

The Chastising of the Jealous Man (Castila Gilos)

Ramon Vidal de Besalu

Table of Contents

<u>The Chastising of the Jealous Man (Castila Gilos)</u>	1
<u>Ramon Vidal de Besalu</u>	2

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I wish to tell you a tale
that I heard told by a minstrel
at the court of the wisest king
of any faith who ever lived,
the King of Castile, Lord Alfonso,
a man of hospitality, generosity,
wit, valor, courtesy
and great chivalric ability.
He was neither anointed nor consecrated:
but was crowned with worth,
and wisdom, and loyalty,
valor and prowess.
The king had assembled
many knights and many minstrels
at his court, and many powerful barons.
When the court was all gathered,
Queen Eleanor arrived.
One couldn't really see her at all,
for she came all enveloped in a mantle
of fine and beautiful silk cloth,
the kind that is called "cisclaton."
It was red with a band of silver,
and there was a golden lion embroidered on it.
She bowed to the king, and then she sat down
some distance away from him.
Right then a jongleur came quietly
toward the generous, noble king,
and said, "O king of worth, emperor,
I have come here to you
and I ask you, please, that my tale
may be heard and heeded."
The king called out, "My love is lost
to anyone who speaks before
this man has finished all that he wants to say."
Then the prudent minstrel began:
"Noble king, adorned with worth,
I have come to you from my lodgings
in order to tell and recount to you
an adventure which happened
in the land where I've come from
to an Aragonese vassal.

The Chastising of the Jealous Man (Castila Gilos)

You know well who this vassal is;
he is named Alfonso de Barbastre.
Hear now, my lord, what a disaster
came to him through his jealousy.
He had a beautiful and charming wife,
and she never played him false
with any man. She wouldn't even listen
to the entreaties of any man in the country,
except one, and therefore she was suspected.
This man was one of her own household,
who held a fief from her husband.
Love overpowered him so much
that from time to time he would entreat
Lady Elvira, the wife of his lord.
This made her very angry in heart,
but she decided to endure his entreaties
rather than denounce him to her husband
for something that might lead to his destruction.
He was esteemed as a knight,
and her husband honored him greatly,
for in good chivalry
he had no equal in all Aragon..."
"Then," said the king, "this must have been
the courteous Bascol de Cotanda!"
"Yes, my lord. Now hear the rest,
and how he fared with the fair Lady Elvira.
Nothing of what a man desires
could he win or obtain from her,
until finally the husband found out.
For his knights told him,
all together, in full council:
'By God, what foolishness
Sir Bascol is committing! Every day
he entreats and beseeches Milady,
and I tell you that she accepts it so well
that you'll be a cuckold for certain.'
'God help me,' he answered,
'if I wouldn't be blamed for it,
you'd all be burned or hanged!
This is something quite unbelievable!
You are all saying it from envy,
because of his surpassing worth and intelligence.
May God never save my head,
if anyone ever tells me tales
about what Lady Elvira does
and I don't hang him by the neck,
for he won't find any protection.'
Then a knight spoke up,
a vile, wicked, and frivolous man:
'My lord, when you've finished your talking
and mocking and threatening,

The Chastising of the Jealous Man (Castila Gilos)

I'll be glad to tell you how you can
find out for sure about all this,
whether Milady loves or not.
Pretend that you want to go help
the king of Leon in a war.
If you can drag Sir Bascol away
from this land and take him with you,
you can exact the penalty on my body:
I deliver it here to you publicly."
("And I accept it," said the king.)
"With that, the council dispersed.
One of those who heard this
ran, by the orders of his lord,
to the lodgings of Sir Bascol.
'Sir Bascol de Cotanda,' he said,
'my lord greets you and asks you
if he can have you with him in the morning,
for he wants to go to give help in war
to the king of Leon, without fail.'
'So help me God,' he replied,
'I'll go with him most willingly.'
Then he whispered softly and quietly,
'I won't do it at all; I can't.'
The messenger, full of wickedness,
returned to report to his lord:
'My lord, I've been to see that traitor of yours,
and he says that he'll go with you.
He says he will, but he certainly won't:
I'm quite sure that it would be painful to him.'
Nevertheless, the lord wasn't upset,
when he heard that his knight
made no objection to going with him.
'The one who should be afraid
is the man who put himself in my power
and delivered himself to me to be put to death.
Nothing can save him from death
if Sir Bascol goes on the expedition;
he won't change my decision
by promises or prayers.'
Then he took to the road,
saying that he was going to see Sir Bascol,
whom Love was making suffer and lament;
and as he lamented, he often said
with deep sighing, night and day,
'Love, you make me act most foolishly,
for I'm treating my lord in such a way
that if he could only find it out,
nothing could save my life.
And he surely will be able to find it out,
for I won't go, not for anything,
where my lord wants me to go.

The Chastising of the Jealous Man (Castila Gilos)

Still, it hasn't been his way
to gather an army that I don't go with,
or engage in a battle without taking me.
If I say no this time,
he'll surely know the reason,
I think, why I have stayed behind.
But I know what I can do:
I'll tell him that I've been sick,
and that I'm not better yet,
and so the doctor advised me
to have some blood let.'
So he had his arms bound,
and his head wrapped tightly with a bandage,
and said that God should give him no joy
if he ever went there, unless he was forced.
For Love, which made him sail close to the wind,
had seized his will and driven him mad.
Just then, Lord Alfonso
called out loudly at the gate,
and it was quickly opened for him.
He came inside and Sir Bascol greeted him:
'My lord, may God Who mounted
the cross for us give you aid!'
'Yes, and to you, Bascol,' said the lord,
'may God give you joy and health.
But tell me, what has happened to you?'
'By Christ my lord, a great sickness.'
'So what will happen? I want to go
on an expedition. Will you not come along?'
'My lord, may God and my faith assist me,
you can see well that I can't go there,
and it troubles me greatly, God save me.'
'And me also' said the lord,
'Sir Bascol, twice as much, by my faith,
since I can't change my plans and not go.
I must be off; I commend you to God.'
'And I, my lord, commend you to His mother.'
With that, the good lord
went away, and the knight stayed behind.
Early in the morning on the next day,
the lord had his horses saddled,
took his leave without delay,
and went out of the castle at once,
furious and full of ill will
because Sir Bascol stayed behind.
He came to a castle
about two leagues away,
and as soon as the day was done,
he saddled his horse,
and mounted up, taking
a young valet along behind him.

The Chastising of the Jealous Man (Castila Gilos)

He took to the road
and returned straight to Barbastre,
saying that he would give his wife
bad medicine that night, if he could.
He spurred his horse
and rode at full speed until he came
quietly up to a small door in the castle,
under his wife's chamber.
He left his horse with his valet,
saying 'Wait here for me, my friend.'
Then he stepped forth
and knocked quietly with his hand.
When the good lady, with a clear conscience,
heard the knock at the door
she said, 'Girl, get up,
get up at once and go see who it is,
girl, for I'm not expecting any
knight or anyone else...
Ah!' she said, 'may God forsake me, if
I don't think it is my lord,
who has come back to test my relationship
with Sir Bascol, since he didn't follow him today.'
He knocked a second time:
'Get up at once, girl!'
She said, 'I won't wait any longer,
'but I'll go see who is there right now.'
She opened the door at once,
and as soon as he came in, he said
'Girl, you've made me wait here too long;
why didn't you come to open the door for me?
Didn't you know I was coming?'
'No, my lord, may God give me good fortune.'
Then the lord of Barbastre
approached, pretending to be a lover,
and went straight up to the bed.
He knelt at once,
saying, 'Beautiful, courteous lady,
here is your heart's friend,
and, by God, don't take it amiss
that, because of you, I failed to accompany
my lord, for which he is angry.
The love which oppresses me
did not let me go elsewhere,
and leave you, be separated from you,
and I have sighed many times for it.'
'But tell me, my lord, who are you?'
'Madame, do you not know me?
It's me, your love,
Bascol, who has loved you so long.'
The lady rose at once
to her feet, and recognized him:

The Chastising of the Jealous Man (Castila Gilos)

it was her husband, but that did him no good,
for she called out as loud as she could,
'By Christ! You traitor! No attack
have you ever made that will bring you more trouble,
for you'll be hanged at once,
and nothing can save you from death.'
She grabbed his hair and began to pull
as hard as she could, with both hands.
But 'woman's strength is vain,'
and soon tires after great effort,
and 'with a heavy club gives tiny blows.'
When she had drubbed him enough
and beaten him and humiliated him,
without him ever striking a blow in return,
she went out of the room and closed the door,
leaving her husband behind, joyful
as if he felt no pain at all,
for it seemed to him that she was faithful.
She didn't stop until she reached
the room of the knight
who was so tormented by Love,
and he found what he most desired:
she took him, and drew him to herself,
and told him all that had happened to her.
'Handsome, courteous friend,' she said,
'now I will give you willingly
what you have always desired.
Love wants it, and permits it to me.
Let's leave the buck on his rope,
at least until day,
and we'll take our pleasure!
And so they stayed, with great delight,
both in one bed, until the morning bells rang
and the lady arose. She went out,
and summoned everyone
from their lodgings, and told them her story:
'Hear now' she said, 'how that scoundrel
Sir Bascol tried to deceive me.
Last night he came knocking at the door,
pretending to be my lord.
He came in like a traitor,
approached my bed, and wanted to dishonor me.
But I knew how to defend myself,
and I've locked him in my bedroom.'
Everyone gave thanks to God.
'Lady,' they said, 'it has turned out very well
for you, provided that he dies at once.
A traitor must not be allowed to live.'
They went at once to arm themselves,
and ran at once to their lodgings.
Then would you have seen some putting on hauberks,

The Chastising of the Jealous Man (Castila Gilos)

others grabbing doublets and shields,
headgear, caps, and pointed helmets,
others taking up lances and darts.
At once they came from all directions,
candles and torches burning.
When Lord Alfonso heard these people
coming toward him, all armed,
he bolted the doors from inside,
and cried out, 'My lords, stop!
By God, the Son of Holy Mary,
I am your master, Lord Alfonso!'
But they battered
the doors so violently
that the wood and iron couldn't resist.
When he heard them breaking in
he jumped quickly on a ladder
and climbed up to a loft,
throwing the ladder away.
When they had completely smashed the door,
they came toward the bed with their weapons
and struck it as hard as they could,
for they all thought that he was there.
When they didn't find him in it,
they were all angry and furious,
and the lady was saddened in heart.
While they were searching around for him,
she glanced up at the loft,
and saw, off to one side, the ladder
which her husband had thrown aside.
She came back and called to the household,
'Gentlemen, I've spotted the traitor.
See, he's up in that loft!
Get the ladder and climb up!
Cut him into little pieces
before he has a chance to say a word!'
Lord Alfonso cried out at once,
'Gentlemen, what kind of people are you?
Doesn't anyone recognize Lord Alfonso,
your lawful master?
It's me, so help me God!
Don't kill me, in the name of God!'
The lady sighed,
and as he was coming down, she cried out,
when everyone recognized her husband,
she cried, wept, groaned and called out
'Sweet my lord, how could you dare
to make such a foolish attempt?
No man born of woman was
ever in such danger of death.
Sweet, noble, generous lord,
for the love of God, pardon me.

The Chastising of the Jealous Man (Castila Gilos)

Please, let me find mercy from you,
my lord, for I didn't recognize you,
so help me the Son of Holy Mary!
On the contrary, I thought
you were Sir Bascol de Cotanda.'
'God save me,' he replied,
'you have done me no shame or harm
for which you need to ask forgiveness.
Rather I, the falsest man,
the greatest traitor who ever was born,
dear lady—pardon me!
For I have deceived myself
and brought shame upon your person!
Wrongly and foolishly
I have hated my own good knight.
It is through the fault of slanderers
that all this torment came to me
and this misadventure!
Dear lady, noble and pure,
pardon me, for the love of God,
and please, let me find mercy from you,
let our two hearts be one!
I promise you that never for any reason
will I believe what slanderers say about you,
and there will be no adversary
able to cause trouble between us.'
'Now,' she said, 'send word of that to Sir Bascol,
my lord, by your messenger.'
'I will do it willingly and joyfully,
since I see that it would please you, my lady.'
'Yes, my lord, and do still more:
you will go to see Sir Bascol
and tell him that you stayed here
on his account, waiting until he was cured.'
He left the room then,
and did what she commanded.
He went to see Sir Bascol de Cotanda,
and sent him his knights
for never had such great joy
come to a man from his own harm.
And shall I tell you something more?
He arrived at the lodgings of his vassal
Sir Bascol and ran straight to his bed.
He was lying, quiet and peaceful,
with the windows closed.
'Bascol,' he said, 'how are you feeling?'
'By Christ, my lord, I am not well,
and I'm surely in need of health.
But how is it that you have come back so soon?'
said Sir Bascol to his lord.
'Bascol, it is for love of you

The Chastising of the Jealous Man (Castila Gilos)

that I stayed, and will stay:
I will not go on any expedition
unless you come with me.'
'My lord, I'll get better, God willing,
and then I will do for you willingly
all that you wish.'
Lord Alfonso returned to his lodgings,
and was very pleased for his misfortune.
That was a good thing, God help me,
for he had suspected a lady
who had done nothing wrong.
But when it came to deception, she
was much smarter than he, in my opinion.
And so, noble king, I pray you,
both you and my lady the queen,
before whom worth and beauty bow,
that you forbid jealousy
in all the married men
who are in your land.
For women have such power,
yes they surely have such power,
that they can make a lie seem true
and the truth seem false,
when they want, since they have such subtle minds.
Let men avoid the role of the jealous husband,
so that they will not always be in doubt,
and sorrowful and angry.
He often sighs and laments
who is ruled by jealousy.
He won't do anything that is good,
for in all the world there is no more harmful
disease, my lord, than jealousy,
nor more foolish or more shameful.
It makes a man less hospitable,
and he entertains less often, inviting fewer guests,
for he's always afraid it will bring trouble."
"Minstrel, I consider this story good
and charming and fine,
and so are you who told it to me.
I wish to give you sure proof,
so that you may know truly
that the story pleased me.
I declare that, among us, the story will always
be known as The Chastising of the Jealous Man."
When the king had finished speaking,
there was in the court no baron
or knight, no damsel or young gentleman,
not a single man or woman,
who hadn't enjoyed hearing it,
who didn't praise and approve it,
and each one was eager

The Chastising of the Jealous Man (Castila Gilos)

to learn The Chastising of the Jealous Man.