I. About the author- Juan Ruiz, Archpriest of Hita (1283?-1350)

Juan Ruiz, a principal figure in medieval Spanish literature, is a poet whose life is little known but much has been said largely from references in the poem itself. He was probably born in Alcalá de Henares, and lived in Guadalajara and Toledo. The poet became Archpriest of Hita, and was, for reasons still unknown, imprisoned for 13 years by the Archbishop of Toledo. Some of the critics believe his imprisonment due to his writing of *El Libro de Buen Amor*, the only work of Juan Ruiz and regarded as one of the finest collections of verse in Spanish.

II. *El Libro de Buen Amor*: when was written and its manuscripts

The title “El Libro de Buen Amor”, defined by the scholar Ramón Menéndez Pidal (the book was used to called “El Libro de los Cantares”), is in the attempt of the author to distinguish “buen amor” (the love to God) from “loco amor” (the carnal love). Obviously, our writer seemed to pursue the second one.

It’s difficult to obtain the original version of the book, yet three medieval manuscripts have been conserved.

1) Gayoso (G): Corresponds to the first version of the book and seems to represent the version most close to the original regarding its linguistic aspect.

2) Toledo (T, 1330): Is a very imperfect copy of the original and it misses many stanzas from the beginning and the middle part.

3) Salamanca (S, 1343): Is the manuscript most extensive of the three and corresponds to the second version of the book. This manuscript incorporates some added materials which do not appear neither in G nor T.
III. Content, sources, metrics (style)

*El Libro de Buen Amor* is an extensive pome of 1709 stanzas with the miscellaneous character, that is, a broad spectrum of styles and subjects, including fables (fábulas), love stories, religious poetry, anticlerical satire (sátira), a mock of epic battle, and pastoral verse (serranas), just to name a few. Thus, its content is very heterogeneous: the religious in conjunction with the profane, the popular (low) and the learned (high). The poems contained in the LBA found their sources in popular poetry, fabliaux (French fables), Classical, Arabic, Jewish, Latin and French writings. According to Menéndez Pidal, the elements of which consists the book are as follows, 1) “Una novela picaresca de forma autobiográfica”. 2) “Una copiosa elección de fábulas, de origen oriental…… también de los fabliaux franceses” 3) “Una serie de digresiones morales, ascéticas y satíricas”. 4) “Una glosa del *Ars Amandi* de Ovidio y del *Pamphilus* (una comedia latina del siglo XII ), del que toma el episodio de don Melón y de doña Endrina”. 5) “Una serie de episodios alegóricos, como la batalla entre doña Cuaresma y don Carnal.” 6) Una serie de composiciones líricas.

The meter is sometimes Alexandrine (*cuaderna vía*: a stanza of 4 verses of 14 syllables, with consonant rhymes), but with an expressive scope not exercised by previous poets. The book represents the mixture of the “mester de clerecía” and the art of “juglaría”. Among the characters are Trotaconventos, the first great go-between of Spanish literature, Don Melón and Doña Endrina, surrounded by fruit and garden imagery in their Pamphilus-inspired love affair, the wise nun Doña Garoza with the Arabic name alluding to her as a “bride of Christ”, Pitas Payas, a career-oriented businessman with a smart wife and even the Archpriest himself as narrator in various guises, often as an unlucky lover in spite of help from several go-betweens (good and bad), in addition to the loving Don Amor and Doña Venus.
IV. Structure

*El Libro de Buen Amor* provides us a series of episodes interrelated and fairly organized. Through the autobiographic technique, the author participates directly in the text, sometimes, as an actor, other times, remains as a spectator. The Archpriest arranges diverse elements according to the continuity of the plot, in which he relates his “personal” mundane love affairs in successive episodes, other times, he makes a deviation (*digresión*) to introduce or insert a fable and other episode that forms an independent unity. In some occasions, what the writer does is to state a general thesis, which illustrates with a short story (*cuento*) and in the end is applied to the thesis. For instance, in those episodes narrated by 3rd person regarding don Carnal and doña Cuaresma, Juan Ruiz is present conversing with his characters. The lyric compositions inserted are used to make direct allusions to the moments of the story, or they are continuations of the narration.