

DAVID LOWENTHAL'S *THE PAST IS A FOREIGN COUNTRY*¹

Part I: Wanting the Past

1. *Discuss the competing claims of tradition and innovation and give examples from two different cultures.* Tradition, or literally, that which is handed down from the past, seeks to codify, preserve, and pass along certain ways of being, thinking, and doing. On the other hand, innovation seeks to alter or change what is old or settled with novel ways of being, thinking, and doing. As the goals of tradition and innovation are quite different, their claims upon the past, as well as the present and the future, are invariably at odds.

Lowenthal captures the idea of tradition with the word “nostalgia” or a looking back with a view to return to happier, former days, i.e., a return home. He notes serious pitfalls resulting from a blind nostalgic view of history, notably it does not need to be taken seriously, it is often trivial, it can be pervasive and very unrealistic, it leads to a loss of opportunity in the present and a mistrust of the future, it alienates people from the present, and it can create fictional absurdities. Innovation is stifled, as pseudo science fiction genres hold sway over the common mind. One good illustration comes from the popularity of time travel and the dominate goals in such literature—“explaining the past, searching for a golden age, enjoying the exotic, reaping the rewards of temporal displacement and foreknowledge, and refashioning life by changing the past” (p. 22).

¹Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

But as Lowenthal notes, “the legion of benefits the past provides clearly transcends nostalgia” (p. 36). These benefits would include the functional aspects of familiarity, reaffirmation and validation, identity, guidance, enrichment, and even escape. By such use of the past, the present is rendered meaningful and a significant role for innovation as part of an ongoing historic continuum is preserved.

Tradition provides stability, and innovation provides malleability. Both are essential, because human survival requires an inheritable culture. Nothing can be purely original. Humans depend on tradition for existence and function. Scientific and artistic achievements assume prior experience. Nothing is totally unique. Even the transformationalist “blends childhood memory with the religious ritual of rebirth, and this imagined golden age shapes his vision of the future” (p. 71). This is the ambiguity of generational conflict in many cultures. The old must pass on, but the new or young receive little openness toward change, since the old are unwilling to give way. So the young must fight for change, and all the while based on premises built around the past, i.e., Japanese youth (see p. 71). In this way, tradition hinders progress.

Likewise, in Roman culture, *a la* Seneca, the trek for the child to adulthood involves mirroring the paterfamilias, hence a living relic of the past, but substantial difference, unlikeness, or change is absolutely necessary for the child to acquire his own face or independence. The quarrel between “Ancients” and “Moderns” during the post-Renaissance also highlights this same tension between tradition and innovation, just as Bloom remarks, “Be like me, but do not presume to be too like me” (p. 73).

2. *What are the burdens of the past? Give examples.* In comparing benefits and burdens of varying meanings of the past, Lowenthal affirms a paradox: “the past aids and delights, it also threatens and diminishes . . . its advantages involve drawbacks, its promises imply risks” (p. 63). He even labels the burdens of the past with moral failure—they are evils which call for exorcism!

Such burdens include fear of the past and its threatening or tragic characters who are full of crimes and calamities. This is aptly captured by Browning’s dying Paracelsus:

I saw no use in the past: only a scene
Of degradation, ugliness and tears
The record of disgraces best forgotten
A sullen page in human chronicles
Fit to erase (p. 64).

The past also harbors baneful effects on the present, like the “burdens of Rome’s great and overwhelming past . . . at once a curse and a blessing” (p. 64).

The importance or virtue of the past can be overrated, which can, in Nietzsche’s emphasis, destroy creative instinct in the present, weaken individual resolve, and hinder forward purpose and direction. This practice of “monumental history” with its hatred of present power and greatness along with its proclamation that “the great thing is already here,” seems to rest upon the striking axiom, “Let the dead bury the living!”

Other burdens of the past are its tendency toward regression, often recalling painful occurrences that elicit obliteration, something unbearable and destructive of important personal and community links to the past. Iconoclastic excesses consistently have sought wholesale purges of such a negative past, witness the multiple destructions of the library of Alexandria and

the city of Carthage. The old is tossed aside for something completely new, or so the purgers think, *a la* the Cistercians, the Puritans, and present-day Futurists.

When the weight of tradition becomes unbearable, satire can help provide some relief, as in the cartoon dialogue:

“I almost drowned yesterday, and my whole life flashed in front of me!”
“That must have been exciting!”
“Not really; I’d seen it before” (p. 68).

With its burdens and presumably its evils, the past “scares us to turn over a rock and find some worm of history we thought dead still crawling about; it scares us, too, though, to find the darkened present illuminated by some flickering light from the past” (p. 69).

3. Is there a difference between the way Americans and Europeans value the past?

Why? While both Americans and Europeans suffer ambivalence about their pasts, the Old/New World paradigm highlights a basic difference. Their “historically meager landscape” notwithstanding, Americans cherish their freedom from a past that shackles and enslaves, especially the bondage of imperial Britain through the period of the Revolution, and more recently, black bondage to pre-Civil War slavery and post-Civil War segregation. A quite current reaction to the past with its flight from encumberment and fight for freedom lies in sundry issues of “political correctness.”

Tradition still characterizes much European thought, as such is jealously guarded by economic, political, and religious institutions. But change is quickly occurring due to global interaction via technological advances in communication. This impetus toward change from the past forced itself on the New World much earlier by way of a frontier mentality. The clash

between Indian culture and that of transplanted Europeans forced issues of autonomy and flexibility as the colonists adapted to a strange and often hostile environment. Peter Gay rightly notes the New Englanders' sense of ambivalence, "Rigid, they would turn themselves into anachronisms; flexible, they would betray their Puritanism" (p. 105).

But their robust "youthness" and "a-historical uniqueness" would save the early and later Americans from a "useless and crippling past." America was novel, exempt from secular history, vigorous, a mark of God's Providence. It did not suffer the decay and rottenness of the Old World. And ambivalence became manifest in a need for identity toward self-preservation that surfaced with a renewal of Old World nostalgia, a sense of debt to the Founding Fathers, and an ongoing piety for the strongly Europeanized colonial past. This was especially true during times of crisis, such as the Civil War, eras of mass immigration, and the shift toward an industrialized society.

The continuous interaction of America with Europe concretized this ambiguity, something shared equally by New World and Continental views of the past. Both derived from a "western" heritage built upon classical, Reformation, and Renaissance civilizations. But each orchestrated its historic value around a different matrix by different means for different ends.

4. Is there a difference between how ancients, Renaissance people, and modern people view the past? Give examples. As a continuation of classical, medieval, and Renaissance societies, European peoples naturally value these deep historic roots. The Renaissance particularly humanized the remoteness or distance of the classical past with a view toward imitating, or at least recreating, the glories of Greek and Roman culture via "unearthing and

resurrection,” that is, revival and rebirth. The glories of the past were thus mined for a glorious present. This humanist confidence, theories about the decay of nature and Victorian anachronisms notwithstanding, sparked tremendous advances in literary production like the printing press, the sciences, and the arts.

Britain especially led the way after the Napoleonic Wars by building politically on the French Revolution and other Continental uprisings, socially on the utilitarian and neo-economic reform movements, and structurally on new technology and increased manufacturing. A new era of industrialism exploded ancient and even Renaissance views of both past and present. No longer could modern man escape back in time, and the failure of the Victorian reaction proves as much. The past was indeed alive in the present but only in a new and minimal way. It was like a new door had opened for mankind, and from that time forward the windows to the past framed opaque panes. When humanity as a whole passed the point of industrialization, it could never again retreat into pre-industrial time (just like “historic man” could never retreat into “prehistoric time,” nor could “agricultural man” retreat into “pre-agricultural time”). Such movement past an epochal moment on the forceful continuum of time allows no possible retreat.

5. *What are some of the images elicited by “old age”? Give examples.* The dual traits of antiquity and decay infuse people and things with a sense of historical change, a movement from new to old, from fresh to worn. But “old” bears a distinct and negative meaning apart from just simply “aged.” The ideas of effacement and deterioration are prevalent, hence “ageing is a worn chair, a wrinkled face, a corroded tin, a mildewed wall . . . [things] faded by time and use” (p. 125). Durability fades, extinction lingers, failure reigns, usefulness wanes, death knocks at the

door. Whether biological or material, images of that which is ugly, dirty, unloved, unwanted, repugnant, and foul accompany the onset of old age.

This process is seen in people, institutions, and societies. Senility and weakness grab hold as Father Time and Mother Nature work their havoc in a decaying, unfortunate, and unyielding world. All becomes moldy, mildewed, and moth-eaten. People and things lose their authenticity as the decay of old age symbolizes failure.

6. How does the past enrich us? Impoverish us? Give examples. The benefits of the past are myriad. It makes the present understandable and familiar, otherwise much would be incomprehensible. It gives continuity for “the now.” This helps to create a comfortable environment in which to live. The past affirms and validates what exists today by providing “an immutable tradition” for things current. By preserving and restoring, the past concretizes the sense of belonging or identity, and thereby infuses existence with meaning, purpose, and value for both individual and community. The past teaches important lessons that can enrich the world around us and also provide a means of escape from a difficult, unacceptable present.

Anachronistic events or places can allow those who suffer in the present to recapture a dream or vision once lost and perhaps spark their hope for the future.

But the past can impoverish as well as enrich. It can hinder newness, creativity, and change toward improvement. It can corrupt, if it is held on to blindly. It can dishearten and discourage, if only negative meanings and interpretations of the past are dwelt on. It can kill openness and honest inquiry, if tradition is exalted too highly. The clash of religious dogma and

medical science, for example, can retard new discoveries and creative adaptations of improved technologies.

7. *What is your favorite quotation from Part I? Explain your choice.* Of three possible choices, I decided on the following:

The miracle of life is cruelly circumscribed by birth and death; of the immensity of time before and after our own lives we experience nothing. Past and future are alike inaccessible. But, though beyond physical reach, they are integral to our imaginations. Reminiscence and expectation suffuse every present moment" (p. 3).

This quote captures the beauty of life on a continuum, for instance, a miracle. But it highlights as well the limits of human existence, namely, birth and death. So the present, now, is the only existentially real moment which can be lived. But humans are not so limited that they cannot transcend time in thought and in spirit via a creative and powerfully influential imagination. This quote sums up nicely these aspects of the human condition.

8. *What is your favorite picture in Part I? Explain your choice.* I chose the photo of the seventeenth century manor house on page 103. I like stone houses, stone walls, towers, and unique variations. There is nothing symmetrical about the major features of this house, except that the individual parts, especially the windows, blend nicely into the whole. It is a harmony of distinct variations.

Part II: Knowing the Past

1. *What is memory?* Memory, along with history and relics, is a way of knowing the past. Claimed by the specialist domain of psychology, memory “is inescapable and *prima-facie* indubitable,” whereas history “is contingent and empirically testable” (p. 187). Even so, absolute certainty about knowing the past seems unlikely, since memory gives “mere glimpses,” which progressively become “more shadowy, bereft of sensation, effaced by oblivion” (p. 192). Writes Simone de Beauvoir, “Recognition does not always give us back the warmth of the past, we lived it in the present . . . and all that is left is a skeleton” (p. 192). Time erodes memory and makes any certainty of yesterday very tenuous.

Memory nevertheless is useful and necessary. “All awareness of the past is founded on memory. Through recollection we recover consciousness of former events, distinguish yesterday from today, and confirm that we have experienced a past” (p. 193). Memory permeates all of life. Memory is habitual, and it is automatic. Memory flows according to a continuous flux, “like a collection of antiquities . . . new keepsakes all the time being added, old ones discarded, some rising to the surface of present awareness, others sinking beneath conscious note” (p. 194). Memory therefore accumulates with age.

2. *What is a nation's memory?* There is individual or personal memory, and there is collective or group memory. The former is intimate and private. The latter is public and shared, even assumed or understood as part of clan and/or culture. A good example of collective memory is a nation's consciousness or stock of historical recollections. This could be the official body of historical information promoted by and useful for the perpetuation of the heritage,

institutions, and traditions of a given country. Or, the repository of past remembrances could include notable and significant events by which a nation came into being or evolved, as these occurrences would mark important turning points for a majority of the populace.

3. What are some other important things about memory. Memory defines self-identity, based on self-continuity. Memory, although subjective, provides an important guide to the past, even as it yields to perceptions and it changes according to experience. There are different types of memory--recall of feelings, memorization of facts, introspective recollections, and instrumental or dispassionate memory. Ironically, memory is awakened and sharpened by forgetting, just as memory is altered by revision. Such things are quite automatic and often unintentional, so much so that memory transmutes experience, since it “distils the past rather than simply reflecting it” (p. 204). “The prime function of memory, then, is not to preserve the past but to adapt it so as to enrich and manipulate the present” (p. 210).

4. How is memory less than history? History broadens memory in several ways. It seeks to interpret relics and their meaning that is associated with memory. It synthesizes eyewitness reports, even though these oral and/or written memories are fragmentary and incomplete. History builds upon evidence that includes individual and collective memories. History, by its very nature, is shared and produced collectively. It utilizes group activity that implies something larger than individual and collective memory. History involves interpretation which indicates action on and use of memory. History is potentially immortal with qualities of stability and endurance, whereas memory is more fleeting, fickle, and less reliable. History is the

accumulation of tidbits taken from memory over time, and when woven together, history formulates stories that provide convincing and intelligible communication about the past.

5. *How is memory more than history?* That memory is more than history is highlighted by three limits to historical knowledge—“the immensity of the past itself, the distinction between past events and accounts of those events, and the inevitability of bias” (p. 214). Memory, if accurately and adequately summoned, can potentially recover the events of the past. But even so, it is highly likely that the perspective remains subjective and skewed according to individual perceptions. Memory can go beyond Levi-Strauss’s “retrospective reconstruction” to obtain some measure of objectivity, albeit limited, bringing the modern viewer of the past closer to *res gestae* (“what has happened”) and not merely to *historia rerum gestarum* (“accounts of what happened”). Finally, memory can plausibly verify the reliability and the verisimilitude of the happenings of the past. This may be impossible pragmatically, since no one’s memory may be that good. But memory theoretically outdistances history on this account, since the enterprise of history suffers from the process of eclecticism and its inescapable biases.

6. *What is a relic?* A relic, which belongs to the specialist domain of archaeology, provides historians with a concrete and tangible “thing” from the past. There are all kinds of relics. Relics come in the form of “natural features” or “human artifacts,” and they yield knowledge in addition to that gained through memory and history. Relics are everywhere, their preponderance is “immeasurably voluminous,” as they appear “above and under the earth.” In one sense, however, a relic is more than just some “thing,” as it must be endowed with a certain significance or meaning pertaining to the past. In this way, the idea of a relic flows backwards,

from the reality of the object in the present to the perception of the object as it relates to and interprets the past.

7. *What are the defects and virtues of reliquary knowledge?* Three properties of relics might be considered neutral. Relics age by decay and wear due to use. Relics seem old-fashioned through a sense of nostalgia and embellishment about their place in the past. Relics do not “fit in” in the present, that is, they are out of date or anachronistic. These qualities do not seem to make relics either defective or virtuous, as such are common to most all relics. But tangible evidence does have some disadvantages. Relics portray only a small piece of the past, a restricted scope. They cannot stand on their own, since they are mute and need interpretation “to voice their reliquary role” (p. 243). Relics are static and thereby entice an overestimate of their value, particularly when coupled with other objects *in situ*. Time and history as such does not stand still, so the static nature of the relic poses a false guide to a full and true picture of the past.

But on the other hand, relics do provide the discoverer of the past with some interesting benefits. Relics lack intentional bias, and therefore they can be more reliable than other witnesses to the past. Relics are very accessible. They can be inspected, not only by the specialist, but also by the common public or interested student. This accessibility highlights the empirical value of relics. “History and memory usually come in the guise of stories which the mind must purposefully filter; physical relics remain directly available to our senses” (p. 245). They can be touched, gazed upon, experienced directly without mediation. Relics touch first the present, then only the past by way of reflection. This “coexistence with the present” (or perhaps better “coexistence with the past”) allows their existential and their historical meanings to

interact with overlap of purpose, significance, and value. These layers of existential reality can be extremely useful to the historian.

8. Do artifacts constitute a viable metaphor in history and memory? Explain. Yes, physical “things” or artifacts provide an important bridge to both remembrances of what has occurred and explanations of what has occurred. The artifact itself is not only a link from present to past—from distinct points in the past or from a passage of chronological time to now—but it is also an important repository that defines, explains, and illuminates. While “memory, history, and relics have long served as mutual metaphors” (p. 251), the artifact appeals to both senses and imagination unlike the representative sensations available through history and memory. Artifacts are “things” and touch psychoanalytic processes in distinct ways. The work of Freud and others notes this valuable realization. The “stuff” of a tangible artifact helps the human mind perceive more objectively what otherwise would be lost by way of analytical reasoning based solely on words, thoughts, ideas, and/or stories.

9. Pick several “favorite” quotations to share with the class, and be prepared to describe why you like them.

“All awareness of the past is founded on memory. Through recollection we recover consciousness of former events, distinguish yesterday from today, and confirm that we have experienced a past” (p. 193).

The myths of memory, pp. 193-194.

“By contrast, remarks a philosopher, ‘those who bring more of their past into their present’ thereby both confirm their own identity and enrich the present with the past’s amplified

residues. As Mr. Sammler put it, ‘Everybody needs his memories. They keep the wolf of insignificance from the door’” (p. 198).

“Memories must continually be discarded and conflated; only forgetting enables us to classify and bring chaos into order. ‘An important condition of remembering,’ as Whitrow put it, ‘is that we should be able to forget’” (p. 205).

Blocked quote on p. 208, about retrieval process of memory.

“As Walter Benjamin put it, a man who dies at the age of thirty-five is remembered ‘at every point of his life [as] a man who dies at the age of thirty-five’; we cannot divest knowledge of his subsequent demise from our memories of his earlier years” (p. 209).

“These excesses aside . . .” (p. 221).

“Understanding the past demands some awareness of the temporal location of people and things; a chronological framework clarifies, places things in context, underscores the essential uniqueness of past events. . . . The pearls of history take their value not merely from being many and lustrous, but from being arranged in a causal narrative sequence; the narrative lends the necklace meaning as well as beauty” (p. 224).

“Fiction criticizes history while cannibalizing it; history derogates fiction’s claims while adopting fictional insights and techniques” (p. 228).

“On the other hand, only a faith that the past really exists gives historians the confidence to collect and order evidence and ‘bring[s] us closer to knowing the truth about that past ‘as it really was,’ even if the full and complete truth about the past will always remain beyond their grasp.’ Old-fashioned this epistemology may be, concedes Gordon Wood, but only such faith

‘makes history writing possible. Historians who cut loose from this faith do so at the peril of their discipline’” (p. 236).

“Relics succumb to attrition of meaning as well as substance” (p. 240).

“Every relic thus exists simultaneously in the past and the present” (p. 241).

Block quote on p. 248, “It was indeed a great machine of Time, this attic . . .”

Part III: Changing the Past

1. What is the difference between “altering” relics and “adding to” relics? The difference between “altering” and “adding to” relics is a fine one, as adding to relics always alters them, and altering relics may add to them but not always. As Marguerite Yourcenar notes, “One always rebuilds the monuments in his own way. But it is already something gained to have used the original stones” (p. 265). Identifying, displaying, and protecting artifacts in some measure alters, as well as embellishment by reconstituting, accidental and intentional reconstruction by moving, and modernizing by adapting them to present day purposes. The relic theoretically remains the same relic, even though its context, situation, and sometimes even its appearance and essence may change.

Adding to relics involves a creative or decorative process, whereby the past illuminated by the artifact is distinctly supplemented by imitation, emulation, reproduction, or commemoration. “The impact of these additions depends on how far they resemble the actual relics. . . . Imitations and reenactments aim to replicate admired originals fairly faithfully; models and images often deliberately depart from their exemplars; emulations use the past to inspire new creations; monuments and memorials frequently commemorate the past in present day forms or motifs” (p. 290). Such things as copies or duplicates, reenactments, readaptations, and symbolic monuments and memorials add to relics, change the past, but at the same time preserve the past as “a cluster of original fragments, much altered by erosion and appreciation, embedded among myriad later additions” (p. 324).

2. What are the various ways of interacting with relics? To what extent should we be allowed to interact with relics? Relics can be found or recovered, identified or labeled, analyzed or contextualized, adapted or changed, renewed or refurbished, duplicated or copied, expanded or embellished, institutionalized or memorialized, and personalized or decontextualized and then recontextualized (i.e., infused with new existential meaning). Since relics can be used for a variety of purposes with varying levels of meaning, it should be axiomatic that the possibilities of human interaction with material things from the past should be limitless. In this way, stuff from the past comes alive and becomes an integral part of the ongoing present. For the sake of good historic preservation, there could be some necessary limits on human interaction with relics if such interaction destroys the relic or effaces it beyond its original signification. But it should be observed that alteration from an original signification may not necessarily destroy an artifact's *intentional* signification, which obviously transcends any static role of a relic.

3. Think of examples of altering and adding to relics that have "worked" and that have not "worked". It would be difficult to draw such a fine pragmatic line on the use of relics, that is, what works versus what does not work. Any use of relics works to some extent or does not work according to what percentage of change occurs in order to interact with the relic. But assuming a general pragmatic success in dealing with relics, the following examples are noteworthy—the preservation of American frontier log cabins *in situ*, Stonehenge, the walls around old Jerusalem, the Parthenon in Nashville (as an example of a modern copy of a classical relic), the Colosseum in Rome, many marvelous cathedrals and churches in Europe, the mammoth site in Hot Springs, South Dakota, the various Indian mounds in North America,

historic photos especially when displayed at the location of their taking, old written documents such as dairies, letters, and manuscripts, and grave markers and tombstones. The following, in my opinion, have not served a pragmatic reliquary value, although they may be of importance for explicating or illuminating the original relic–historic markers or plaques, the Lincoln “birthplace cabin” (moved and rebuilt inside a museum in Hodgenville, Kentucky), certain stand alone arches and columns, copies and duplicates (but this depends on the utility of the artifact and what interpretation it bears), and pristine, but basically sterile, interior rooms of some royal palaces.

4. When is revisionism of the past legitimate? When is it risky? When is it prohibitive?

When erosion or fragility threatens the survivability of certain antiquities, then revision is legitimate. Revision can also make articles better known and more accessible to the public, even though copying or celebrating via commemoration or reenactment can alter the original. This also can alter how the viewer perceives the artifact, the difference between the meaning of old versus new in a particular view of reality. In the case of copies, “the original may seem out of place, for habituation to replicas tends to persuade us that antiquities should look complete and ‘new’. The copy may afford an historical experience as ‘true’ as the original, but it is a *different* experience” (p. 293). The issue of genuineness likewise arises concerning reproductions, but even though a copy may fail to fully recapture the past, it nevertheless reflects the past in some measure no less than the original.

Revision can be risky when slanted for nationalist goals, for political reasons, for radical viewpoints, and perhaps for trendy and quirky styles. Celebrations or commemorations that distort in order to portray an iconographic fashion or a retrospective ideology or a splendid

genius can be risky. But these uses of the past have their value and cannot be dismissed completely as illegitimate. Each use necessarily revises the past “in our own terms,” and the motives for doing so are many—“to enhance self-esteem, to aggrandize property, to validate power, etc.” (p. 235). But perhaps such use becomes prohibitive on the occasion of what Lowenthal calls “the stubborn weight of [the past’s] remains.” He notes, “Though the past is malleable, its alteration is not always easy: the stubborn weight of its remains can baulk intended revision. When relics and records obstinately resist a desired interpretation, we may have to change our minds rather than alter the evidence” (p. 326). Such alteration beyond or in contradiction to the material evidence can produce negative results such as conflation, confusion, deception, distortion, and exaggeration (see pp. 348ff.).

5. What is the role of tradition? How / when does material culture enhance tradition?

Tradition is simply what is handed down or passed along from one generation to the next. Tradition can be used to authenticate the present as well as allow an intimate participation with the past, that is, to feel a part of it or belong to a cherished heritage. “To connect with a valued tradition, we must, like the humanists, replicate, transform, and fragment it; [so] in order to link their own lives intimately with events of wider significance . . . people ‘remember’ . . .” (p. 331). This role of tradition works at various levels, for example, the personal level, the family level, the national level, etc. This inheritance of bygone remnants further infuses old traditions with new life, and serves many purposes, such as creation of new traditions, emphasis of native or ethnic achievements, denigration of rival heritages, romanticizing the past to overcome a deficient present, claiming the exotic past as one’s own, and the mediation of varying traditions

or between traditionalist and modernist goals. Artifacts that perpetuate these aspects of tradition do so, however, with a bit of what might be labeled “historical romance” and this, according to Archibald Alison, “discards from human annals their years of tedium, and brings prominently forward their eras of interest, giving us the truth of history without its monotony” (p. 340).

6. What does Lowenthal mean by “the unstructured eclecticism of our historical interest”? Of what is it symptomatic? What are its effects? Lowenthal refers to this “unstructured eclecticism” as another symptom of the loss of the past (p. 383). The idea is that due to fragmentation in the historical endeavor, whether deliberate or unconscious, the present portrayal of the past is no longer “an organized historical corpus” but rather “a pot-pourri of everything that ever happened.” The result is “a meaningless mosaic of fragments” that “conveys no present instruction.” Since we are “unwilling or unable to incorporate the legacy of the past into our own creative acts, we concentrate instead on saving its remaining vestiges. The less integral the role of the past in our lives, the more imperative the urge to preserve its relics.”

7. Whose responsibility is it to preserve the past? Everyone preserves the past to some extent, but in a formal or official sense it would be the role of professionals or interested individuals to keep alive the remnants of history in the different spheres of family, community, state, nation, etc. Some responsibility rests also with the general public for the common good, as well as to disinterested individuals and groups so as to maintain greater objectivity and balance.