Textual and lexical problems would leave this verse of four words entirely unintelligible but for a gloss (EM 377.37) that defines δρόσοι as lion cubs while also restoring the λε of <λε-όντων missing from all manuscripts. The first two words as printed above follow a conjecture by Wellauer, condemned by Wecklein to his archive of less probable conjectures, still acknowledged as the most common choice of editors a generation after Wecklein, sporadically accepted even later, now generally ignored in editions and commentaries but recently espoused in a brief plea by Garvie. It is the purpose of this note to support that reading on the grounds, first of all, that it yields good sense and, secondly, that the reasons for dismissing it are not valid.

Detailed, albeit selective, reviews of earlier arguments on the crux have been presented by several others, so another one will not be attempted here. Defense of δρόσοις λεπτοῖς, however, necessitates a preliminary assessment of the problems and credentials of what has in effect become the orthodox reading: δρόσοις ἀέπτοις. This is itself a conjectural artifact that approximates several MSS readings—δρόσοισιν ἀέπτοις (VF), δρόσοισιν ἀέλπτοις (Μ) or δρόσοις ἀέλπτοισι (Τ)—without perfectly matching any of them. A scholion in M that also records ἀέπτοις has been taken as confirmation of the original reading, although it is safer to see it as documenting an early but not necessarily original and correct reading. The dubious textual foundations for ἀέπτοις can not be stabilized by lexico-semantic considerations, for outside of this Aeschylean context and glosses thereon the word ἀέπτος is sparsely attested. It is present, by virtue of a slight and plausible emendation, at Aeschylus Supplices 908 and, again by virtue of modern

1) Wellauer 1823, ad loc.
2) Wecklein 1885, 146.
3) Lawson 1932, 114. Lawson did not himself accept it.
5) Garvie 1999, 58.
7) Accepted by Fraenkel (1950); Murray (1960); Page (1972); Thomson (1966); Bollack & de la Combe (1981).
8) So Fraenkel 1950.
emendation (ἄελπτοι to ἄεπτοι), in a Hesychian gloss that provides a fragment (213 Radt) of Aeschylus’ Proteus where ἄεπτοι is said to mean ἄεντοι and apparently equated with ἄσπτοι. As it happens, the Hesychian definition is appropriate to the context in Supplices, but it can not be accommodated in A. 141. There being no other occurrence of ἄεπτος (except where it is presented as if a by-form of the semantically intractable ἄεπτος), ἄεπτος in A. 141 must be recognized as a variant reading with no known meaning that is suitable. To that situation West responds with the expressed conviction that ἄεπτος is the correct reading, even while conceding that he does not know what it means and adding that perhaps it means ‘helpless’. The latter definition, like the debil offered by Diccionario Griego-Español (which treats ἄεπτος in two separate entries), would be appropriate to the context, but it lacks any independent support and in turn can afford no support for the reading that is purported to document it. Given the overall textual instability and semantic uncertainty, a pragmatic reconsideration of the orthodox reading seems justified, particularly if an equally slight modification of the text might yield a meaning that is clear and congenial to the context. It is to that end that I propose a reassessment of δρόσοισι λεπτοῖς.10

A likely etiology for the MSS variants, essentially the same one offered by Wellauer, begins with the earliest phases of the text’s transmission.11 An original ΔΡΟΣΟΙΣ ΛΕΠΤΟΙΣ would produce the variants ΔΡΟΣΟΙΣΙΝ ΑΕΠΤΟΙΣ and ΔΡΟΣΟΙΣΙΝ ΑΕΛΠΤΟΙΣ, the latter perhaps resulting from attempts to restore the original Λ. Plausible factors contributing to the corruption of ΔΡΟΣΟΙΣΙΝ ΛΕΠΤΟΙΣ include optical confusion of Λ and Α, haplography arising from the exceptional triple occurrence of the sequence ΑΕ within the verse and ‘correction’ of a perceived violation of gender concord between δρόσοις (ι) (f.) and λεπτοῖς (m., or n.). Wellauer acknowledged the matter of gender, quite possibly vitiating his own case with a seemingly insouciant remark: in genere masculino vix quisquam, puto, haeredit.12 That sanguine assessment was soon belied by Blomfield’s ‘correction’ to λεπταῖς13 and later by Wecklein’s condemnation and the mainly tacit compliance with it by recent editors. In fact, though, whatever basis Wellauer himself might have had for his dismissal of the masculine gender as a problem, that dismissal is well-founded on several considerations which redundantly offer the possibility that there would be no real violation of concord in δρόσοισι λεπτοῖς.

9) LfgrE s.v.
10) Wellauer 1823.
11) This would obviate the objection of West (1999, 61) that corruption of λεπτοῖς to ἄεπτος would involve a change of accent mark.
12) Wellauer 1823, ad loc.