

Anxiety and Authority

Erasmus's Dialogue with Italian Humanism

by Alessandro Bonvini, MA (KU Leuven)

28 January 2026
6pm

Ágnes-Heller-Haus
1st floor, SR 6

κοσμοῦ επ τῇ φυλαῖ
κῆ, κῶναιορ δῆ, πιώμτε
θυκηρ πγλύποδα φα
γώμ ὁ μιογλύκης ὀμόρ
τέθυκηρ Αἰχύλω γρά,
φοντὶ ἐωιστέπλωκε χε
λώνη. Σοφοκλῆς ράβα
φαγώμ ταφυλῆς πνι.
γεισ τέθυκηρ κωνερ οἱ
κατά δράκης, εύριστί/
δηρ ἔχωγηρ τὸν θεῖον
ειτι λαπιέντε εἰσε. Ετ
ονιά bibens mortuus
ειτ. Aeschylo scriben/
focatus veriit. Canes



Debates on Italy's influence on Erasmus of Rotterdam point to a fundamental ambiguity in his relationship with Italian humanism, shaped less by simple imitation or rejection than by productive tension. This talk explores that dynamic through Erasmus's engagement with Angelo Poliziano in the *Adagiorum Chiliades* (Basel, 1536).

Poliziano offers a paradigmatic model of philological excellence that Erasmus both adopts and seeks to surpass. Erasmus portrays him as a heroic restorer of Greco-Latin learning, praised for textual emendation and bilingual mastery, and uses his work to frame a broader narrative of the revival of Greek studies from Italy to northern Europe. At the same time, by defending Poliziano against his critics, Erasmus appropriates his authority in order to present himself as Poliziano's rightful successor. Drawing on Harold Bloom's concept of the 'anxiety of influence,' I argue that the *Chiliades* become the arena in which Erasmus fashions himself as a *Politianus alter*, completing and ultimately transcending his Florentine model.