

## *Easy Virtue*

This poem was inspired by my Hellenist daughter's comment that I am a woman of easy virtue, because it takes so little for me to feel virtuous. She followed up the comment by giving me the following exegesis:

EXCELLENT on your virtuosity! Strength doesn't have the same Latin root as virtue, but one of the Latin words for strength/power/force (sometimes with an implication of violence) is vis (stem vir-, so is related to virus, which of course is a powerful critter; the violence/violation words are probably cognate), while the Latin for virtue is virtus. I don't know if they're cognate. In fact, I sort of remember that people just aren't sure. Virtus may be related to the word for man, vir (as Greek arete, which means virtue, is cognate with aner, the word for man). The underlying idea seems to be that the original virtue or excellence was physical courage, especially courage in battle. Manly stuff. But I don't think it's certain that vis is in the same family (or certain that it's not).

She was a woman of easy virtue  
a virtuoso on the virginal  
and a virtual virago  
battling the virulent  
claims of virility run amok.

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Her analysis of the poem:

Very cool! Virgo and virago are both related to vir. The ultimate meaning goes back to a word meaning the offshoot of a tree (so virga - switch - is related to all three). It's the same range of meanings as "scion" - which of course is also fundamentally the offshoot of a tree - thus the scion of a house is just like the old man (a hint at male parthenogenesis, perhaps?). Vir and virgo - man and maid (hmmm wonder if "maid" is from the same family as "man"). Virago is developed, I think, from vir - a mannish woman.