



A Reticent Retreat: Background Notes on the Creation of Galdós's *Mariucha*

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The original manuscript of Pérez Galdós's 1903 drama, *Mariucha*, provides critics with several provocative points for discussion and analysis. To begin with, the manuscript number 21797, housed in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, is definitely not written in Galdós's hand.¹ Alan Smith contends that this is most likely an actor's copy, but one should note that the manuscript contains aspects—drawings of set designs and, in particular, what seem to be galley notes—which one would most likely not find in a performer's version.² Much more important and intriguing for Galdós scholars, however, are the significant revisions made between the original and the published versions. Not only do these changes help us to understand how Galdós approached the composition process, they also strongly suggest that he was acutely aware of the socio-political storm that hovered menacingly around *Mariucha* in 1903. The purpose of this brief essay is, therefore, threefold. For starters, we will use the differences between the two versions to demonstrate how in the composition of *Mariucha* Galdós allows himself a substantial deal of leeway in the initial draft, cognizant during the entire process that he will eventually trim away any number of details, dialogues, and even scenes. Next, we will explain how many of these changes made by Galdós actually respond to the politically charged ambience that surrounded the *estreno* of *Mariucha*. The third prong also has political overtones but in this instance we will focus on the possible impact of these changes on the personal political agenda of Galdós.

The manuscript version contains dozens of sections that have been crossed out with a series of neat diagonal or vertical lines within a dark border. In most cases, it is relatively easy to decipher the eliminated sections. One also comes across, however, several segments that have not been crossed out that contain information not included in the published version of the play. For the sake of clarity, it should be noted that when we refer to the manuscript of *Mariucha* in this essay we are alluding to expurgated passages or words that never find their way into the published version.

Reading through the deleted passages of the manuscript, one quickly senses a degree of tension and animosity between the *pueblo* and the *aristocracia* not found in the published version. Using the repugnant Pocho, Galdós immediately begins to stir emotions:

POCHO. ¡Paciencia! Que es como decir hambre. ¡Infeliz pueblo trabajador! ¡Siempre han de burlarte, siempre han de oprimirte estos malditos nobles, aun después de arruinados! Dígame ¿Es este el sillón donde se sienta el Señor Marqués?³

CIRILA. Este es.

POCHO. (Se sienta groseramente.) ¡Echate aquí, pueblo, tumbate a tu gusto en el trono de estos que fueron superiores, y por su mala cabeza ya no lo son! Pueblo, ahora es la tuya. (Ms. 1.1)

Later, after hearing Filomena's comment about wanting to distribute money to "pobres más desvalidos que nosotros," the priest, Rafael, seizes the opportunity to expound on the degree of poverty in the region: "¡Ahí los hay, vaya si los hay! Conozco á muchos que á más de indigentes son enfermos incurables, paralíticos, tuberculosos, cancerosos" (Ms. 1.4).

In the second act in another deleted scene, Galdós accentuates the *carbonero's* basic struggle to survive:

LEÓN. [D]ías hubo en que me consideré feliz comiendo lo que dejaban los perros. [. . .]

LEÓN. Otros pobres hacían lo mismo; pero era yo más diligente que ellos, y recorría toda la carretera de [Lugar de Luso], y la de Valdenoche á esta. [. . . M]iseria esparcida . . . rebuscando también [illegible] de la boca mina donde arrojan la escoria . . . (Ms. 2.2)

Then, in act three, the playwright continues to underscore the depth of León's plight:

LEÓN. ¡Ay, señora! Aprendí en la más sabia de las escuelas, y en la universidad eterna, donde se cursa la ciencia dolorosa.

VICENTA. ¿Qué?

MARÍA. Quiere decir que fueron sus profesores el sufrimiento, el desamparo, la cruel necesidad. De esta enseñanza, créalo usted, saben los hombres fuertes, sinceros, de alma vigorosa. (Ms. 3.3)

Galdós makes León's acceptance of working-class values even more provocative by focusing on his previous behavior as a spoiled aristocrat:

PEDRO. ¡Pues no dió pocos escándalos aquel mozalbete [León]!

CESÁREO. Y a su tío le costó Dios y ayuda librarle de la cárcel. Al fin desapareció de Madrid. Nadie ha vuelto a verle. (Ms. 1.18)

LEÓN. [C]iego y desmandado, y sin sentido más que para requerir todos los goces, triunfos de vanidad fáciles, de los que se adquieren con el dinero, con la audacia, con la desvergüenza. (Ms. 2.2)

The playwright continues to focus on the gap between *pueblo* and *aristocracia* by exaggerating the exorbitant wealth of Teodolinda:

VICENTA. Verá usted que lujo tan desfachatado. Me ha dicho Nicolás que en su casa de Madrid hasta las rodillas para fregar suelos se traen de París.

MARÍA. Y los palillos de dientes que usa son de una madera especial, que no la hay más que en las orillas del río de las Amazonas. (Ms. 1.8)

In one of the most intriguing differences between the published text and the manuscript, Galdós complicates León's existence even more. Bravo, Corral, and Roldán, scavengers all, plot physical violence in their effort to poach León's financial gains:

ROLDÁN. Poca falta para que antes [illegible] esperara el amigo Bravo.

ALCALDE. ¿Y cómo está de su revolcón?

CORRAL. Ha quedado con tantas agujetas como el que vuelve de dar una vuelta al mundo, á pie.

ROLDÁN. O rodando.

ALCALDE. Anda; ya puede alegrarse, que buen consuelo de las mataduras es la ínsula con que Don Cesáreo recompensa su lealtad.

CORRAL. ¿De veras?

ALCALDE. Sí; un destinito en Gracia y Justicia no hay quien se lo quite... Y al poco tiempo, entrada en la Magistratura.

ROLDÁN. Su sueño dorado. ¡Que bien le ha venido el volteo! Pues yo . . . Dime, Nicolás, puedo pasar á ver á ese hombre?

ALCALDE. ¿Tú? ¿Para qué?

CORRAL. Este cree que el caballero negro no se mata, y que levantará el vuelo en busca de otro ángel á quien engañar.

ROLDÁN. Me han entrado ganas de quedarme con el establecimiento. Déjame hacerle la proposición de traspaso. Como de todos modos han de venir mal dadas, cederá las existencias por poco dinero.

ALCALDE. Ahora no es oportuno. Espérate.

CORRAL. Sí, que mientras más tarde vayas, menos dinero ha de pedirte (Ms. 5.2)

The insinuation is, of course, that Cesáreo has paid Bravo to dissuade León from marrying Mariucha and will compensate him with a government job. Roldán, meanwhile, intends to plunder the worker's painstakingly constructed business.

The second act of the manuscript also contains a symbolic but highly provocative gesture that, if published, would have stunned any audience. Mariucha is impatient to change the course of her life, and this eagerness sets the stage for a major transformation (Bieder 18). Inspired and full of enthusiasm after selling her expensive clothing, the protagonist impulsively decides to change clothes, on stage, in the *glorieta*, but not into the *peignoir* [dressing gown] mentioned in the published text:

MARIUCHA. Dame su delantal. [En el pabellón habrá un trozo de follage tras el cual se oculta María al desprenderse de la falda y cuerpo. Cubierta con el delantal de Cirila aparece al fin de la escena enteramente transformada y decente.] (Ms. 2.5)⁴

Not only does she emerge wearing her maid's apron, she is now "decente." Obviously, the switch from the *peignoir* to the apron is highly significant. While the former (the *peignoir*) suggests a degree of luxury and sophistication that maintains Mariucha's link to the aristocracy, the latter (the *delantal*) is a bold reference to blue-collar labor with which Galdós daringly situates the protagonist in the ranks of the working class.⁵

In act three of the manuscript, Galdós appears poised to follow the apron image with yet another labor-related symbol to heighten the tension between the feuding factions (*pueblo* and *aristocracia*). Scene seven, then, features a curious exchange between the priest and Mariucha's father, Pedro:

D. RAFAEL. Pues si con esos afanes, digo yo, perdóneme, si con esa [illegible] lucha, en la que tanto resplandecen su inteligencia como su virtud, ha logrado María traer la abundancia donde había escaseses ¿qué tienen que decir, señores míos? Déjense querer, déjense salvar.

FILOMENA. ¡Oh, sí, le debemos la vida!

D. PEDRO. En nuestro corazón tiene un altar. Pero que ese altar no se nos convierta en mostrador. (Ms. 3.7)

Much like the *delantal*, the *mostrador* remains a highly recognizable symbol of labor and the working classes. To bring yet another charged term into play in a heated exchange between a renegade priest and an impoverished and embittered aristocrat was, as Galdós eventually realized, perhaps more risk than he was willing to take at this particular político-literary juncture.⁶

In the manuscript version, the division between the aristocracy and the Church is likewise more pronounced than in the published text. Galdós's rebellious priest reveals a sinister view of what is transpiring in Agramante and Spanish society in general. He warns the young lovers in the following fashion: "Ah vosotros no conocéis el mundo, la sociedad, yo sí. Ya os contaré, ya sabréis la que os espera avecillas locas que volando habreis de estrellaros contra el muro" (Ms. 4.1). His views subsequently become even more pessimistic:

D. RAFAEL. Inocentes, no conocéis al enemigo con quien habeis de luchar. Debo deciros todo lo que sé . . . que es muy grave. [Ambos se aproximan, ansiosos.] Es preciso que conozcais los instrumentos de suplicio, y aun de muerte, que se preparan contra vosotros. (Ms. 4.1)

To this point, we have established that there are many revealing differences between the manuscript and the published version.⁷ In addition to the rebellious Rafael of the manuscript we have the *delantal*, the *mostrador*, the threatened violence, and much more. And what these examples allow us to conclude is that Galdós allowed his pen and his thoughts to flow quite freely during the initial stages of composition. In this instance, he wrote himself into a tense and potentially dangerous corner, but always with the full knowledge that he (or some handpicked editor) would eventually defuse the situation by means of reductive editing. It should be noted, however, that this kind approach to the composition process—a decidedly unrestrained, even undisciplined initial version

followed by significant deletions and modifications—was not something new for Galdós. Previous research has shown that he probably began this practice as early as 1876, with the manuscript of *La segunda casaca*. There he included, and ultimately deleted, a series of odd scenes involving a seriously wounded Salvador Monsalud, an unusually helpful Juan Bragas de Pipaón, and a vengeful Jenara Baraona. Five years later in 1881, with *La desheredada*, he again allowed himself significant latitude in the initial stages of composition. Many potentially high-profile sections dealing with sexual activity, drunkenness, or political innuendo would disappear at some point in the composition process (Schnepf, “On the Creation” and “The Naturalistic Content”). At this relatively early juncture in his career, Galdós had evidently settled on his approach to writing. Twenty years later, now immersed in the creation of *Mariucha*, this process continued.

The second part of this essay deals with the literary and political reasons why Galdós deleted both the dialogues and details—the *delantal* and the proposed thrashing are two illustrative examples—that make the manuscript of *Mariucha* so confrontational, so hyper-charged. The answers to these questions, however, are somewhat more complex in nature.

Any study of *Mariucha* must take into account the fact that this play was the first and only work by Galdós to debut outside of Madrid. It opened instead in Barcelona, a labor-friendly city where the play’s thesis—redemption through hard work—would surely be well received. If that in itself were not important enough, in 1903, the city was in the midst of a contentious strike by the *carboneros*, a fortuitous circumstance that added depth and verisimilitude to León’s struggle to succeed in the working class world (Fox 608, 618; Bieder 17). Galdós could not have imagined a more sympathetic ambience and audience for his drama.

But Don Benito also grasped the dangerous situation that surrounded the debut of his play. The strike had stirred up a significant amount of street violence; tempers were running high; and a steady flow of anti-establishment and pro-labor rhetoric kept the situation inflamed.⁸ Now, Galdós seemed to sense, was not the time to add fuel to the fire by flaunting aprons, and counters, and openly challenging traditional social, political, and religious structures. Not only could he see the immediate perils around him, he also vividly remembered what had happened only two years earlier with the debut of *Electra* in Madrid. The first presentations of this drama had shocked the nation and caused violent reactions from virtually the same factions drawn into battle in *Mariucha*—*aristocracia* and *pueblo*. It was then that Galdós learned a painful lesson about how key phrases, symbols, and charged topics could trigger dangerously aggressive behavior from highly engaged spectators. One critic, H. Chonon Berkowitz, wrote that in the first two acts of *Electra*: “Every happy phrase, every tense moment, was an occasion for demonstration” (356).⁹ Máximo’s bold suggestion about arson, Berkowitz continues, was “like tossing a flaming torch at the raucous-voiced and red-palmed ‘people’” (352). Galdós had no intention of sparking any kind of similar reaction with *Mariucha*; nor did he have any desire to relive the fear that he felt when his fellow citizens had rioted in the streets of Madrid. This time he would err on the side of caution. The apron and the counter, the same as other provocative elements, would be deleted.

The circumstances surrounding *Mariucha* were odd, to say the least. In one particularly strange turn of events, Galdós was invited to comment on his own play on the eve of its premiere. The contents of this revealing *carta*, published in the July 17, 1903 edition of Barcelona's *El Liberal*, suggest that Galdós had either already deleted the more inflammatory passages or that he was on the verge of doing so.

Se puede hablar con el pueblo sin instruirle hondamente, y sin calentarle la cabeza con graves problemas morales, encarnados en intensos afectos. [. . . Diré] a usted que la buena de *Mariucha* no se mete, que yo sepa, por estos callejones o trochas del pesimismo, a los cuales hay que buscar salida con el pico o el hacha. En ella las violencias fugaces de acción o de lenguaje dan pronto paso a la placidez y al sentido de las cosas. (qtd. in Fox 612–13)

With the deft hand of an experienced writer, Don Benito does manage to steer *Mariucha* away from what he calls the “trochas del pesimismo” but he does so only after making a calculated assessment of the situation in Barcelona of 1903 and, perhaps even more importantly, after remembering and incorporating the hard lessons learned in 1901 with Pantoja, Máximo, and others in the production of *Electra*.

Galdós, then, clearly deletes a series of inflammatory elements from the text of *Mariucha* at least in part out of respect for the tense socio-political situation surrounding the debut. But one is tempted to see a personal political reason behind these changes. The raucous success of *Electra* catapults Galdós to the forefront of the political arena and to what will be a prolonged battle against conservative Spain portrayed in a variety of forms: clergy, aristocracy, and monarchy (Berkowitz 384–88). It is not difficult to trace his increasingly liberal and radical political trajectory during this key four-year period, 1901–05. In *Electra* (1901), he openly incites the crowds against the dangers of predatory religion (Pantoja). With the dramatic version of *El abuelo* (1904), he boldly challenges traditional class structure as he argues for a drastically reshaped society. And finally, in the dialogue novel, *Cassandra* (1905), he claims a spiritual victory over the conservative forces with the violent murder of Doña Juana, the twentieth-century embodiment of Doña Perfecta.

In 1903, however, we discover a rather curious anomaly with the case of *Mariucha*. Granted the actual performed play does feature a controlled attack on a parasitic aristocracy; a tenacious defense of the work ethic; and even a mild rebuke of an indifferent clergy. The manuscript version, however, shows that Galdós, at one stage of the composition process, was aiming for much more, perhaps even for a play as provocative as *Electra*. Although the writer did not officially join the republican encampment until 1907, Fox suggests that the writer might have been working clandestinely with these liberals at a much earlier date: “Es posible entonces,” the critic contends, “que en 1903 don Benito estuviera militando ya entre los bastidores del republicanismo” (619). If we accept this contention as accurate, Galdós’s political situation in 1903 was, to say the least, quite complex. In July of that year—coinciding closely with the debut of *Mariucha* in Barcelona—the liberal cabinet of Fernández Villaverde took control of the Spanish government. General elections were scheduled for November of that year. If we assume that Galdós was already subject to party discipline,

it is not difficult to go one step further and suppose that his marching orders for his new drama were to avoid at all costs anything similar to the riots that shook the streets of Madrid in the wake of *Electra*. If, as the facts seem to indicate, Galdós was convinced of his “mandate for leadership” (Berkowitz 385, 383–401) and that he was destined to play an important role in Spanish politics at some future date, it is not difficult to conclude that much of the inflammatory component found in the original manuscript of *Mariucha* was expurgated in the name of party loyalty and, one has to assume, eventual personal political gain.

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Notes

- ¹ In 1903, Galdós also published *Los duendes de la camarilla*. One immediately recognizes Galdós's somewhat unique and unsteady handwriting in the original of *duendes* (Ms. 21772). See appendix 1. The appendices included in this essay come from microfilm copies housed in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid. I would like to offer my thanks to the workers in the "Sala de Manuscritos." Their constant help and patience over the years have made my work at the BN all the more pleasant.
- ² There are many galley markings to "Ortega," "Otero," "Cándido," and others. There are two drawings of set designs for act two and two for act five. Curiously, at least one critic who reviewed the opening night performance took issue with what he considered an inferior stage design (Berenguer 274). See appendices 2 and 3.
- ³ Galdós frequently omitted accent marks and other punctuation. We have opted to respect the author's spelling and grammar.
- ⁴ Several critics pointed to this open-air clothes change (to the *peignoir*) as one of the play's major defects (Fox 610).
- ⁵ The working class apron, writes Phillis Cunningham, was a "symbol of menial labor" (148). The need to be protected from dirt, she adds, suggested "undignified activity." Curiously, Galdós's manuscript reference to the *delantal* may have carried an additional emotional charge. In the late eighteenth century, these aprons were known to be produced in Barcelona, in houses of correction no less (Ribeiro 63).
- ⁶ Galdós's statement about the *mostrador* is provocative and highly ironic inasmuch as the renegade priest—in charge of altars—has been slipping money to Mariucha.
- ⁷ It is worth repeating that a generous portion of the manuscript version of *Mariucha* is significantly more confrontational than the published version. Corral's failed pursuit of the protagonist, for instance, takes an ugly turn. When he appears with news about Cesáreo's marriage, the tension between Corral and a displeased Mariucha becomes virtually palpable:

CORRAL. Celebro ver a todos tan contentos [a María irónico]. Y usted loca de alegría [María le mira desdeñosa. Corral se aleja murmurando aparte]. Precioso angel, quiero ver tu cara cuando a ella te salga . . . tiene que salir . . . el viso negro de carbón . . . (Ms. 3.9)

Later in the same act, Corral challenges Mariucha:

CORRAL. ¿No cree el angel de la casa que aceptando mi mano podrán sus padres de estimar más conveniente el apoyo de un yerno como yo, que le dé una nuera como Teodolinda?

MARÍA. [con fingida benevolencia.] No lo crea D. Faustino. (Ms. 3.10)

In act three, Mariucha's father reveals serious doubts about her comportment after discovering the drawer filled with money: "¿No tiene por ciertos, ni siquiera probables, los rumores malignos que corren en el pueblo?" (Ms. 3.8). At another point Don Pedro expresses serious but unexplained concern about the strength of the French *franc*: "¿Que atrocidad! La verdad, señores, hay que mirarse mucho antes de pasar la frontera" (Ms. 3.10). In act four, León's devotion to María takes on a fatalistic tone: "Mantengo el ofrecimiento de mi vida, mantengo la resolución de vencer o

morir” (Ms. 4.5). Later, he adds with passion: “No te dejes atropellar, no te dejes atropellar. Defiéndote.” Shortly thereafter María and her mother have a heated exchange about “parasitismo” and “humillación” (Ms. 4.6). One finds additional tension in León’s fierce responses to Cesáreo in their battle over María. León doubts that he will succumb like “una pobre alimaña perseguida de cazador” (Ms. 5.4). And he scoffs at Cesáreo’s threats to keep him away from his sister: “¡Qué tontería! No hay convento que esté siempre cerrado, ni cárcel que no abra sus puertas alguna vez. No ha de ser perpetua mi condena.”

- ⁸ The Barcelona-based newspaper *El Liberal* provided numerous descriptions of the violence stemming from the strike.
- ⁹ There should be no doubts about the level of chaos that resulted from the debut of *Electra*. Berkowitz’s descriptions of Galdós’s fears as well as the violence and the general bedlam that ensued in the wake of the initial performances make for good reading (346–82).

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~~de esta que antaño todo se resolvió~~
~~no se lo que me digas. Rosanda, pues te~~
~~encuentra, ~~en~~ ~~esta~~ ~~la~~ ~~mejor~~ ~~vida~~... ¿~~
~~¿has vuelto a salir?~~ ¿dónde le has visto
 mi hermana?

XXVIII

— Pues curioso — dijo Rosanda,
 ve que podía, — por darte una noticia
 o mala para ti... El amigo ~~de~~
~~probar de~~ ~~la~~ ~~Goetia~~ ~~dominica~~ ~~domi~~
~~ni~~ ~~de~~ ~~veritas~~, ~~saliera~~ ~~como~~ ~~de~~ ~~Victoria~~
 veras, se ha visto ~~quedarse~~ ~~compromiso~~

Appendix 1. Galdós's handwriting in the manuscript of *Los duendes de la camarilla* (1903).

Escena VIII

Maria, Filomena — Vicenta, doña Cirila.

Vicenta. Amigas muy queridas; un aviso, una petición y me voy
 al instante.

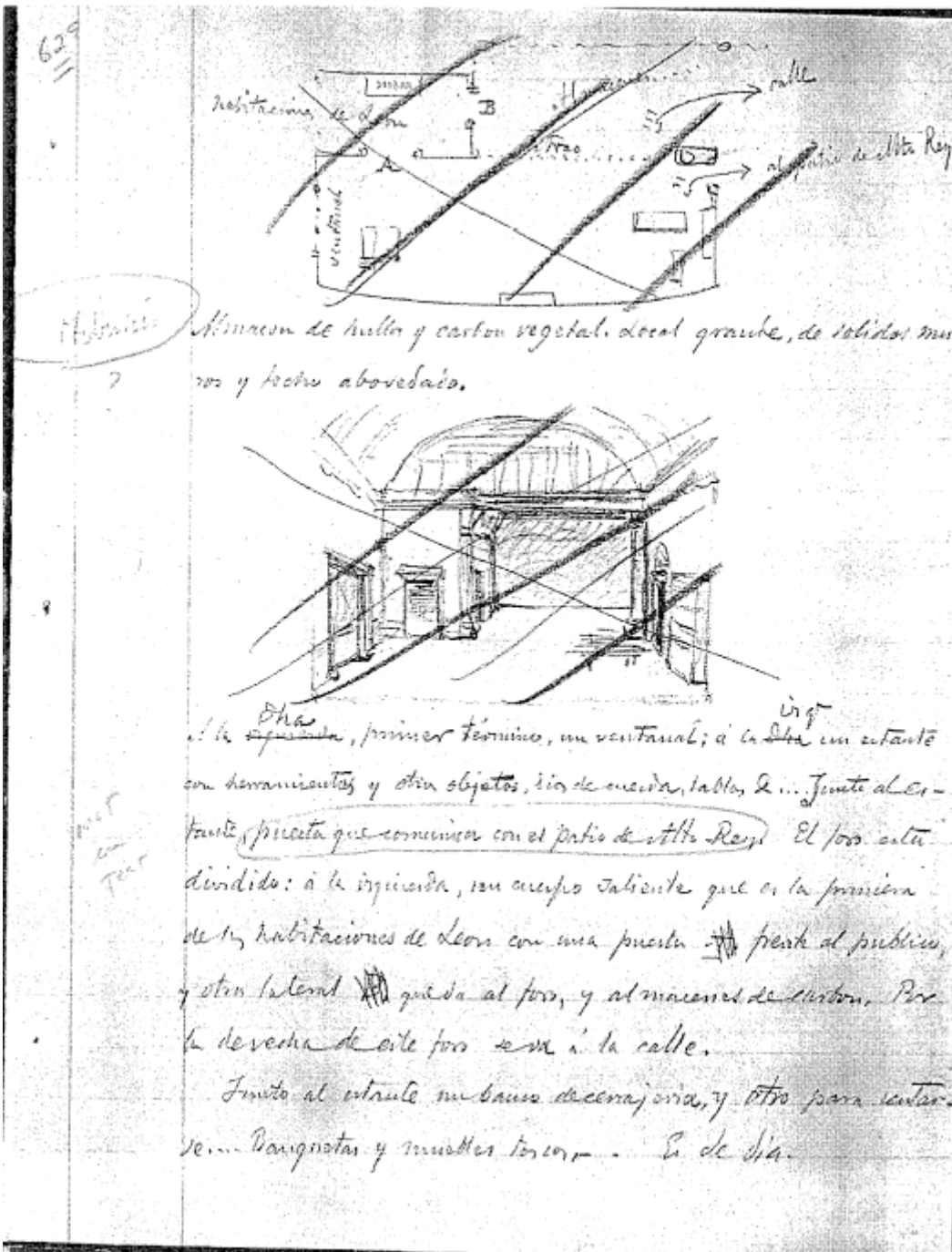
Filom. Ante todo; ¿sabe V. si viene Cesáreo. Su marido de usted
 ha recibido un telegrama...

Vicenta. No sé nada. En casa estuve después de misa. Ni
 cosas había salido.

Maria. No sé Vicenta? ¿ve vienen las tres?

Vicenta. Un momento... Lo primero, advertir a ustedes que Teo-
 dolinda viene en persona a invitarnos.

Appendix 2. Unidentified handwriting in the manuscript of Galdós's *Mariucha* (1903).



Appendix 3. Stage scenes from the manuscript of Galdós's *Mariucha* (1903).