# Why ancient drama speaks to our time: An interview with Joel Christensen and Paul O'Mahony of *Reading Greek Tragedy Online*

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The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting social, political and economic crisis have had an impact on every feature of human society, including artistic and cultural life.

The series *Reading Greek Tragedy Online*, produced by the Center for Hellenic Studies and the Kosmos Society at Harvard University, arose out of this crisis.

Its co-producers, classical scholar Joel Christensen and actor/director Paul O'Mahony, responded to the tragedy and loss of the pandemic—and the necessary closure of performance venues—by staging a series of online performances and discussions of, to borrow a phrase of Aristotle, "the most tragic" works in literature.

The series brings together leading classical scholars and actors to discuss and perform excerpts from Greek drama. The series, created during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, and continuing through the mass protests against police violence of 2020, the 2020 election and the January 6 coup attempt, is not afraid to explore the contemporary relevance of Greek drama and the parallels between these works, written two and a half millennia ago, and events of our own time.

*Reading Greek Tragedy Online* has produced over 50 episodes, including all the existing works of Greek tragedy. The performances have been viewed by thousands of people all over the world, from all walks of life.

The works of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides are regarded as being among the most important literature ever produced.

Greek drama is the predecessor of modern forms of artistic performance such as theater, movies and television. But it also has enduring artistic significance in itself, speaking to both the human condition in general and the specific contemporary themes of war, political crisis, democratic rights and the mistreatment of refugees and other oppressed people.

Joel Christensen is a Professor at the Department of Classical Studies at Brandeis University. He is the author of *The Many-Minded Man: "The Odyssey," Psychology, and the Therapy of Epic*.

Paul O'Mahony is the director of the Out of Chaos Theatre in the UK and has been involved in theatre for over 15 years as an actor, writer, director and producer.

The entire catalog of *Reading Greek Tragedy Online* is available for free on the series' website.

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