

9. Vacillating Love – Juan Ruiz “The Book of Good Love” Juan Ruiz, *Libro de Buen Amor* (1330)

After an hour's drive from Madrid northeast on national route #2, we arrived in Guadalajara. As we left this city and went to the north, we reached a village called Hita at the foot of a small mountain (picture 1). When I was studying in Spain, I found out that the Medieval Festival of Hita (Festival Medieval de Hita) was held during the summer vacation, and I drove to the village with my friends.



【Picture 1: Hita】

I wanted to visit Hita by all means because Juan Ruiz, the author of a book I used for study in my Spanish literature course, “The Book of Good Love” (*Libro de Buen Amor*), lived in this village as a clergyman.

In general, stone buildings are well-kept in Spain, and we can easily imagine what it was like in the places that have strong connections to Spanish literature. Moreover, there are no advertisements plastered everywhere to destroy the rural scenes and spoil our pleasure. The Medieval Festival produces a literal and rural atmosphere. Watching the people walk around the village in unique costumes while munching roasted sardines, made us want to do the same (picture 2).

●Mystery of The Author

“*Libro de Buen Amor*” is a voluminous work which has more than 1,700 quatrains and is a representative work of the enlightenment literature in the medieval age. Juan Ruiz preaches to the common people about love. His themes vary from the glory to Christ and the Virgin Mary to advice on worldly love. In spite of his moral status as a priest, it can also be read as the story of his having been involved with many women. Most of what is written is probably fiction, but through this work we can have an interesting glimpse of everyday life in the 14th century.

This is the only work written by Juan Ruiz, and since there are few historical references to him, we do not know much about his background. It is not even certain if the author's name really was "Juan Ruiz". Surely in the following 19 quatrains, there is a phrase "yo, Juan Ruiz", but this is such a common name that it is possible the author has made up a pen name.

If his name is common, he would show his character, and "Archpriest of Hita" (Arcipreste de Hita) would be the one in this work. I wonder if Hita represents the actual village of Hita and if he was actually a priest there. Or, is it also made up by the author? This is also a mystery.

I imagined a large village from the name "Archpriest" (arcipreste), but I found that this village was really quite small as I walked around following the festival procession. According to the investigation by a researcher of Spanish Medieval Literature in Italy, Margherita Morreale (1990), there were many Jewish immigrants in Hita, and they said Hita was a very important place.



【Picture 2: Festival Medieval de Hita】