the end of the book surprise you? Did Charlie miss some clues earlier in the book?

What really happened in the death of Alexander Hamilton? Was Burr justified in calling for the duel? Why or why not?

Do you feel that Burr was an important political character in the formation of the infant government of the United States? Can you compare him to any modern day politicians?



Discuss Vidal's writing style. Did it contribute to your enjoyment of the book or did it hinder your reading? Explain

Do Burr's observations of important historical figures such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson cause you to have different impressions than those you have previously held? Why or why not?

Describe Burr's alleged treason. Do you believe that he was really committing a treasonous act? How did the laws of the new government assist him? Did anything else come to his aid?

Do you agree with Washington Irving that history should be cleaned up, and the sad and less civilized details should be stripped from the books? Why or why not?