

FENOALTEA IN THE ITALIAN MIRROR:
RECOLLECTIONS BY A STUDENT OF HIS

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ABSTRACT

Internationally renowned as a brilliant researcher, Stefano Fenoaltea was also an outstanding teacher of economic history and economics. In this brief contribution, a former student of his during his latest years in the University of Rome “Tor Vergata”, who was later tutored by him as a Fondazione Einaudi Fellow, share his memories and impressions of Fenoaltea as a teacher and mentor.

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When Alberto Baffigi and Giovanni Vecchi invited me to join the final panel of the Symposium in memory of Stefano Fenoaltea, I was hesitant, to say the least. The panel, as the reader of these joint special issues had already realised, featured extremely distinguished scholars, in economic history, as well as in the broader historical discipline. The previous sessions also included other major economic historians, who had crossed Fenoaltea’s decades long academic and intellectual journey, for so much time, compared to the relatively few years I had the chance to meet him. After the initial astonishment, I realised the only rationale for inviting within this

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The paper readapts my *in memoriam* speech at the Symposium “Economics, history, and economic history in Stefano Fenoaltea’s Cliometrics”, held on November 12, 2021. I am grateful to Alberto Baffigi and Giovanni Vecchi for asking me to deliver that speech, and to the editors of the *Annals of the Fondazione Luigi Einaudi* for inviting me to submit a written version to this journal. I am indebted to Alberto Baffigi, for several, extended discussions on these topics since September 2020, and to Aurora Iannello.

stellar programme a post-doctoral researcher, who had just submitted his doctoral dissertation, could have been to include the point of view of a young economic historian, who had experienced Fenoaltea not much as a colleague, but as a teacher. For this reason, in this brief text I will only incidentally engage with the scholarly and intellectual issues that Fenoaltea's academic legacy calls into question,¹ and will limit my focus on recollecting him as a teacher and a mentor – at least, from the perspective of one of his students in his late, Italian years.²

The first time I encountered the name “Stefano Fenoaltea” was in my undergraduate years, spent in the University of Rome “Tor Vergata”, where Fenoaltea had been teaching from 2003 to 2013.³ It must have been the year 2010 – I had enrolled in the Fall 2008, and as far as I remember, Economic History was one of the courses for the second bachelor year, in the spring semester. The large cohort of students who survived to the first year of classes were divided between two *canali*: depending on your surname initial, you would be assigned to either Fenoaltea or Giovanni Vecchi.

Fenoaltea held an infamous course, that proved extremely challenging for undergraduate students: the syllabus was represented by his Italian book on the Italian economy between unification and the Great War (Fenoaltea 2006a). In the words of a young economic historian who attended those classes, Andrea Papadia, “you either loved that course or hated it. Mostly hated it”. I must admit that, among my acquaintances, Andrea is the only one who actually had loved it. For those not accustomed with the Italian university system, it is important to realise that Economic History was not an elective course, but rather a mandatory exam, that all students had to pass, in order to keep on and eventually graduate. In practical terms, this meant that Fenoaltea's course had to be attended every year by half of the “Economics and Business” cohort – back then, some 200, possibly 300 students per year – irrespectively of the bachelor degree they had enrolled in (as in the old labelling “Economia e commercio”, Italian School of economics include what elsewhere would be taught in business schools, as well as courses aimed at future accountants). Indeed, the great majority of these students were pursuing business administration curricula, and one could not assume they necessarily paid great interest to either the econom-

¹ Together with Alberto Baffigi, requested to write a blog post in the immediate aftermath of Fenoaltea's death, I tried to approach these issues in BAFFIGI and GABBUTI (2020).

² In doing this, I could rely on the enthusiastic help of a number of fellow students, who had also attended Fenoaltea's classes in Rome: Pierluigi Grassi, Alessio Marchetti, Enrica Maria Martino, Marta Michetti, Lorenzo Migliaccio, and Andrea Papadia.

³ For a brief but complete reconstruction of Stefano Fenoaltea's career, as well as a touching memory, see Christopher L. Hanes' obituary for Eh.net, later published as HANES (2020).

ic way of reasoning offered by Fenoaltea, or (economic) history in general. Thinking about it in retrospective – at the time, I had no idea I would have pursued a doctorate in economic history, would have read for pleasure the English version of the 2006 book (Fenoaltea 2011), and eventually consider Fenoaltea as a “colleague”, if not a friend – I came to realise how challenging and possibly disturbing this way of teaching must have been, for a man educated in excellent, international institutions (Hanes 2020: 418), who had then taught in a very different academic environment. At the times, I could easily see how difficult, and worrying, was his course for those undergraduate student.

With insight, indeed, I find Fenoaltea’s choice of teaching that book to such an audience puzzling, to say the least. On one hand, it is striking for me that a man who wrote papers that “are exemplars of a style once common, now rare in economic history, in which the author takes generally-accepted historical facts, presenting little if any further empirical evidence, and presents a model to explain the facts in words – no math – as the result of transactions costs and other fundamental economic forces” (*ibid.*: 413-414), and who, as will be discussed below, had previously designed and taught a completely different course, decided to teach to undergraduates the full detail of his masterly reconstruction of the trends in the various industries of the Italian economy. For sure, “for Fenoaltea the construction of statistical series was not a dull task. It was an intellectual exercise that drew on all his knowledge of economic theory and of history – economic, political and technological” (*ibid.*: 415). Still, one could wonder how much of this intellectual exercise could be transmitted in a large lecture hall to dozens of students, and why a scholar who had proved able to engage with so many, fascinating historical episodes – to limit to the paper Hanes refers to, Fenoaltea (1984, 1999), they address one of the ‘Holy Grails’ in the international literature, such as slavery⁴ – decided that the first and only classes of economic history most of his students would ever attend should be spent on a period in which, as Fenoaltea had fiercely argued, nothing really relevant took place in Italy.

While he might have changed his mind in later years,⁵ indeed, at those times Fenoaltea argued fiercely against the existence of anything like a

⁴ See HANES (2020: 412-413) for a concise discussion of these papers, as well as for the complete list of Stefano Fenoaltea’s scientific works. Hanes also reports Gianni Toniolo’s recollection of a book contract Fenoaltea had signed for Cambridge University Press on the African Slave Trade.

⁵ See, in this issue, Alberto Baffigi on how the newly disaggregated series presented in FENOALTEA (2020) led him to reconsider the very existence of a cyclical trend in the period, invalidating both the Kuznetsian cycle and the traditional, “pro-Giolitti” interpretations.

‘take-off’, as well as against attributing to the political cycle (and thus, to the Italians’ own agency) the responsibilities, for bad or for good, of the accelerations and slowdowns of the country’s rate of growth. Italy’s fates, consistently with its position as a peripheral economy within the first globalisation, simply reflected the broader fluctuations of the Atlantic economy – and in particular, the so-called “Kuznets cycles” (Fenoaltea 1988). While one can disagree on this interpretation, and all of us economic historians of modern Italy share Fenoaltea’s scholarly interest for this period, I believe we could agree that second year economics students might better be captivated to the virtues of history with different topics.⁶

A reason for this choice could have been possibly be some sort of ‘patriotism’.⁷ In Baffigi and Gabbuti (2020), we wondered whether Fenoaltea’s scholarly attention on Liberal Italy might have reflected the political legacy of his father, Sergio. Before serving as a diplomat, in the crucial, final years of World War II Sergio Fenoaltea had been a key figure in Italian anti-fascism. Together with the later Treasury and Budget Minister and Secretary of the Republican Party, Ugo La Malfa, he represented the liberal-socialist Action Party (*Partito d’Azione*) in the National Liberation Committee (*Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale*) since its start in 1943. For that generation of reformists, Fascism had resulted from the failures of the previous, liberal élite to modernise and democratise the country (Felice 2020: 405): not only Stefano Fenoaltea’s decision to focus his research on the period, but also his choice to teach that book to the wider student audience he possibly ever had, might have reflected this legacy.⁸

For sure, the first lesson Fenoaltea taught to his students was the “deterministic” nature of history. As he used to say in class, “History has no heroes”. In 1815, he would then add, anybody could have taken the Duke of Wellington’s role at Waterloo: Napoleon was going to lose anyway. But

⁶ I do not share the view of those who, to use the words by Emanuele FELICE (2020: 397), consider “a failure” Fenoaltea’s “choice in recent decades to devote himself almost exclusively to a single research topic, not very innovative and of little interest in the international arena”: my point here is on his teaching choice, in the context of an undergraduate course in an Italian public university.

⁷ Notably, FENOALTEA (2020) is opened by the newly coined ‘Roman saying’ (the latest of his ‘jokes’ of this kind): “*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mensurare*” (italics added).

⁸ FELICE (2020: 404) also recollects a seminar in Barcelona, when Fenoaltea answered a question arguing how, had Liberal Italy achieved a more sustained industrialisation before 1914, its entrance in the Great War would have determined a way quicker end of the conflict, “preventing the Russian revolution and what followed”. One could include Italian Fascism in this “following”, but I must admit I do not remember a reply of this sort when, in several conversations, I politely asked Fenoaltea why he never engaged with Fascist Italy (my own research period), way less investigated, and possibly one in which politics and policies had a greater impact.

if you can make the point by teaching Napoleon, why would you teach Giovanni Giolitti instead? In his teaching, possibly more than in his research, Fenoaltea proved that, even if history is deterministic, historiography is definitely not: and I think Napoleon was lucky to encounter only Wellington, and not also Fenoaltea, on his path to glory.

For good or bad, the “G” at the beginning of my surname implied I had to attend Giovanni Vecchi’s course – an engaging, classic Econ Hist 101, covering several topics in world economic history from the first industrial revolution to present. In 2010, with the 150th anniversary of the Italian unification quickly approaching, Vecchi dedicated his final lectures to the economic history of post-unification Italy, developing some of the themes that would soon be included in Vecchi (2011). Vecchi’s course was probably the first time I saw Stefano Fenoaltea’s face – or at least, when I became able to recognise that face when walking around the school. Luckily enough, I was able to recover the original slides from my laptop, so now I can fully appreciate, with insight, their truly *Fenoalteasque* nature. After a graph reporting the earliest, infamous series produced by the national statistical offices and his director general, Benedetto Barberi (1961) – the title of the slide left no space for imagination, labelling it as “an old (and wrong) story” – and a sketch of Rostow’s (1960) stages of growth model,⁹ Vecchi showed us a picture of Alexander Gerschenkron.¹⁰ Then, after a brief summary of the major alternative interpretations of the period, from Antonio Gramsci to Rosario Romeo, a slide was dominated by pictures of Fenoaltea and Giovanni Federico, under the title “the Revisionists”: this was to introduce their contributions to the new series of national accounts – on industrial and agriculture value added, respectively. Possibly more than the fellow students who had to read the whole Fenoaltea (2006a) (our syllabus included only the first, introductory chapter), the undergraduates attending Vecchi’s course were made vividly aware of the importance the professor next door had, and was having in those months, in writing our own national history.¹¹ I remember how impressive it was, for a 19 year old student, to realise that scholars could estimate several decades of GDP by their own hands, completely changing the way in which we understood the past (even a relatively close one, like the late 19th century).

⁹ For a discussion of these series, it is impossible not to refer to FENOALTEA (2011: 8-21).

¹⁰ On the relationship between Fenoaltea and Gerschenkron, see McCLOSKEY (2020).

¹¹ The new series of Italian national accounts, heavily relying on Fenoaltea’s work on the 1861-1911 period, were going to be published and fully documented in the following year, starting from the conference *L’Italia e l’economia Mondiale, 1861-2011*, held on October 12-15, 2011 at the Bank of Italy, and then in publications as BAFFIGI (2013) (first circulated in the Bank series of Economic History Working Paper in that same October 2011).

Then, you can imagine the further impression, when Vecchi made us read Fenoaltea's (2008a) own reflections on the limits of GDP. In this short text, written in Italian on a non-academic publication (and thus not included in the list of his works), Fenoaltea – showing the best of his sense of humour as well as his rhetoric skill (I ask the reader her pardon for translating Fenoaltea's Italian in my poor English) – denounced all the limitations of the GDP:

Our macroeconomic data are not immediate measures of objective reflections, like data in natural sciences could be. They are rather, as literary works, complex elaborations, linked to the specific cultural context, the specific historical moment in which they were born; as such, they capture not reality, but a specific aspect of reality, in the light of the values and prejudices of a given society (Fenoaltea 2008a).

Born in the interwar decades to “provide a practical solution to a specific problem” (that is, to fight mass unemployment and the Great Depression by means of countercyclical policies), GDP was not meant to measure the economy, and for sure nothing close to wellbeing (“a measure of wellbeing would share with GDP only production of final consumption goods”). Precisely for its original intent, GDP, as Fenoaltea (2018) would later recall in a humorous anti-austerity pamphlet, did not include (mostly female) unpaid work. “The measure of wellbeing, of growth, of the economy, is not the GDP. Then why is it adopted as if it were? First of all because of words, that control thinking” – it should rather be called “index of the productive effort that determines paid employment” (Fenoaltea 2008a). Despite the short article was addressing a non-academic audience, interested in contemporary, political debates – indeed, the main argument was what Fenoaltea (2019: 6) would later refer as the failure of *economists* – Fenoaltea (2008a) concluded it with a lamentation on his closer colleagues, who did not engage with, and even “violently refused” his proposal: “We care about long run growth, about wellbeing: let's jettison national accounting, let's think about measuring what we really want to measure. Who better than us to overcome GDP?” (Fenoaltea 2008a). Brilliant as most of his works, what makes this short article so peculiar is not the argument, but the author. How could a scholar, an intellectual like Fenoaltea, decide to devote almost an entire life to study something that he understood was fraught with such essential limitations? More generally: how could a scholar write economic histories – fight over them, in the way Stefano Fenoaltea fought what he understood as a “contact sport” (McCloskey 2020) – and at the same time, have the post-modern understanding of social sciences, condensed in his metaphor of the “campfire stories”? The metaphor, indeed, was already in Fenoaltea (2008a), but I can rely happily on Fenoaltea's prose here:

Economic history invites rigorous logic, parsimonious explanations, and a confrontation with evidence that is naturally quantitative: it is, or at least can be, Science in its style. Substance is another matter. Economics, history, the social “sciences” are not the cumulation of objective knowledge, but the contemporary form of the stories our distant forefathers would tell when they gathered around the campfire. Our theories, our facts – our stories, like their stories – are constructs that define and project an image of ourselves; they are shaped by fears and aspirations so deep we do not admit them to our conscious minds, by prejudices so strong we do not recognize them (Fenoaltea 2011: xix).

This defining ‘ambivalence’ of Stefano Fenoaltea, part of what made him such a unique scholar and individual, was strikingly brought to the fore, from the very first moment in which you “encountered” him in Tor Vergata – at least, in Vecchi’s course.

I really “met” Fenoaltea a couple of years later, during my master course, attending a very different class. It was labelled “European Economic History”, possibly for bureaucratic reasons;¹² but most likely, it was based on the courses Fenoaltea had taught across North-American campuses and colleges, covering various topics (and most of his own major, non-‘Italianist’ contributions), between the agricultural and the industrial revolutions. Also in this case, I still have the PDF of the notes he prepared for the course (Fenoaltea 2008b). The notes (apparently written in 1997: just after he had permanently moved back to Italy, to the University of Cassino, possibly signalling his intention of adapting this course to the new academic environment?) are opened by some “Methodology” that could be worth reproducing in such a paper:

The three purposes of this course:
 – provide information on the broad factual outline of European development;
 – provide training in applying economic analysis to real-world events;
 – provide education in the subject of historical development (using “educated” to describe one capable of recognising the intellectual context and heritage of specific works and interpretations; its opposite is “naïf”).

Recognized types of economic history (1978 JEH): Marxist, Annales, “new” (analytical: relies explicitly on mainstream economic theory) [v. “old” (descriptive)].

Other characteristic approaches to historical development:
 – “Scientific” v. not: what is its mark? Hypothesis-testing? Or passion for simplicity of explanation? Reasonable and unreasonable positivism (and prejudice);
 – determinism v. not: cultural, institutional. technological determinism; determinism v. path-dependence;

¹² It was a compulsory course in a Master Degree in “European Economy and Business Law”, as well as an elective for the Master Students in Economics, and as these two programmes, it was taught in English.

– belief in progress v. not: stages v. stasis (Karl Marx v. Adam Smith).
Whig history and not (Fenoaltea 2008b: 1).

This course was a very different experience, compared to the much larger audiences of bachelor students; closer, at least in numbers, to what he had been doing in the US. I really remember the lectures as theatre plays; they looked like a performing act, perfected over the years (and, we later realised, we had been attending the second-last season, before his formal retirement). Fenoaltea would always open the lecture of the day with a captivating line. My favourite was when, in a class mostly devoted to criticise – guess what? – historical series of GDP, Fenoaltea discussed why he considered some series of early-modern Italy to be grossly overestimated. Using the rate of urbanisation as a proxy for economic development was, to Fenoaltea, a blunder: living in towns was largely a matter of preferences, as testified by the very different nature of Northern European graveyards, and the necropolis that characterised since antiquity Southern Europe.¹³ I still remember the argument, but most of all, the attack: “Do you ever walk around cemeteries? It is rather an instructive activity...”. A fundamental component of Fenoaltea’s “effectiveness” as a teacher was, indeed, his personality – he was a character, in the artistic sense.¹⁴ No-one of the students who shared their memories with me failed to mention the Tuscan cigar, always held in his mouth, and his white short-hand polo shirts, matched with a grey gilet and a scarf. Entering the classroom and finding Fenoaltea, sitting over the desk in this outfit, staring at somewhere as if he was waiting for inspiration, really felt like meeting Laurence Olivier in the south-eastern periphery of Rome.

Fenoaltea’s lectures were, indeed, a unique experience. In the words of one of the course mates, “You felt like he was opening your head like a coconut; and what he spilled in it was not knowledge, but rather a method. It was rather obvious that his classes distilled decades of research, but this was not the most important part. Over the years, you might forget who Whig historians were, how the common fields worked, but you will never forget the cornerstones of his method... His classes were an endless epiphany”. Another former student told me how she remembers Fenoaltea more as a high-school teacher – one with whom you built an intimate relation-

¹³ There was no specific reading attached to this literature, but Appendix 3 of FENOALTEA (2008b), entitled “What do cities do?”, discussed the models by Persson and Hohenberg and Less.

¹⁴ Fenoaltea’s CV, just below “Teaching Experience”, featured a short section called “Teaching Effectiveness”: “for want of better evidence, the following are passages from recent student letters, the last three prompted by the sudden news that I was leaving Tor Vergata”.

ship over the years (“even though his course lasted just a few months!”); the way in which Fenoaltea focused not just on the notions, but stressed the intuition behind them – and then, the way in which a different interpretation of a fact had a much broader impact of our understanding of the past – made his classes “a breath of fresh air”.

From the beginning, Fenoaltea would denounce the simplistic way in which we had been taught, since primary school, that history was inevitably a story of progress – it did not change much, for Fenoaltea, if it was a linear, simple progress, or more sophisticated models, like Marxist ones, or the aforementioned stages of growth by Rostow. In the very first lesson, Fenoaltea told us that there were few scholars, including himself, who believed that history started with the Garden of Eden, and was then followed by an endless decline: that “European Economic History” course was meant to make this inherent truth self-evident – not by chance, the first reading was Fenoaltea (2006b) on economic decline.

He would not be scared of leaving unanswered issues he considered crucial, but for which he felt unable to give an answer. One, in particular, occurred several times: the negative correlation between economic growth and the length of the working day. How is it possible that we human beings happen to be so much richer than past generations of humans, but nonetheless, we keep working so long (even longer) hours? As the true aristocratic he was, his point of reference were those who could afford to never work at all; but he would remind us that labour meant effort, pain, as in the Latin etymology – “the sweat of your brow” occurred several times in his classes.¹⁵ He possibly developed these thoughts in his year at the Institute of Advanced Studies (1995-1996), when, he told us, he was suddenly exposed to anthropology: for sure, some of the salient parts of his course were the first classes, devoted to works such as Boserup (1965) and Sahlins (1972),¹⁶ in which we learned how the transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture had not improved, but rather diminished the wellbeing of the majority, forced to work longer hours for less food.

This leads me to another puzzling component of Fenoaltea’s teaching. In those years, many of us students – born in Italy just at the time in which the country had started its decline (Felice and Vecchi 2015), and enrolled

¹⁵ Once, he attributed to his understanding of the different nature of intellectual and physical labour the intuition behind the multi-prized FENOALTEA (1984): apparently, in a period of stress in which he was not able to write effectively, he had realised that the same stress did not impede him from fixing his car.

¹⁶ On the other hand, while making us read also Karl POLANYI (1944) (only marginally more popular than Boserup in Italian economics departments), Fenoaltea taught us that he was wrong – capitalism, he believed, has always existed.

in a School of economics just at the beginning of the longest recession in the country's history – had hard times, if not understanding, developing a passion for the orthodox economic theory we were taught in most classes. Most courses, we felt, were not providing us with the intellectual background, necessary to understand the issues we faced every day in the news and the outer world. One would not immediately imagine Fenoaltea representing an exception to this situation. Even after his critical reflections of cliometrics (Fenoaltea 2019; 2020), Fenoaltea seemed always to consider economic theory – or at least, some economic theory¹⁷ – the only thing that resisted his postmodernist understanding of the social sciences. In his classes, Fenoaltea showed us how few, sharp theoretical tools could be used to reinterpret most human history: the “passion for simplicity” mentioned at the beginning of his notes was, after all, a passion for the economics he had learned in his graduate years.¹⁸ When, as a doctoral student, I asked his opinion about the plausibility of a sudden, sizeable jump I estimated in the Italian labour share in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Fascist regime, he immediately referred me to “The Ricardian Model of Trade” developed in Appendix 2 of Fenoaltea (2011). On the other hand, his classes finally gave us back the reality we were looking for when enrolling to the School of Economics: contrary to some of the models we had been taught in other courses, Fenoaltea's logic did not hid, but rather brought economic reality to the fore (something that, he told us, his US students fell too: “after all this economics, the *economy*, finally!”).

For us – for me for sure – Stefano was too distant, too bright, for being a “model”, or even a source of inspiration. He was a myth, one of those quick-tempered Greco-Roman deities; or, in the biblical language he liked, a prophet. Even his wonderful irony, mentioned in all the obituaries dedicated to him, while creating a human connection and empathy, most of the times resulted too brilliant, multilingual and multicultural, for us to reply – sometimes even to fully enjoy it. Those who attended his master course felt privileged, but almost no-one dared choosing him as a supervisor. Still, we loved him – if I can dare using the same word of his *Doktorbruder* Deirdre McCloskey (2020: 394).¹⁹ Mine was a biased sample, of course: Fenoaltea

¹⁷ According to FELICE (2020: 405), “the 19th century, Ricardian economics”.

¹⁸ Indeed, in FENOALTEA (2020: 11), he declared to have only two “strong beliefs”: “I believe in the power of human logic, in our capacity for error-free deduction (Descartes be blessed); and I believe in the human aversion to work, to effort, to ‘the sweat of our brows’. The one allows you to develop the ineluctable implications of the other: the discipline that does so, that investigates what we call ‘rational choice’ (as if it could be anything else) is what we call ‘economics’”.

¹⁹ I consider a proof of this attachment that, after almost ten years, no one of those

was definitely “difficult, proud, *aristocratico*”, as stressed by the same McCloskey (2020: 393). He came from very different institutions to an Italian public university (and, as a result of his early life as a son of an ambassador, he was aware that also “his high culture – novel, poetry, and so forth – was French, not either as one might have expected English or Italian”); he taught a discipline that was not immediately useful, and he did it in a very demanding way. Not everyone could love him. Still, he created a connection in those who met him as a teacher, something we felt distinctly with Aurora Iannello, his last PhD student at the University of Turin, when I drove her to his funeral. Despite Fenoaltea’s “grouchy” first impression, you would always find him in his office at Tor Vergata, and his door was always open, even to the student who dared to just walk by, hoping in a random conversation. After the end of the course, when exam results had been published, a group of us students went together to Fenoaltea’s office, to say goodbye and thank him for the course (something I am not sure we had done previously, or did later). He concluded this brief, polite chat with the following sentence: “It is true, after all, you students are like hamsters: as soon as you grow fond of them, you have to say goodbye”. He definitely loved his students back, in his own way.

Luckily, for me, that was just an *arrivederci* – and I will always be grateful for that opportunity to the Bank of Italy (where I met him at conferences and workshops, and eventually spent few weeks as a visiting, having the chance to meet him daily) and the Associazione per la Storia Economica (ASE). Eventually, Fenoaltea was also going to be my tutor at the Fondazione Einaudi – he still was in September 2020. During his cigar pauses, walking around Villa Hüffer – where, until very recently, the Economic History Unit of the Bank was based, and he had a desk – I did my best to “humanise” the deity-Fenoaltea of my “Tor Vergata” years. For sure, in those years, Fenoaltea showed me how he could be affectionate to a young scholar, again in a way out of the ordinary. If you sent him anything, he would read every single line. You could tell, because he would not simply annotate every page (providing you, on top of the scholarly comments, with a priceless copy editing): he would physically walk into your office, and personally explain you his comments, one by one. He did the same to many young scholars he did not know personally, by creating and leading workshops such as the “cliometric-style” sessions of the ASE Annual Assemblies, and the monthly “Eternal City Economic History

I contacted in the days before the Symposium failed to find some time to share their memories with me, even though most of them did not pursue a research career, and with the exception of Papadia, none of them studied economic history since.

Workshop”²⁰ – “the acronym, ECEHW, is pronounced like a sneeze”, as he loved to say. Both workshops rules were that speakers could talk for less than five minutes, while the audience had to carefully read all drafts in advance. I cannot tell, given that I met him very late, why he ended up supervising so few graduate students: whether he fully developed these aspects of his character in old age,²¹ and was too ‘intimidating’ for students to approach him as an advisor; or possibly, whether he changed institution too often, and graduate students might have been discouraged by his difficulty in getting tenure. Whatever the reason, Stefano Fenoaltea did not need to be your advisor, nor much time, to make you passionate about economic history, and to leave a distinct, unforgettable mark on your life.

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²⁰ The workshop, launched in the months in which Fenoaltea worked on his *Spleen*, was aimed at gathering economic historians from all the Roman universities, to promote exchange between different approaches. The workshop is still running (coordinated by Federico Barbiellini-Amidei, Daniela Felisini, and myself), and has recently been named after Stefano Fenoaltea.

²¹ For sure, the reader will find a very similar testimony of Fenoaltea’s generosity towards young scholars in FELICE (2020: 401), who also mentions Anna Missiaia.

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