EL CONDE LUCANOR

I. About the author- Don Juan Manuel (1282-1349)

Nephew of King Alfonso the Wise, the Prince (Infante) don Juan Manuel played an important part in Spanish affairs during the first half of the 14th century. This haughty aristocrat, courtier and warrior was at the same time an extremely erudite man, an antiquarian with an *encyclopedic* mind. Writing on history or the exercise of knighthood or the culinary arts, he would digress eloquently on theology, astronomy and the natural sciences. More individualistic than any of his medieval contemporaries, he affixed his significance to everything he wrote and deposited his manuscripts in safety vaults.

II. *El Conde Lucanor*: sources, structure, content and its significance

The masterpiece of don Juan Manuel, *El Conde Lucanor* (also called *El libro de los ejemplos* and *El libro de Patronio*), is a collection of fifty tales largely from oriental sources. The work reveals his broad knowledge of the folklore of his native country (Spain) and of other nations as well, and acquaintance with tremendous number of Oriental, Greek, Latin and Christian books.

*El Conde Lucanor* was conceived as a moral treatise, a kind of handbook of practical ethics, yet in essence an anthology of short stories. Structurally, in each story the young noble, Count Lucanor, presents a problem to his advisor, Patronio. In each case Patronio solves the problem by recounting an exemplary tale (*ejemplo*) in the form of anecdotes, adventures or tales which illustrate his point of view. In the end the moral instruction was clearly indicated. The appeal of the work lies not on the ethical, but on the fictional plane. These stories, some of the author’s own vintage, but more often adaptations or borrowings from folklore, from Pliny’s *Natural History,*
Aesop’s *Fables*, the *Panchatantra*, *The Arabian Nights*, *The Gospel according to St. Luke*, etc., all constitute a valuable anthology of world literature, which also became a source book for later writers including among others Cervantes, Calderón, La Fontaine, Hans Christian Anderson.

*El Conde Lucanor* has been considered not only as the first great work of Spanish prose fiction, but also the earliest European fiction written in the vernacular (the native language). In addition to its literary value, through this work don Juan Manuel did transmit the cultural heritage of Moors and Christians as well as much of the anonymous world of folklore.

III. **Analysis of Ejemplo XXXV:**

“De lo que aconteció a un mancebo que casó con un mujer muy fuerte y muy brava”

According to many critics, this text contains the plot of Shakespeare’s play *The Taming of the Shrew* (though perhaps not directly from the text itself).

1. Indicate the structure of the text
2. Describe the character of the young man: his background, his purpose of getting married with a very wild and unruly wife, how he made his wife become obedient under his commands, etc.
3. The significance of the moral lesson. Can you find another example from world literature?