The term ζῆλος, meaning ‘emulation’ or ‘jealousy’, can be classified amongst those lexical innovations found in the language of Hesiod rather than in epic works. Its use is avoided in the Homeric poems, but its existence can be inferred by the presence of two derivatives: δύσζηλος and ζηλήμων, which can each be found a single time in the Odyssey. According to Glenn Most, instead of invoking the argument of Hesiod’s chronological posteriority, one should instead focus on the differences, in terms of both theme and audience, that existed between Homeric epic and the Hesiodic corpus. The key distinction is the latter’s realism, as feelings such as envy or jealousy, being intrinsically negative attributes, would be banished from the lofty realm of heroic epic.

This contribution will add further nuances to the debate . First of all, I will focus attention on what was most likely the original meaning of ζῆλος, i.e. ‘emulation’, rather than ‘jealousy’. Even when afforded this meaning, the term is likely to have encountered an *a priori* rejection by an aristocratic audience. They would have been instinctively hostile to the social mobility implicit in any form of emulation in which neighbor imitates neighbor (Op. 23–24). A kind of social and political prejudice can therefore be added to the idealistic censorship through which art excludes the real world’s grosser or more depraved language, a prejudice which is overturned with proud self-awareness by Hesiod himself. Furthermore, it could be suggested that such a prejudice might lead to branding a word as vulgar or colloquial, often resulting in such ‘displeasing’ terms only being accepted in their derivative forms. Finally, the observation that those *Homeric hymns* which are believed to be of continental origin (*Hymn to Demeter, Hymn to Apollo*) contain the other oldest attestations of the etymological family of ζῆλος, provides further data in favor of the possibility of the existence of a western poetic tradition that deviates from the Ionian tradition.