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## CLOTHING IN *CELESTINA*: HOW IT ADVANCES THE PLOT<sup>1</sup>

### RESUMEN

El propósito de este ensayo es ver de cerca cómo ciertos artículos de ropa o de adorno en una obra literaria pueden ayudarnos a descubrir su uso sutil para avanzar el progreso de la trama. Efectivamente, estos artículos ofrecerán al lector perspicaz de *Celestina* unas posibilidades interpretativas que esclarecerán cómo los autores utilizan las motivaciones de los personajes para impulsar hacia adelante la trama. Los cuatro artículos seleccionados para análisis son: el manto de Celestina (el que tiene y el que quiere), el hilado de Celestina, el cordón de Melibea, y la cadenilla de oro de Calisto, dado a Celestina como premio por sus servicios. Estos combinarán dentro de la estructura de la obra, en maneras sorprendentes, para efectuar las tragedias finales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Celestina*, ropa, mantón, cordón, cadenilla de oro

### ABSTRACT

I propose to argue that a closer look at articles of clothing or of decorative use in a work of literature may be an aid to a better understanding of how they are used in subtle ways to

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anticipate plot movement and/or reveal the not so obvious goals of the wearer. They in fact open up for the alert reader of *Celestina* interpretive possibilities that will offer a more complete understanding of how the progress of the text's plot is fashioned by the author or authors. The four items chosen for analysis are Celestina's cloak (present and future) and the yarn she sells, Melibea's sash and the gold chain with which Calisto rewards the services of Celestina. These will combine in the work's structure to effect in unseen ways the final tragedies.

KEYWORDS: *Celestina*, clothing, cloak, sash, gold chain

## I. PREAMBLE

Articles of clothing mentioned in any literary text can silently signify social class, economic power, self-awareness and more. But an article of clothing or adornment can also—semantically speaking—acquire additional nuances as the plot progresses. The perspicacious reader will take these articles of clothing or adornment into account better to appreciate the structural and symbolic importance assigned to them by the authors. I believe this to be particularly true in the case of *Celestina*, a work in which the authors develop new meanings and functions of selected articles of clothing to further the plot movement until these once-innocent items become deeply predictive of the tragedies that befall their wearers. *Celestina* is a work with no third person narrator framing the progress of the plot, thus leaving all interpretation and understanding to its readers. In what follows, we will be observing how particular items of clothing in *Celestina* reveal in varied ways meanings that are not front-and-center in the work's dialogues: these affect emotional patterns, secrets, enhancement of characterizations, the structural building blocks and much ironic foreshadowing of events yet to come.

It will be useful at the outset to list the varied items of clothing, cloth and adornments—many of which will not be other than what they are—and signal in boldface a selection which will be analyzed for their role in the deeper understanding of what is transpiring in the minds of the characters. There are, naturally, general references to *ropa*, but also to specific items of clothing worn by Celestina, Melibea and Elicia. Calisto owns an elegant cape (*capa*) and a brocade doublet (***Jubón de brocado***), indicating his high social status. Centurio possesses a *capa harpada* and Sosia a *capa ratonada*: these indicate their lower social caste. Frequent mention is made of *tocas* (headware) and *gorgueras* (neckware). Black clothing for mourning is worn by Elicia, Tristán and Sosia and—according to Melibea—by the many who feel gratitude for the generosity of Calisto, after he has died. Areúsa's bed has sensual and inviting *sábanas*. Melibea wears a *camisa* (chemise or undergarment). Celestina's *haldas* (long skirts) frequently slow her down. Celestina eagerly desires a new ***manto*** (mantle). Both Pármemo and Celestina plan on Calisto providing them with a *saya* or *sayo*. Centurio had previously been given one by

Areúsa, along with shirts, a cape and armor. In terms of armor, Calisto possesses *coraças* (body armor). He will reward Celestina with a *cadena de oro* (gold necklace). The cowardly Pármemo prepares for danger by wearing lightweight *calças* and *borceguies* (pants and half boots). Celestina offers Pármemo and Sempronio *calças de grana* (fancy red pantaloons), thinking to appease their fury. Melibea's sash *cordón* figures most importantly, as does Celestina's yarn *hilado*.

## 2. CELESTINA'S *HILADO* – YARN

With so many cloths ascribed to nearly all of the work's characters, we must keep in mind that Celestina's brothels were also the base from which she plied her several offices: seamstress, perfume making, cosmetics, hymen restorer for young women, go-between and, as Pármemo says, “un poquito hechicera” (257).<sup>2</sup> The cover for all of these was her fame as a seamstress. Indeed, when we learn that under that guise many young females would come to her house (brothel) to sew and to fashion chemises and neck ruffs and many other items of clothing, the metaphor of sewing, threading needles and making garments to sell represents a common euphemism for what really was taking place: prostitution. Since Celestina was ever wont to befriend students, stewards and serving lads of clergymen, “a éstos vendía la sangre inocente de las cuytadillas” (258) and made good profits in her years of glory, now some two decades in the past.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Celestina's many kinds of threads for her seamstress trades also illustrate her casting a wide spider-like web over the young women of her town, as she boasts to Sempronio in Act 3: “Pocas vírgenes, a Dios gracias, has tú visto en esta cibdad que hayan abierto tienda a vender, de quien yo no haya sido corredora de su primer hilado” (298-299). There can be no mistaking the meaning of that which for she is famous and most proud.

The next mention of Celestina's *hilado* comes about when she is commissioned by Calisto to bring him into contact with the now inaccessible Melibea. The important ingredient in Celestina's strategy for gaining access to Melibea involves her yarn—*hilado*—into which, invoking Plutón, she believes she has introduced a venomous snake potion, trusting that it will make of Melibea a love-crazed woman: “(...) por la áspera ponçoña de las bívoras de que este azeyte fue fecho, con el qual unto este hilado (...) hasta que Melibea, con aparejada oportunidad que aya, lo compre” (309). And this yarn as a ruse

<sup>2</sup> All quotations can be found in the edition of *La Celestina*, edited and annotated by Peter E. Russell.

<sup>3</sup> Since Pármemo is remembering what went on when he was a mere lad, given into the care of Celestina by his mother, Claudina, his account narrates what went on in Celestina's past. However, she is now living in poverty, wearing ragged clothing and her bordello survives with a single girl, Elicia, still working as a prostitute. It is through Elicia's special friend and lover, Sempronio, that Calisto comes to know and employ Celestina.

to gain access to Melibea proves to be a successful one, for Melibea's mother, Alisa, at that moment needs more yarn for a weaving she has undertaken. When Alisa is shortly escorted from her home by a page in order to attend her gravely ill sister, her final request of her daughter functions as an ironic prophecy in the plot: "Pues, Melibea, contenta a la vezina *en todo lo que razón fuere darle por el hilado*" (319, my emphasis). Alisa cannot possibly envision what the import of her words will have in the structure of the work, but the reader is now forewarned.

Later, in Act 6, Celestina obliges Calisto with her personal recreation of the stressful Act 4 conversation with Melibea, telling him that the cause of her being welcomed in Melibea's house was the selling of her *hilado* to Alisa. Her yarn achieves a new register in Act 10: when Alisa returns home after another visit to her sister and finds Celestina there, she naturally is suspicious. Celestina lies, explaining that she was short of some yarn the other day and had returned to supply what lacked. On the other hand, Melibea, having already surrendered her sash to Celestina in Act 4, invents a plausible lie to protect both herself and the bawd, claiming that Celestina was hoping to sell her some cosmetics. This is the lie that Alisa believes, charging Melibea not to allow Celestina again entrance to the house and, once again, an aside made by Lucrecia: "¡Tarde acuerda nuestra ama!" (455), duplicates the effect of a Greek chorus. It is in this fashion that, in Acts 4 through 10 of *Celestina*, the go-between's *hilado* and Melibea's *cordón* become fatally intertwined in the structure of the tragedies that will follow. And one important item that links them tightly is Melibea's belief in Calisto's supposed toothache.

### 3. MELIBEA'S *CORDÓN* – SASH

That one item that Melibea cedes to Celestina after her particularly angry outburst over the bawd's frequent mentions of Calisto is also an article of clothing, the sash (*cordón*) she wears around her waist. And this sash, thought to have touched many holy relics in Rome and Jerusalem is, ironically, handed over as a token to help cure Calisto of the non-existent toothache that Celestina's fertile mind invents as a way to appease Melibea's anger earlier in Act 4. Indeed, it is this toothache which establishes a topic which changes the tense atmosphere from anger to acquiescence. Celestina's success is mirrored in Melibea's surrendering of the *cordón*: "En pago de tu buen sufrimiento, quiero complir tu demanda y darte luego mi cordón" (337). But though Calisto's toothache was an ingenious lie, the handing over of her sash signifies, for Melibea, a welcome opportunity for future communication with Calisto. Before this moment, she believed that a subsequent meeting with Calisto would be impossible, having so abruptly dismissed him in Act 1, sc. i. At the same time, the surrendering of the sash also metamorphoses into a deeper-

ning of her secret longing for a sexual encounter with Calisto<sup>4</sup>. Lucrecia's significant aside will provide crucial insights for the reader: "¡Más le querrá dar que lo dicho!" (337). What Lucrecia suspects—owing to what she already knows but has kept to herself—is that Melibea is coming closer to a public confession of her secret love for Calisto. Celestina departs, sash in her hands, and in Act 5 congratulates herself on having obtained it by trickery, concludes, addressing it: "¡Ay, cordon, cordon, yo te traeré por fuerça, si vivo, a la que no quiso darme su buena habla de grado!" (343).<sup>5</sup> And in the following Act 6, a triumphant bawd presents Calisto with the symbolic sash.<sup>6</sup>

Seeing it and touching it, Calisto becomes enraptured and behaves as though he were, symbolically, possessing Melibea, addressing it fetishistically: "¡O bienaventurado cordón, que tanto poder y merescimiento toviste de ceñir aquel cuerpo que yo no soy digno de servir!" (362), and "¡O mi gloria y ceñidero de aquella angélica cintura!" (364).<sup>7</sup> Both Sempronio and Celestina are taken aback at this sensual fondling of the 'cordón' and remind him that it is not Melibea. Sempronio reads Calisto's mood as the reader might also read it: "Señor, ¿por holgar con el cordón no querrás gozar de Melibea?" (365). Celestina's response is even more specific: "... tratar al cordón como cordón, por que sepas fazer diferencia de fabla quando con Melibea te veas: *no haga tu lengua yguales la persona y el vestido*" (365, my emphasis). The religious associations of the sash—it having touched relics in Rome and Jerusalem—are significantly transposed into a blatantly irreverent sexual symbol. And even though Calisto would like to parade the sash before others on the open street, Celestina will carry it away with her, knowing she must return it to Melibea so she will think it has cured the toothache it was surrendered for. The reader will later recall Calisto's fondling of the sash when, in Acts 14 and 19, he fondles the body of his desired Melibea.

An even more distasteful interpretation of the sash is its standing as payment for merchandise. Sempronio interprets it in this way when he asks Calisto in Act 8: ¿Quisieras

<sup>4</sup> The means by which clothing is instrumental in the act of Melibea's seduction is traced in the article by Gladys Lizabe (2005).

<sup>5</sup> Celestina does not like to be railed at and she can hold a grudge, as she murmurs to herself in Act 5, after Melibea describes her lovesickness as serpents eating away inside her: "¡Bien está, assí lo quería yo! ¡Tú me pagarás, doña loca, la sobra de tu yra!" (441 my emphasis). In the quote from page 343, Celestina's words "si vivo" are spoken with no thought to their possible import, for she does live only long enough to bring Melibea to Calisto, but not long enough to know anything of their sexual encounters.

<sup>6</sup> Her joy at her success has two manifestations. Initially, she remembers the conjuration of Pluto and seems to credit him with her success, saying, "O diablo a quien yo conjuré, cómo compliste tu palabra en todo lo que te pedi" (341-342). What she really believes is the efficacy of her own actions; *¡O cuántas erraran en lo que yo he acertado! ¿Qué fizieran en tan fuerte estrecho estas nuevas maestras de mi oficio, sino responder algo a Melibea por donde se perdiera quanto yo con buen callar he ganado?*" (342, my emphasis).

<sup>7</sup> In a very real sense, the *cordón* functions metaphorically as a pre-possession of she who wore it (Lizabe, 108).

tú ayer que te traxeran a la primera habla, amanojada y embuelta en su cordón, a Melibea, *como si hovieras embiado por otra qualquiera mercaduría a la plaça, en que no hoviera más trabajo de llegar y pagalla?*" (410-411, my emphasis). Though appearances matter to Sempronio, it is true that Melibea, of her own free will, cedes willingly her freedom (in the sash, as Lucrecia knows), never thinks of herself as a commodity bought or sold, but offers herself with a strong personal and passionate desire for Calisto. Distasteful though it be, it can seem to some that Melibea has been bought and sold with the one hundred gold coins, promises of better clothing and a gold necklace given by Calisto to Celestina, but it is Sempronio who sees it as a financial transaction<sup>8</sup>.

It is after all these comments on Melibea's sash are made that her secret love for Calisto is finally revealed to Celestina—and confirmed by Lucrecia in Act 10—after Lucrecia had gone to Celestina's house in Act 9 to retrieve it and return, enlisting Celestina to accompany her with a view to treat her melancholy, lovesick mistress. It is here that Celestina again taunts Melibea over and over with the name of Calisto—as she had done in Act 4—until the old Melibea faints and ceases to be, and a new Melibea is born, and with a new "Madre", Celestina (Snow, 1995). It is now that Melibea publicly reveals that, in fact, her liberty was surrendered along with her sash. Her confession is completely that of a new woman: "Venida soy en tu querer. *En mi cordón le llevaste embuelta la posesión de mi libertad.* (...) Mucho te deve esse señor, y más yo, que jamás pudieron mis reproches aflacar tu esfuerço y perseverar" (45, my emphasis). Melibea, now completely in Celestina's hands, states boldly: "... has sacado de mi pecho lo que jamás a ti ni a otro pensé descubrir" (451).

Her secret love now made public, Melibea is free to take the initiative, acting on her desires and with free will. That is the Melibea who begs Celestina to arrange a meeting with Calisto for that very evening, at midnight. The reader will recognize what has always been true from the beginning of the work (Act 1, scene i): that after Melibea's rejection of the "ilícito amor" (228) proposed by Calisto, both the rejected (Calisto) and the rejecter (Melibea) do indeed greatly crave an illicit sexual relationship, although neither can imagine a way to resolve the dilemma of how to bring this about. To satisfy his desire, Calisto will enlist the aid of Celestina and her *hilado*, and Melibea will surrender to Celestina her *cordón* (and her liberty) to bring about that longed-for relationship (Act 14). In the surrendering of her *cordón*, the reader follows it, first as a form of Melibea's modesty through to the Calisto's symbolic possession of the body that wore it. Melibea

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<sup>8</sup> In a different sense, Alan Deyermond (1985) comes to a similar conclusion, based on Calisto's statement to Melibea in Act 19: "Señora, el que quiere comer el ave, quita primera las plumas" (584), while he is removing her clothing and she is protesting. Is her protest sincere or is it mere coquetry after a month of meetings?

confesses in Act 10 to why she allowed Celestina to take her *cordón* to Calisto: “Su dolor de muelas era mi mayor tormento, su pena era la mayor mía” (451).

#### 4. CELESTINA’S CLOAK – *MANTO*

One other item of clothing that advances the plot towards its tragic ends is the new cloak desired by Celestina. Its importance is symbolic and structural. Her current *manto*, torn and ragged, symbolizes her decline from a well-remembered period of glory and, structurally, it will put her on a road to recover some of what was lost and, ironically, this road will initiate a chain of events that will bring about her assassination. The high point in her period of glory, as told to her dinner companions and Lucrecia in Act 9, was some twenty years ago. Since then, with time, she has been gradually reduced to an impoverished existence, her once thriving brothel surviving now with one remaining prostitute, Elicia. Her table, once overflowing with plentiful food and wine with which her numerous clients supplied her is now a but a shadow of what it had been. Celestina is in the textual present a poor and unhappy crone of sixty years, formerly accustomed to being the center of a wide network of services, symbolized by the multiple threads her seamstress cover sends out, spider like, from her brothel, drawing in and providing sexual adventures for young men, young women and many clerics in her community.

Importantly, we readers need to keep in mind that twenty years ago, Pleberio and Alisa gave birth to Melibea and, ever since, the house of Pleberio has prospered along with his many businesses, all of which were managed to provide his only daughter with a considerable dowry when she would marry and they would be no more. Thus, built deeply into the plot of *Celestina* is this contrast between these two elders, both now sixty years old: the wealthy and thriving Pleberio and the impoverished and vengeful Celestina, the seamstress who once was his neighbor (Snow 2002). However, in *Celestina* it is only the seamstress and bawd who dwells on this contrast, as her current daily life is wrapped up in so many lacks that she inevitably compares them with the material well-being attained in her previous existence, recounted to her guests in Act 9. In the textual present, however, her thirst for better times is symbolized by her desire for a new *manto*. In her mind, as seen in all her actions, exists a fervent desire to *medrar*, to improve her economic situation. And such a *manto* will become closer to being real when she is given a task to perform for Calisto.

Our analysis will begin with the conversation between Celestina and Calisto in Act 6, after Celestina has taken possession of Melibea’s sash, which Melibea trusts will help cure Calisto of his toothache. Upon entering Calisto’s house, Celestina’s exclamation of the difficulties encountered in her meeting with Melibea are linked immediately with her

manto “raydo y viejo” (350). The bawd gladly responds to Calisto’s request to recount what transpired in that first Act 4 interview with Melibea. Listening closely, Calisto is so entranced and sensually excited by her telling that he cries out: “¡O quién estuviera allí *debaxo de tu manto escuchando qué hablaría sola aquélla en quien Dios tan estremadas gracias puso!*” (365, my emphasis). And his go-between responds thus: “¿Debaxo de mi manto dizes? ¡Ay, mezquina, *que fueras visto por treynta agujeros que tiene*, si Dios no le mejora! (356, my emphasis).<sup>9</sup> For Celestina, the age and condition of the cloak are real, while for Calisto, being able to see and hear the voice of Melibea would have satisfied his sexual longing. The cloak takes on special meaning for each of them.

Moments later, the successful go-between reveals how she had conned Melibea out of the holy sash worn around her waist and is preparing to let Calisto hold it. Calisto, now beside himself with sexual desires, replies even more wildly to Celestina: “¡O, por Dios, toma esta casa y quanto en ella ay y dímelo, o pide lo que querrás!” Celestina, who recognizes this offer as the overstatement it is, counters with this bargain: “Por un manto que tu des a la vieja, te dará en tus manos el mesmo que en su cuerpo ella traía.” In ecstasy, Calisto exclaims: “¿Qué dizes de manto? ¡Y saya y quanto yo tengo!” Y Celestina, not wanting at this emotional juncture to ask for more, replies: “Manto he menester y éste terné yo en harto. No te alargues más. No pongas sospechosa duda en mi pedir; que dizen que ofrecer mucho al que poco pide es especie de negar” (360-361).<sup>10</sup> In the event, it is too late to call in a tailor for this new *manto* and it will remain a promise, a promise that Celestina will keep firmly in mind. When she departs in the company of a jealous and backbiting Pármeno who has been privy to the previous conversation, the bawd bids goodbye to Calisto, not forgetting his promise: “Quede, señor, Dios contigo. Mañana será mi buelta, donde mi manto y la respuesta vernán a un punto, pues oy no hubo tiempo” (370).

Pármeno is upset with and envious of Celestina’s success with Calisto, but the bawd, acknowledging his contrary mood, attempts to persuade him that her purpose in asking for a *manto* was her way of helping him. Her words to Pármeno ring manifestly untrue: “Que de lástima que hove de verte roto, pedí hoy manto, como viste, a Calisto. No por mi manto, pero por que, estando el sastre en casa y tú delante sin sayo, te le diesse” (375-376). Pármeno keeps his negative feelings to himself since, at this juncture, he wants Celestina to get him into Areúsa’s good graces and her bed, and so fulfill her Act 1 promise: “Pues tu buena dicha quiere que aquí está quien te la dará” (276).<sup>11</sup> Celestina also gets

<sup>9</sup> The *manto* with its threads all asunder is featured in a study by Mariel Aldonza Palma Villaverde (2103).

<sup>10</sup> “La solicitud del manto es moneda de cambio para la vieja que quiere experimentar la honra que genera la posesión de bienes materiales propios de un mundo del que está excluida (Lizabe, 104).

<sup>11</sup> It so happens that Areúsa’s house can be seen from Calisto’s windows, as per the dialogue between Sosia and Tristán closing out Act 14 (529-530). Thus, it benefits Pármeno not to be critical of Celestina’s appeal for a new

what she wants in return by making Pármemo solemnly promise in front of a witness to form, along with Sempronio, part of her anti-Calisto confederation (Snow 2013).

Her current *manto*, old and torn with its thirty holes, is again symbolic of her better days, when her former *manto* was kissed by many clergy, as she boasts to Lucrecia in Act 9: “Unos me llamavan ‘senora’, otros ‘tía’, otros ‘enamorada’, otros ‘vieja honrrada’. Allí se concertavan sus venidas a mi casa, allí las ydas a las suyas, allí se me ofrecían dineros, allí promesas, *besando el cabo de mi manto*, y aun algunos en la cara, por me tener más contenta. Agora hame traýdo la fortuna a tal estado ...” (433-434, my emphasis). Celestina cannot ever forget how well-to-do she once was, and the memory of those times impels her constant desire to have the wherewithal to live again more comfortably. She seems perfectly content now to accept a *manto* for her services.

For the moment, the promise of a *manto* remains unfulfilled. However, when Celestina informs Calisto in Act 11 that she not only has arranged with Melibea for an assignation that very evening at midnight, but that Melibea “es más tuya que de sí misma, más está a tu mandado y querer que de su padre Pleberio” (460), a more than grateful Calisto, in what will be his last meeting with Celestina, rewards her most generously: “En lugar de manto y saya, por que no se dé parte a oficiales, toma esta cadenilla; ponla al cuello y procede en tu razón y mi alegría” (460). Unwittingly, Calisto, in upping the value of her services, provides Celestina with a gold chain much more valuable than she could dream of, so much more that she will refuse to share it with her confederates. Thus, it is Calisto who—however ironically—provides the motive for the assassination of his successful go-between.<sup>12</sup> But her *manto*, though it be ragged and worn, serves Celestina yet once more when, sensing that the harsh words of Sempronio and Pármemo are becoming a real threat (Act XII), Celestina calls to Elicia: “¡Elicia! ¡Elicia! ¡Levántate dessa cama, da acá mi manto presto (...).” She seems to believe in its protective power. However, in the face of Sempronio’s accusation: “¡O vieja avarienta, *garganta muerta de sed por dinero!* ¡No serás contenta con la tercia parte de lo ganado?” (497-498, my emphasis), Celestina cannot now use her verbal skills to turn the tables, there are no clever words or false promises to avert what she faces, and her greed, her ‘thirst for money’, brings her life to its fatal end. The reader will recall Celestina’s earlier words in Act 9: “Cerca ando de mi

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‘manto’ as they will, in leaving Calisto, be nearing Areúsa’s house. Pármemo will use this proximity to remind Celestina of her Act 1 promise to procure for him the sexual services of Areúsa.

<sup>12</sup> Calisto is only a fan of Celestina while she is busy gaining for him the body and soul of Melibea. In truth he disdains her and makes that more than clear in Act 13 when he learns of the death of Celestina, Sempronio and Pármemo: “La vieja era mala y falsa, según parece que hazía trato con ellos, y así que riñeron sobre la capa del justo” (508). Formerly, he made it seem that he thought more of her: he maintained this pose until he was back in touch with Melibea. After that, he no longer would have had any use for Celestina’s arts.

fin” (432). They were then and now fully ironic: she cannot know how true those words were, for in two more days, her death foretold will surprise her, and her ragged *manto* will not provide her any protection.

5. GOLD CHAIN — *CADENILLA DE ORO*; BROCADE DOUBLET — *JUBÓN DE BROCADO*;  
TROUSERS AND HALF BOOTS — *CALÇAS, BORCEGUÍES*

Involved in these items are Celestina, Sempronio and Pármemo (thirst for money), Sempronio and Pármemo (cowardice) and all three (betrayal). After Act 11, much of what transpires in *Celestina* after Celestina receives the *cadena de oro* from Calisto in the presence of his two servants will change what might have been their future, had Calisto not performed this rash deed. The value of the gold chain exceeds any previous idea of gain Celestina may have envisioned. Similarly, the gold chain also increases for Pármemo and Sempronio the value of the confederation with Celestina and will bring about a separate, private confederation of the two when Celestina’s thirst for gold has her dissolve the confederation of three. In sum, the gold chain betokens the beginning of the end for all three. They had initially bonded in a confederation to fleece Calisto of as much as they could get from him in his pursuit of Melibea. Sempronio was in it from the outset, already having been given the brocade doublet that was Calisto’s, as a token of his esteem for arranging the services of Celestina.<sup>13</sup> However, Pármemo initially mistrusts Celestina and only becomes a solid member of this confederation when the bawd provides for his enjoyment of the sexual favors of Areúsa (Act 7). Celestina, whose thirst for money is more than fulfilled by this gold chain, has no intention of ever sharing in it, the confederation notwithstanding, and will refuse their demand to split the gains in three equal shares (Act 12). Her failure to reckon with their violent behavior at her betrayal is crucial: her greed is clearly the fatal flaw—the blind spot—of a Celestina accustomed to dominating all those she comes into contact with. On previous occasions, she evidenced mastery of each of her confederates. Her pride is also a factor, though the old saw that pride goes before a fall was never part of her past life.

There are two references to the *cadena de oro* which shed light on the complex web that Calisto’s gift had set in motion for these three servants. The first is spoken by Sempro-

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Sempronio may have suggested a conspiracy as he takes Celestina to meet with Calisto, with these words. “Calisto arde en amores. *De ti y de mí tiene necesidad, Pues, juntos nos ha menester, juntos nos aprovecharemos; que conocer el tiempo y usar el hombre de la oportunidad haze los hombres prósperos*” (254, my emphasis). Even though Celestina believes she can soon also have Pármemo in the confederation, saying to Sempronio: “Déxame tú a Pármemo, que yo te le hare uno de nos y de lo que hoviéramos, démosle parte” (266), Pármemo will remain a dubious confederate apart until he beds Areúsa in Act 7.

nio to Pármeno: “¿Qué quieres que haga una puta alcahueta que (...) suele hazer siete virgos por dos monedas, después de verse cargada de oro, sino ponerse en salvo con la possession (...)? ¡Pues guárdese del diablo, que sobre el partir no le saquemos el alma! (466, my emphasis). In these words, though spoken in anger, the reader will perceive clear ironic foreshadowing. The second significant reference has the same two interlocutors, about to go to Celestina’s house in the middle of the night (Act 12) and Sempronio again leads the way, saying to Pármeno: “(...) antes que venga el día, quiero yo yr a Celestina a cobrar mi parte de la cadena. Que es una puta vieja; *no le quiero dar tiempo en que fabrique alguna ruyndad* con que nos escluya” (489, my emphasis). Once again, it is Sempronio who suspects that a treason is at hand<sup>14</sup>. Later, there is yet a third rehearsal of the assassination of Celestina. It is Elicias’s explanation to her cousin, Areúsa. Here Elicia serves the reader as an omniscient narrator and analyst, one fully aware of events unknown to Areúsa:

Pues, como Calisto tan presto vido que buen concierto en cosa que jamás lo esperaba [that is, the midnight meeting with Melibea], a bueltas de otras cosas dio a la desdichada de mi tía una cadena de oro. Y como sea de tal calidad aquel metal, que mientras bevemos dello, más sed nos pone, con sacrílega hambre, quando se vido tan rica, alçóse con su ganancia y no quiso dar parte a Sempronio ni a Pármeno dello, lo qual avía quedado entre ellos que partiessen lo que Calisto diesse.” (535)

She continues, relating how the two confederates arrive by dark of night in a state of anger, demanding their share of one-third each. Celestina’s denial, claiming that all the earnings were hers, proves that Sempronio’s earlier fear that she might try to exclude them was on the mark. And, after much acerbic discussion, seeing Celestina’s greed so overpowering, her former confederates draw their swords “y diéronle mill cuchilladas” (536). Elicia’s recounting errs in that only Sempronio, egged on by Pármeno, is the actual single assassin of her “madre, manto y abrigo” (537).

Let us return to the events of Act 12: The first half is dedicated to the eagerly anticipated midnight meeting of Calisto and Melibea. Both become frustrated owing to the locked doors which prevent any touching, which is why in future meetings Calisto will bring a ladder in order to be able to scale the garden walls and have physical access to her.

<sup>14</sup> Sempronio in Act 5 had heard Celestina, on the way to tell Calisto of her success with Melibea, refer to his participation in their confederation thus: “De mi boca quiero que sepas lo que se ha hecho; que, *aunque hayas de haver alguna partezilla del provecho*, quiero yo todas las gracias del trabajo” (344, my emphasis). This “little bit of” the profit shocks Sempronio, who wanted always a fair share. She, realizing the effect of her use of the diminutive, then covers herself in an even worse, less believable promise: “Todo lo mío es tuyo” (344). And when push comes to shove, in Act 12, it will be Sempronio who assassinates Celestina, encouraged by Pármeno: “¡Dale, dale, acábala, pues començaste, que nos sentirán! ¡Muera, muera!” (499).

Though Calisto boasts to Melibea that their midnight assignation is protected by the valor of his two servants (485-486), nothing could be further from the truth. The truth is that both Sempronio and Pármeneo are so nervous and suspicious about arousing the attention of Pleberio's men that they run off at the slightest sound and brag to each other about which of them is the most fleet. Pármeneo does not hide his cowardice, boasting to Sempronio: "Calças traygo, y aun borzequíes de esos ligeros que tú dizes, para mejor huyr que otro" (474). And Sempronio's response?: "¡O Pármeneo amigo! 'Quán alegre y provechosa es la conformidad en los compañeros! Aunque por otra cosa no nos fuera buena Celestina, era harta la utilidad que por su causa nos ha venido'" (474, my emphasis). They are in fact forming a close confederation of two, having first bonded in Act 8, when Sempronio learns of Pármeneo's seduction of Areúsa and the feast they will share at Celestina's house (Act 9), and his welcoming of Pármeneo with open arms: "Franco eres, nunca te faltaré. ¡Cómo te tengo por hombre, como creo que Dios te ha de hazer bien! Todo el enojo que de tus passadas fablas tenía, se me ha tornado en amor. No dudo ya de tu confederación con nosotros ser la que debe. Abraçarte quiero; seamos como hermanos" (406, my emphasis). These words prove later to have been the foundation for the later confederation of these two "brothers" against the founding member, Celestina, of the confederation of three.

It is in the second half of Act 12 that the gold chain impels the actions of these proven cowards, who present to Celestina a totally false narrative of their "bravery" earlier in Act 12, and of the destruction of their swords and shields. Celestina makes light of such losses, counseling them to appeal to their master, Calisto, for new ones. When they do bring up the matter of the gold chain, Celestina fabricates a tale of letting Elicia hold it and she cannot now recall where she left it. Should it appear, however, Celestina promises to give them, instead of their one-third shares, some scarlet trousers, *calças de grano*, which is what Celestina claims that young chaps like them look good in (494). The devious bawd further claims that the gold chain is worth little. The reaction to all this by Sempronio is violent and to the point:

No es ésta la primera vez que yo he dicho cuánto en los viejos reyna este vicio de la cobdicia: *quando pobre, franca; quando rico, avarienta*. Assí que, adquiriendo cresce la cobdicia y la pobreza cobdiciando, y ninguna cosa haze pobre al avariento sino la riqueza. '¡O Dios, y cómo cresce la necesidad con la abundancia!' (494, my emphasis)

Celestina counters with an offer that pretends to offset the idea of sharing the gold chain, declaring to Sempronio: "Si algo vuestro amo a mí me dio, debes mirar que es mío; *que tu jubón de brocado no te pedi yo parte, ni la quiero*" (494, my emphasis). Celestina's greed and avarice have indeed created in her a fatal blind spot. She cannot believe that these two could not be bought off with lies and promises of scarlet trousers. Her

earlier Cassandra-like observation, “Cerca ando de mi fin” (432) is now as unexpected as it is violent.

None of the three are alive when Calisto and Melibea finally, in Act 14, become lovers. Celestina arranged their union with great aplomb, but will not live to see Pleberio’s only daughter’s suicide leave him with nothing to show for his decades of acquired riches. Celestina also formed a confederation with Calisto’s two servants which she failed to honor and lost not only the riches she so avidly longed for, having received one hundred gold coins from Calisto in Act 1, but also her life. In the first case she was the clear-sighted facilitator, but in the second case, her fatal flaw, excessive greed, made her the blind victim of her own ambition.

## 6. EPILOGUE

I began this essay by hoping to show just how structurally important in *Celestina* were selected articles of clothing (the *hilado*, the *manto* and the *cordón*) and adornment (the *cadencia de oro*) in the authors’ plotting of the tragedies that befall Celestina, Sempronio and Pármeno (the three confederates), and Calisto and Melibea (the seekers of an illicit love affair). Forming the confederation in Act 1 to *medrar*, that is, to improve their economic lot in life, is solidified and progresses, with ups and downs, until the *cadencia de oro* becomes the motive of its dissolution and brings about the assassination of Celestina by her two former confederates and the swift execution of Sempronio and Pármeno for the murder of the greedy go-between. It brings to an end Celestina’s many roles in the town and dissolves her threads, or web, that link a good many of the town’s citizens. Even though her death in Act 12 comes early in the 21-act work, her one success—robbing Pleberio of any future plans for his only daughter—is a scheme constructed by the go-between upon the falsehood of a toothache and the surrendering to her (and to Calisto) of Melibea’s sacred *cordón*. She does not live to be able to gloat over Pleberio’s loss of his life’s purpose. The chain begins with Celestina’s *hilado* and her gaining entrance to the house of Pleberio and the subsequent surrendering of Melibea’s highly symbolic and sensual *cordón*. The *cordón* is then exchanged for a promise of a *manto* and, much more surprisingly, the gift of the *cadencia de oro*. In letting her *cordón* (and her freedom) leave her body, Melibea becomes a rebellious daughter in a patriarchal society which is intolerant of illicit love affairs outside the bonds of matrimony. Having abjured the norms of such a society and betrayed her family, Calisto’s accidental death calls for her voluntary suicide. The new Melibea cannot be the old Melibea, the “guardada hija” of Alisa she once was. I conclude this essay hoping that my interpretations of the authors’ skill in dramatizing the symbolic and structural significance of these items of clothing and decoration will make a fresh reading of *Celestina* a worthwhile experience.

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