This paper aims to analyze the stylistic import of the Greek adjective ἀλγεινός, ‘painful’, and the fortunes it partly shared with ἄλγος, the poetic noun from which it derives. Bound to the Homeric precedent ἀλεγεινός possibly through folk etymology, ἀλγεινός belonged originally to the lexicon of the tragedy. The word was, in fact, initially rare in medicine and prose, but gained prominence in set phrases over time. As is the case for its ancestor ἄλγος, it is preserved in Hellenistic poetry, for instance as a useful alternative to ἀλεγεινός, but was shunned as a last resource by post-Hippocratic physicians, who—until the Late Antiquity—preferred adjectives with fewer poetic or sentimental connotations. Starting from the fourth century, a tally of literary texts and epigraphs yields a very complex picture: from a resurgence in the work of Quintus of Smyrna, to its total disappearance in the epic poetry of Nonnus of Panopolis.