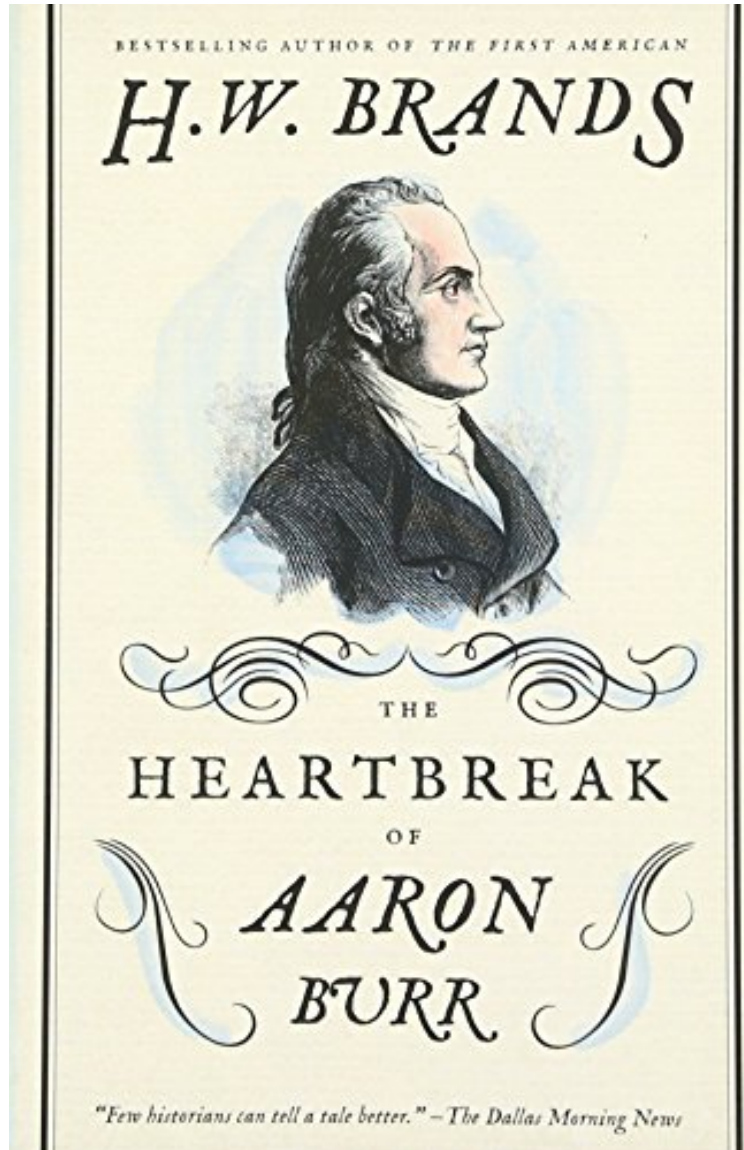


[Free pdf] The Heartbreak of Aaron Burr (American Portraits)

## The Heartbreak of Aaron Burr (American Portraits)

*H. W. Brands*

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**H. W. Brands : The Heartbreak of Aaron Burr (American Portraits)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Heartbreak of Aaron Burr (American Portraits):

17 of 17 people found the following review helpful. Blue BurrBy VA DuckAn interesting account of the life of Aaron Burr, told without bias or favoritism. This relatively short read (192 pages in paperback) covers most of Vice President Burr's adult life - though his part in the Revolution is alluded to rather than documented. The "Heartbreak", of course, refers to his relationship with his beloved daughter Theodosia and his grandson, Aaron Burr Alston.Professor Brands

applies an interesting style to the writing of the book: short, succinct chapters drawn up in short, succinct sentences told in an assertive style - in the fashion of one who has actually witnessed history, rather than one who is recounting it from research. He blends the correspondence of Mr. Burr and Theodosia and other characters into the narrative without breaking the pace of the story. His writing is interesting and quite pleasant in its cadence. There is a "romantic" character about the telling of this story - which I think Professor Brands very much intends - though the story is not saccharine, or maudlin in the least. The author spends more time on Burr's trial for treason than other biographies have and it is appreciated. We hear from John Marshall, Luther Martin, Edmond Randolph and other now famous figures at the trial. However, apart from the detail of the trial, if you have read a Burr biography, you will not likely find new historic incidents here, nor do I think that was Professor Brands' intent - so much as to very deftly present the emotion of the events of Arron Burr's life. And, he has done that very well. Consider reading as well, Professor Nancy Isenberg's book "Fallen Founder: The Life of Aaron Burr" for another book that takes an interestingly different look at Burr the man--rather than the villain.-----kindle edition-----This e-book shows no sign of the occasional quirks of this format (odd line-breaks, typographical errors, non-working links, etc). The compactness of the book extends to chapter names as well - the author simply numbers the 41 chapters, so the table of contents is less than informative. There are no notes or index - which can be a useful feature in e-book format, but again, I think this is in keeping with the style of the book. A personal opinion; the portraits of Hamilton and Jefferson presented mid-book are perhaps the least recognized of the portraits commonly seen. Other portraits included: Arron Burr, Theodosia Burr, Andrew Jackson, James Wilkerson, and John Marshall. e-Book publication quality, .0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Vivid, wonderful little book By SherriLee Some reviews criticize the brevity and/or focus of this book. However, the title is The Heartbreak of Aaron Burr and that is the focus...his personal life, his family, his heartbreak. This is not meant to be a political biography. It mentions and notes his impact on many things, but then blows by them to concentrate on the relationship that finally broke his heart. This is a fascinating, bewildering, inspiring, melancholy story written in short, vivid chapters. I am not a Burrito and I loved this little book 6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. The Heartbreak of Aaron Burr is a short scamper through the life of Vice-President Aaron Burr and his daughter Theodosia By C. M. Mills Dr. H.W. Brands has written several historical bestsellers written for a popular general audience. Among his tomes are "The First American" a biography of Benjamin Franklin and "A Traitor to His Class" a life of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. "The Heartbreak of Aaron Burr is a brief account of Burr's relationship with his only child the erudite and tragic Theodosia. Burr (1756-1836) was a Revolutionary War hero. He married a woman who was ten years his senior who died when Theodosia their only child was eleven years old. Burr believed in equality of the sexes and raised Theodosia to be a scholar. She was a lovely young woman who married William Alston. Alston became elected as the governor of South Carolina. The couple had one child Aaron Burr Jr. who died as a young boy. Theodosia was sickly disappearing at sea on her voyage to visit her father in New York City. Burr never got over her loss though he did continue to practice law in New York. Burr was the grandson of Jonathan Edwards the famed New England theologian. Aaron's father served as President of Princeton University where Burr graduated becoming a lawyer. Burr was active in New York politics as a Republican. He served as Vice-President during the first administration of President Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson and Burr later became bitter enemies. Jefferson believed Burr was seeking to separate the western portion of the United States and go to war against Mexico. It was believed Burr wanted to set the capital of his new nation in New Orleans with himself as the head of state. He was accused of treason in a famous trial in Richmond, Virginia presided over by John Marshall, the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court. Marshall was a strong Federalist and enemy of Jefferson. Burr was acquitted of treason since no two witnesses had seen him actually lead a revolt against the United States. Burr killed his chief rival Alexander Hamilton in a famous duel in New Jersey. He was scorned by the political powers of the age. Burr spent long periods in Europe especially in England, France, Holland and Sweden. He eventually returned to New York City penniless and scorned. His reputation was never recovered as he died an old and disillusioned man. Brands tells the tragic tale of the Burr family through the correspondence of Burr and Theodosia. His account of the treason trial in Richmond is a fascinating look at the legal system in the early republic. The book will appeal most to history buffs. The book is somewhat dry but give the reader a new insight into the life of Aaron Burr and his family.

Though he was a hero of the Revolutionary War, a prominent New York politician, and vice president of the United States, Aaron Burr is today best remembered as the villain who killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel. But as H. W. Brands demonstrates in this fascinating portrait of one of the most compelling politicians in American history, Burr was also a man before his time a proponent of equality between the sexes well over a century before women were able to vote in the US. Through Burr's extensive, witty correspondence with his daughter Theodosia, Brands traces the arc of a scandalous political career and the early years of American politics. The Heartbreak of Aaron Burr not only dramatizes through their words his eventful life, it also tells a touching story of a father's love for his exceptional daughter, which endured through public shame, bankruptcy, and exile, and outlasted even Theodosia's tragic disappearance at sea. A Paperback Original

"H. W. Brands brings to life Burrs forgotten contributions as a Revolutionary War hero and politician, as well as the shame that shadowed him for the rest of his life after Hamilton's death." The New York Times "Intense. . . . Short, accessible . . . tightly focused work. . . . In *The Heartbreak of Aaron Burr*, Mr. Brands goes beyond what is commonly known about Burr to show his more admirable side, which lay in his developing the mind and character of the treasure of his life, his daughter Theodosia." The Washington Times "Tightly crafted. . . . Aaron Burr is our Founding Father in the shadows. So often the gifted American who gut-shot Alexander Hamilton on a sheltered rocky ledge in Weehawken, N.J., is remembered as a nasty piece of work. . . . The flawed, fascinating pol has been the subject of many biographies. But in H.W. Brands' beguiling 192-pager, *The Heartbreak of Aaron Burr*, the grandson of Calvinist preacher Jonathan Edwards steps off the page with customary aplomb not as a cartoonish villain but as a cultured, considerate and caring father who was a Princeton graduate at 16, a hero of the Revolution at 20, New York state attorney general at 30 and U.S. senator at 35. . . . Like Herman Melville, who swept us back to 19th-century New Bedford's Spouter-Inn in *Moby-Dick*, Brands transports us to a room on Stone Street in New York on this eighth day of June, anno domini 1812. . . . And it's [Burr and Theo's] highly literate, lively correspondence that leavens this revealing book and makes its subjects spring to life. Austin American-Statesman "Although Burr is the subject of numerous biographies, Brands' use of the letters between Burr and Theo, named after her mother, allows a somewhat different perspective. As the title may suggest, this sketch seems to look more at Burr the man than the other categories in which he could be placed: politician, duelist, accused traitor. While Brand concisely covers the breadth of Burr's life, it is clear that the father-daughter relationship was an extraordinary one. Seattle Post-Intelligencer "Compelling. . . . A softer perspective of one of American history's most controversial figures. Its true Burr gets a bad rap. . . . The letters give us an authentic glimpse of his personality while nicely mirroring the dramatic political landscape (duels, deals and treason) of the time. Austinist Brands reveals another side of Burr in this examination of his extensive correspondence with his beloved daughter, Theodosia. . . . The letters deal with more than personal relations, as Burr discourses upon subjects as varied as sexual equality and political rivalry. . . . This useful, often emotionally stirring work offers a surprising view of an enigmatic personality. Booklist "The second in the author's series entitled *American Portraits*, this is one of the increasingly popular small stories that give so much insight into the men, women and events of history. A short but thrilling page-turner. Brands burrows into Burr's psyche and exposes his failings as he details the outstanding talents that were so sadly wasted. Kirkus "About the Author H. W. BRANDS holds the Jack S. Blanton Sr. Chair in History at the University of Texas at Austin. A New York Times bestselling author, he was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in biography for *The First American and Traitor to His Class*. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. "Patience, my dear children, and you shall hear all. The old man sits at a cramped table in a spare room overlooking a narrow street in lower Manhattan. He writes clearly but swiftly, in the practiced hand of one who has written much in the course of an accomplished life conducted often on the run. He tells his daughter and her son of his recent arrival from abroad. The ebb carried us up to Rikers Island, one mile from Hell Gate, and here, being met by the flood, we cast anchor to wait for the ebb, which would make at half past seven. In the meantime came up a breeze from S.E. Nothing could have more perfectly accorded with my wishes, as we must now necessarily arrive in New York about ten in the evening. The old man's absence from his home city has been forced, and he fears retribution from the law, which is why he hoped to arrive after nightfall. However, as the hour approached, the captain began to doubt whether it would not be too dark to go through Hell Gate, and thought it would be more prudent to wait till morning. I combated this childish apprehension, but without effect. He sought another vessel to complete his journey. There hove in sight a very small sailboat, standing down. He paid two men to row him over. The sailboat proved to be a pleasure boat belonging to two young farmers of Long Island. They were not bound to New York but to the Narrows, but very kindly agreed to put me on shore in the city. The wind failed, though, and the sailboat succumbed to the seaward pull of the tide. It seemed inevitable that I must make a voyage to the Narrows. But luck, in the form of another vessel, intervened again. When we were nearly opposite the Battery I heard the noise of oars, and hailed, was answered, and I begged them to come alongside. It proved to be two vagabonds in a skiff, probably on some thieving voyage. They were very happy to set me on shore in the city for a dollar, and at half past eleven I was landed. He recalled the Water Street address of a trusted friend. A decade earlier he had counted many friends in New York and many more admirers across America. But nearly all had abandoned him. Many thought him dead; not a few wished him so. Yet his friend in Water Street remained. Thither I went cheerfully, and rejoicing in my good fortune. The rejoicing soon ended. I knocked and knocked, but no answer. I knocked still harder, supposing they were asleep, till one of the neighbors opened a window and told me that nobody lived there. The news was sobering, perhaps fatal. Was there no one in the city who would take him in? A murder charge looms over his head; after all he has risked to return home, to see his beloved daughter and darling grandson, will he face instead the sheriff and the hangman? He considered his options. To walk about the whole night would be too fatiguing. To have sat and slept on any stoop would have been no hardship; he had suffered much worse during his exile but, then, the danger that the first watchman who might pass would take me up as a vagrant and carry me to the watchhouse was a denouement not at all to my mind. He paced the sidewalks for an hour. He saw a lamp in a house fronting an alley. The house looked disreputable and consequently, under his peculiar circumstances, comparatively safe. He woke the owner

and asked if he might sleep there the rest of the night. He was led to a small garret where five men were snoring. I threw open the window to have air, lay down, and slept profoundly till six. He paid his host twelve cents for the floor space and reentered the alley. He returned to Water Street, for lack of a better idea, and was greatly relieved to discover that the neighbor was wrong; his friend still lived there. He had merely been gone awhile. The friend greeted him warmly but cautiously. He said he could not stay in that house but might lodge briefly with his brother, Sam, in a house around the corner. And here I am, the old man writes his daughter, in possession of Sams room in Stone Street, in the city of New York, on this eighth day of June, anno domini 1812, just four years since we parted at this very place.<sup>2</sup> Aaron Burrs great love begins amid the violence and confusion of the Revolutionary War. He is a colonel in the Continental Army; she, the widow of a British officer killed in the West Indies. He encounters Theodosia while protecting her home from American raiders who impute the Toryism of the deceased to his widow. She admires the dark-eyed, black-haired young officer, a common reaction among Burrs female acquaintances. Less predictable is the affection he develops toward her. She is ten years his elder and neither beautiful nor rich. But she is intelligent, educated and willing to speak her mind. The women Burr grew up among were sometimes intelligent and often outspoken, but none had much education or seemed to miss it. Burr is fascinated by this woman with whom he can converse as an equal. A battle injury compels him to retire from the army and frees him to court Theodosia. They marry in 1782. She gives him a daughter, whom he names after her. He promises to provide the younger Theodosia all the advantages of education and expectation the well-to-do typically accord their male children but deny their girls. If I could foresee that Theo would become a mere fashionable woman, he tells her mother, with all the attendant frivolity and vacuity of mind, adorned with whatever grace and allurements, I would earnestly pray God to take her forthwith hence. But I yet hope, by her, to convince the world what neither sex appear to believe: that women have souls! Theo idolizes her father from the moment she can express herself. She frequently talks of, and calls on, her dear papa, her mother writes Burr when the child is two and he is away. Your dear Theodosia cannot hear you spoken of without an apparent melancholy; insomuch that her nurse is obliged to exert her invention to divert her, and myself avoid to mention you in her presence. She was one whole day indifferent to everything but your name. Her attachment is not of a common nature. Others will note the uncommon nature of the attachment between father and daughter, which grows only stronger with time. Burr directs Theos education from his library when at home and from his stagecoach, his hotel and wherever his law practice takes him when he is traveling. It is surprising that you tell me nothing of Theo, he chides his wife when Theo is seven. I would by no means have her writing and arithmetic neglected. It is the part of her education which is of the most present importance. If Shepherd one of her tutors will not attend her in the house, another must be had; but I had rather pay him double than employ another. Theos mother endorses the educational project, within the limits of maternal tenderness. She begins to cipher, she assures her husband regarding Theos arithmetic studies. French proceeds apace. Mr. Chevalier attends regularly, and I take care she never omits learning her French lesson. I believe she makes most progress in this. Music lessons pose a logistical challenge. She must either have a forte-piano at home, or renounce learning it. Theo responds with spirit, including resistance to excessive study. I will not use severity; and without it, at present, I can obtain nothing, her mother writes Burr when Theo is being stubborn, albeit charmingly so. The moment we are alone, she tries to amuse me with her improvement, which the little jade knows will always command my attention. Theo doesnt write her father as frequently as he wishes. Theo has begun to write several letters, but never finished one, her mother explains. The only time she has to write is also the hour of general leisure, and, when once she is interrupted, there is no making her return to work. Burr wants Theo to learn to ride horseback; her mother reminds him that the day is only so long. She writes and ciphers from five in the morning to eight, and also the same hours in the evening. This prevents our riding at those hours, except Saturday and Sunday; otherwise I should cheerfully follow your directions. The paternal encouragement pays off. Theo makes amazing progress at figures, her mother reports. Though Louisa an older girl has worked at them all winter, and appeared quite an adept at first, yet Theo is now before her, and assists her to make her sums. You will really be surprised at her improvement. For reward the mother takes her daughter and some friends for a ride in the country. We have a good plain Dutch wagon, that I prefer to a carriage when at Pelham, as the exercise is much better. We ride in numbers and are well jolted, and without dread. Tis the most powerful exercise I know. No spring seats, but, like so many pigs, we bundle together on straw. Four miles are equal to twenty. . . . I hope you will see our little girl rosy cheeked and plump as a partridge.<sup>3</sup> I was acquainted with Burr, and I thought well acquainted with him, when in the height of his power and fame, Erastus Root will remember. Root meets Burr in the courtroom, and also Alexander Hamilton, the other standout of the New York bar. As a lawyer and as a scholar he was not inferior to Hamilton. His reasoning powers were at least equal. Their modes of argument were very different. Hamilton was very diffuse and wordy. His words were so well chosen, and his sentences so finely formed into a swelling current, that the hearer would be captivated. The listener would admire if he was not convinced. Burrs arguments were generally methodized and compact. I used to say of them, when they were rivals at the bar, that Burr would say as much in half an hour as Hamilton in two hours. Burr was terse and convincing, while Hamilton was flowing and rapturous. They were much the greatest men in this state, and perhaps the greatest men in the United States. When he isnt directing Theos education, Burr constructs a career as a lawyer and a politician. His intellectual and rhetorical gifts serve him in both

arenas. He settles in New York after the Revolution and commences a law practice that wins him friends, influence and sufficient income to buy a handsome estate, Richmond Hill, overlooking the Hudson two miles above the tip of Manhattan. He fills one of the finest libraries in the city with the latest editions from London and the European continent, and he entertains distinguished visitors from several states as well as philosophers and aristocrats from abroad. Because he never counts costs, his purchases outrun his income, and, barely noticing it, he falls behind with his creditors. Yet they assume that his earning power will continue to grow and gladly lend him more. Easy credit simultaneously assists the political career Burr is building. He serves in the state assembly and as attorney general before seeking election as one of New York's two senators to the freshly reconfigured federal government. His opponent, Philip Schuyler, would have made a distinguished statesman in the days of Rome, being august in demeanor and imperious in manner, but he lacks the popular touch increasingly required in the politics of republican America. More to the point, he has enemies in the New York legislature, which will choose to retain or replace him. It doesn't help his chances that his son-in-law and ally, Alexander Hamilton, widely thought the genius behind President George Washington, is even haughtier and, in some quarters, more thoroughly disliked. Burr's many gifts include a talent for ingratiating: he can cause the most diverse, insightful people to think him a fine, capable fellow. He persuades the New York legislators to select him over Schuyler and thereby over Hamilton. Schuyler accepts the defeat with comparative grace, but Hamilton takes the verdict both personally and politically. Burr's victory insults Hamilton's family, and it threatens the congressional majority Hamilton requires to effect his ambitions as Treasury secretary. An associate tells Hamilton of a passionate courtship between his principal rivals, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, and Burr. *Delenda est Carthago* Carthage must be destroyed: the refrain of the Roman intransigent Cato I suppose is the maxim adopted with respect to you, Hamilton's man says of the enmity he perceives in Jefferson, Madison and now Burr toward Hamilton. In the first decade of the federal republic, political parties begin to form. The framers of the Constitution neither expected parties nor much liked them. Most anticipated a high-minded politics in which the nation's eminent men, knowing one another and bound by mutual respect and shared devotion to the common weal, would debate policy on its merits. But the patriotic glue of the Revolutionary War wears off, and new men enter the arena. Predispositions toward government emerge; around the predispositions, factions develop; the factions become parties. Jefferson and Madison head one party, the Republicans, which professes opposition to an energetic central government. Hamilton and John Adams head the other, the Federalists, which deems energy essential in government. George Washington attaches to neither party but leans Federalist. Jefferson's Republicans see Burr as useful in probing the weakness of Hamilton's Federalists in Hamilton's home state. Building up Burr will force Hamilton to defend his New York political base and will distract him from the broader objects of his policy ambitions. A Republican connection serves Burr's own purposes. Burr's grandfather Jonathan Edwards, the famous Calvinist minister, was the most eminent theologian in America; Burr's father, Aaron Burr, president of the College of New Jersey at Princeton, was the country's foremost educator. Burr, who precociously graduated from Princeton at the age of sixteen and started at once on a professional path in law, sees no reason he should not become America's greatest political figure. George Washington enjoys a preeminence no contemporary can match, and Jefferson and Adams rank just below Washington. But after them, who will guide the country? Burr considers himself as capable as Hamilton and Madison and at least as clever. Why should he not become president one day? He mustn't tip his hand too soon, though. He shares his thoughts with his wife but no one else. When they are together they speak in confidence; when they are apart he writes in cipher, knowing that postmasters appointed by Hamilton's Federalist party arent above opening letters sent by persons in whom their sponsors take interest. The coding is simple, primarily substituting numbers for names. But it serves its purpose for Burr. And it makes Hamilton, who learns that his rival has something to hide, distrust him the more.