It has been argued that on a linguistic level, Greek did not possess the notion of jealousy (Konstan). Despite disagreement from Sanders and Sissa, it is in large part true that jealousy, a “complex” feeling, did not possess a unique identifier at the height of the 5th century BC. Nevertheless, while ζῆλος is not documented in Homeric epic, perhaps because of a degree of censure toward a base feeling, it can be found circulating in classical literature, starting with Hesiod. In contrast with the focus and outlook of recent research, which is less attentive to etymology, in this essay, I plan to reconstruct the semantic range of the noun ζῆλος and its radicals in classical tragedy. Methodical research reveals that ζῆλος continues to be an infrequent lexical choice in tragedy (6x), and it is reasonable to suspect that there is often a margin of stylistic markedness. On a semantic level, it seems to center more around the idea of admiration, affective desire, and eventual attainment of a good or a situation, rather than irascibility, underlying the Homeric use of ζηλήμων (*Od.* V 118) and δύσζηλος (*Od.* VII 307).

In general, tragic poets found it easy to shift ζῆλος and, above all, the verb ζηλόω into the ambit of the ideal and when necessary the pathetic μακαρισμός, with the meaning of “to consider happy,” and with different aims and intentions from envy. It appears completely impossible to assign the modern sense of jealousy to any term from this lexical family. The reason for this can be found in part in the inflexible *ethos* of these aristocratic mythological figures, an *ethos* reluctant to tolerate change, weakness, or compromise, but also in every aspect of ζῆλος understood as the emulation of a model other than oneself.