

Comparative Analysis of *Comedia* Play of Ilocos Sur and Ilocos Norte

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ABSTRACT

Comedia, a traditional theatrical form in the Philippines, is a vibrant and colorful performance that blends comedy, drama, and music. Rooted in Spanish influences, particularly during the colonial period, *Comedia* has evolved into a distinct Filipino art form. This comparative study aimed to understand the similarities and distinctions between the *Comedia* plays of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur. In collecting data, the researcher used techniques such as observation of the actual and retrieved recordings of the theatre play, interview techniques for the directors of both plays, and documentation. Meanwhile, in analyzing the data, the descriptive-comparative technique was used, namely, describing the data obtained in the field and analyzing it by looking for similarities and distinctions between the two research objects based on the elements of theater described by Aristotle, namely, plot, characters, theme, dialogue, music, and spectacle. While both provinces share fundamental elements of the *Comedia*, distinct variations emerge that reflect the unique cultural differences and influences of each locality. In Ilocos Norte, the *Comedia* play is modernized as it exhibits a fusion of romantic, comedic, and festive elements, with the incorporation of several characters, movements, props, and other elements. On the other hand, Ilocos Sur's *Comedia* play is traditional as it showcases a blend of local traditions and Spanish influences, creating a performance that resonates with the province's historical and cultural heritage.

Keywords- *Comedia*, Comparative Analysis, Folk Media, Ilokano, Theatre Plays.

I. INTRODUCTION

Unpopularity of Comedia in Research

Way before the advent of Netflix, YouTube, and other streaming platforms, theater was one of the collaborative forms of performing arts from which the world got its entertainment. Theater, as an ancient and multifaceted art form, has played a pivotal role in shaping cultures, reflecting societal values, and providing a powerful medium for creative expression. Rooted in the human instinct to tell stories, theater has evolved over centuries, adapting to the dynamic landscapes of different societies and influencing the way people perceive and interact with the world around them.

Theater is a unique form of art that offers entertainment and allows audiences to experience emotions and thoughts that people might not otherwise be able to express (McCreary, 2022). When it comes to the importance of theater in life, theater is regarded as the greatest of all art forms and the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being (Wilde, 2022, cited in Klenk, 2022). While literature, research, and studies on theater in general are already extensive and can give a diverse range of outcomes, most of which are usually stigmatized and rarely compare the many productions of a theatrical performance.

Furthermore, theater reflects the lives of people, its history, beliefs, traditions, cultures, and others. It is a form of communication that not only acts as a form of entertainment but also holds a mirror of society and allows people to see each other in a different light (Elufowoju, 2020). Meanwhile, Clark and Miller (2016) stated that theater helps society in self-knowledge and understanding as it teaches society about itself, hoping to point out the attitudes and mindsets of current society. It is a way for people to tackle injustices that they encounter or tell a story that they are dying to tell the world (Bollinger, 2021).

Throughout the years, the state of Philippine theater has dramatically changed and has incorporated many modern elements to keep it relevant to its growing audience. Elcomblus (2021) discussed that the Philippine theater still attacks the idea of some contemporary issues and portrays the real lives of Filipinos nationally and internationally. However, some people are still craving plays that feature not only contemporary and important issues but also plays that tackle cultural identity, history, and heritage. This manifests the need for more diverse theater plays to be seen to inspire and encourage appreciation among current audiences, especially the younger generation.

In the Ilocos Region, particularly in the provinces of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur, theatrical plays are infrequent and occasionally performed. Theatrical plays are commonly performed during festivities, aiming to serve honor, create awareness, and foster a better appreciation of history. One of the theatrical plays produced and performed in the Pamulinawen Festival of Laoag City, Ilocos Norte, and the festival of Sta. Calina, Ilocos Sur, is the “*Comedia*.” *Comedia* is a picturesque theatrical representation of the moro-moro fight where a forbidden romance ensued between a prince and princess toward conversion to Christianity. It has portrayed how Christianity has affected people’s lives then and now and serves as a reminder that having relentless faith will always get people through even the darkest of times. In the province of Ilocos Norte, “*Ang Lagusan*” is one of the latest theatrical plays featured in the month-long foundation festivities of the Mariano Marcos State University. On the other hand, in the province of Ilocos Sur, “*Tres Patrimonio*” is also one of the well-known theatrical plays in the region. These renditions of theatrical plays aim to emphasize Ilokano pride and spark awareness about their cultural heritage and identity. However, theaters in the Ilocos region are rarely and occasionally performed.

The cultural and historical significance of theater in the Ilocos provinces is undeniable. Peacut and Gagliano (2022) stated that theater continues to be a significant part of a culture and contributes to the development of creatives from all fields and disciplines. It opens the possibility of experiencing different perspectives that people may not be aware of or have contemplated. However, as new entertainment platforms

keep appearing, this cultural heritage is slowly fading. McCreary (2022) discussed that ticket sales have declined for years and that many theaters are struggling to stay afloat, whether they are local, national, or international. The rise of streaming services has made it easier for people to watch plays and movies from the comfort of their homes. With more and more people spending their leisure time on their phones and laptops, there is less time for live entertainment. The present state of theater in the region manifests the need to explore this field further. With this, the researcher compared the similarities and distinctions of the *Comedia* play. Additionally, it can contribute to the available corpus of knowledge and further the understanding of theater as a traditional form of communication. Specifically, how Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur’s *Comedia* play resembles and differs from each other, and how it functions in both provinces. The two provinces share a rich history and culture. However, some might be modified after their separation and other factors that lead to constructing their own identity as a province. Thus, examining how their cultures, such as the intangible *Comedia* theater play, may have similarities and distinctions, will be interesting.

The research gaps the researcher addressed were the unpopularity of *Comedia* in research and comparing the Ilokano plays, as well as the limited studies about Ilokano plays. To this date, there are limited studies focused on theater produced and performed in the two provinces of Ilocos. The study aimed to reveal the truth, new insights, and perspectives. Most importantly, this study offers a valuable contribution to the field of communication that could serve as a source of inspiration for new ideas and advance the cause of theater performances, specifically in the Ilocos region.

The study aimed to identify the similarities and distinctions between the *Comedia* plays of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur. Specifically, it sought to answer the research question:

1. What are the similarities and distinctions between the *Comedia* play of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur in terms of their:

- a. plot;
- b. characters;
- c. theme;
- d. dialogue;
- e. music; and
- f. spectacle?

II. METHODOLOGY

Comparatively Analyzing Comedia Play

This study followed the comparative analysis approach to determine the similarities and distinctions between the *Comedia* plays of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur. Hanckel et al. (2021) discussed that qualitative

comparative analysis is a method for identifying the configurations of conditions that lead to specific outcomes. The elements of theater as listed by Aristotle, such as the plot, theme, characters, dialogue, music, and spectacle of the play, were investigated in the conduct of comparative analysis.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection method for this study is observation of the *Comedia* play. The primary data source is the retrieved recordings of *Comedia* in Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur. Additionally, the researcher observed and documented both *Comedia* plays personally. To aid the discussion, the researcher interviewed the directors of both plays with consent. Through interviews, the researcher gathered information about things or processes that other means could not effectively observe.

Data Analysis

The researcher comparatively analyzed the data of the study based on the following elements defined by the Aristotelian theory: the plot, theme, characters, dialogue, music, and spectacle of the play.

A coding sheet served as a guide in the conduct of the comparative analysis. The coding sheet used in the study was designed by the researcher, approved by the advisory committee, and evaluated by theater experts.

In addition, the researcher transcribed and analyzed the captured data after the recorded interview to examine it closely. The data that has been collected answers the study’s general research question, which is to identify the similarities and distinctions between the *Comedia* play of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur.

III. RESULTS

Similarities of the *Comedia* play of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur

The following elements of theater listed by Aristotle served as the framework for comparative analysis: plot, theme, characters, dialogue, music, and spectacle. During the comparative analysis between the *Comedia* plays in Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur, striking similarities were observed.

Plot: The comparative analysis of both *Comedia* plays revealed the following findings: similarities between Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur. Du (2017) stated that according to Aristotle, the plot is the underlying principle of a tragedy, as it is the very soul of it and where it gives meaning, vigor, and vitality to the play. In this study, the plot is categorized as exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution.

Exposition. In both provinces, the exposition serves as a ceremonial entry point into the narrative, inviting the audience into the world of the characters. Both plays started with a dance sequence introducing the characters of the play (Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 1. Dance introductions of characters in Ilocos Norte



Figure 2. Dance Introductions of Characters in Ilocos Sur

The analysis revealed that the *Comedia* play of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur has a shared characteristic where both provinces use the exposition as a cultural doorway to introduce key characters with a dance, allowing the audience to quickly identify protagonists, antagonists, and other essential figures. This supports the idea of Fleming (2020), where the exposition shows the part of a story that sets the stage for the drama to follow. This part introduces the theme, setting, characters, and circumstances at the story's beginnings. Hurwitz (2021) discussed how dancing, in the introduction of characters in theater, serves as a multifaceted tool for storytellers. It adds layers of meaning, cultural context, and visual appeal, contributing to a more immersive and engaging theatrical experience for the audience. The parallel use of dancing in character introductions underscores the enduring and cohesive nature of *Comedia* as a cultural expression in the Ilocos region.

Rising Action: In both provinces, the rising actions serve as a crucial phase that builds tension, introduces conflicts, and propels the narrative toward a climactic resolution. Ilocos Norte features the Moros learning of the forbidden love of their princess and the prince of Christians and trying to exploit the situation (Figure 4). In Ilocos Sur, the prince of Moros, along with its warriors and community leaders, prepares for a significant conflict or engagement to defend their land, culture, and way of life against the Spaniards (Figure 5).



Figure 3. Moros planning to exploit the forbidden love of the prince and princess



Figure 4. Screengrab of Moros having a meeting for the preparation of the fight

Further analysis revealed the rising action *Comedia* play of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur follow a hero's journey structure where a central character, often a brave and virtuous individual, is called to embark on a quest to confront a malevolent force of villains. This supports the idea of Shah (2023), who stated that this part of the story usually comprises a series of events that lay down breadcrumbs, ask questions, and set roadblocks and conflicts that must be overcome. It also creates tension and suspense, leading to the third element. Daise (2023) also discussed that a conflict between the protagonist and antagonist creates tension, action, and consequence, and brings great satisfaction to the conclusion of a story. This heroic motif resonates with audiences in both provinces, drawing them into the timeless narrative. While each region may infuse its own unique cultural elements and historical references, the heroic journey of the characters creates a cohesive and captivating narrative structure in the rising action of *Comedia* across the Ilocos region.

Climax. In both provinces, the climax serves as a pivotal moment where conflicts reach their highest point and resolutions begin to unfold, creating a cathartic and emotionally charged experience for the audience. In Ilocos Norte, forbidden love was exposed and the consequences of the relationship became dire. A confrontation then occurs between the Christians and Moros, with heightened emotions and dramatic tension (Figures 6 and 7). In Ilocos Sur, the climax of the play involved a decisive battle or confrontation where the

Moros used their military prowess, knowledge of the terrain, and fighting skills to achieve victory (Figure 8).



Figures 5 and 6. Confrontation between Christians and Moros



Figure 7. Screengrab of Moros defeating the Christians

The analysis shows that *Comedia* plays between Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur showcase a shared dramatic language that employs intense confrontations where heroes, often portrayed as virtuous and guided by faith, face off against antagonists. This supports the idea of Chase (2023), who discussed that the climax is the point of greatest tension or drama, where the central conflict is resolved. Daise (2023) also discussed that confrontations in the climax are key moments for character development where characters may undergo significant transformations, make critical choices, or reveal hidden facets of their personalities. This development adds depth to the characters and contributes to a better understanding of their motivations and arcs. Moreover, Deveaux (2019) stated that confrontation creates tension and suspense, holding the audience's attention and keeping them engaged in the unfolding

drama. To conclude, the confrontations embedded in the climax create a cohesive and resonant theatrical experience. It is a pivotal element that contributes significantly to the overall impact and effectiveness of a theatrical production.

Falling Action. In both provinces, the falling action serves as a crucial phase where the consequences of the climax are explored, loose ends are tied up, and the resolution unfolds. In Ilocos Norte, the consequences of forbidden love started to unfold when the princess of Moros was kept hidden. The prince of Christians, along with the jesters, then attempted to mediate the situation and successfully resolved the conflict with the help of an angel (Figure 9). On the other hand, in Ilocos Sur, the play explored the consequences of the Moro victory, including the restoration of their autonomy, cultural preservation, and the celebration of their success (Figure 10).



Figure 8. Angel giving the golden sword to the prince of Christians



Figure 9. Screengrab of Moros celebrating their success

The *Comedia* plays between Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur share a common narrative structure that addresses the aftermath of the climax and explores the resolution of conflicts. Chase (2023) stated that this part occurs after the turning point of the climax and signifies that the story's main conflict is ending. Ideally, it resolves any loose ends in the plot and shows the aftermath of the climax. Moreover, Daise (2023) discussed that the navigation of the aftermath of intense confrontations and moral dilemmas provides closure to the narrative arcs of the characters. This shared emphasis

on resolution reflects a universal storytelling approach that aims to bring satisfaction to the audience.

Resolution. In both provinces, the resolution typically involves the outcome or solution to the conflicts and challenges introduced in the exposition. In Ilocos Norte, the conflict between Christians and Moros came to an end, resulting in the conversion of Moros to Christianity. The Prince of Christians and the princess of Moros married, became King and Queen, and lived happily ever after (Figure 11). In Ilocos Sur, the play concludes with a resolution of the central conflict, emphasizing the resilience and determination of the Moros. The conflict between Christians and Moros also came to an end. The Moros reaffirm their cultural identity and their commitment to preserving their traditions (Figure 12).



Figure 10. Wedding and promotion of prince of Christians and princess of Moros



Figure 11. Screengrab of Christians ending conflict with Moros

The analysis revealed that both plays showcased a common goal and featured moments of reconciliation and redemption. Characters in both plays who were previously in conflict have found forgiveness and a path toward positive transformation. This supports the idea of Chase (2023), where this part of the story refers to the moment everything comes together for the main characters. It is the stage in the story's plot structure where characters resolve their conflicts and the climax's ripple effects settle down. It is a satisfying end, ensuring the story feels complete. Moreover, this also supports the idea of Barrowski (2021), where this part of the story is used to conclude the story satisfactorily, leaving the reader feeling fulfilled with the novel. Both provinces have proved that this part of the plot ties together all the loose ends of the stories and allows the reader to learn what happens to the main characters.

Characters. The comparative analysis of both *Comedia* plays revealed the following findings: similarities between Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur. In this study, the shared character traits depicted in the *Comedia* plays of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur suggest a common portrayal of archetypal figures deeply rooted in cultural, moral, and theatrical conventions. In both provinces, the characters embody common traits, contributing to the richness of the narratives.

Heroic Protagonists. Both Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur *Comedia* plays feature heroic protagonists. These characters are typically portrayed as virtuous, courageous, and deeply guided by faith. They serve as the moral compass of the stories, embodying the ideals of the community. Allison and Goethals (2019) have stated that heroic characters reveal truths and life patterns that limited minds have trouble understanding using the best logic or rational thought.

Antagonistic Villains. The antagonists in both provinces represent evil, corruption, and immorality. Francis (2015) has discussed that every story needs a great villain because, without the villain, the hero cannot shine. These characters serve as the force of antagonism that keeps the action moving and the reader engaged.

Confidant/e. The confidant/e in both of the *Comedia* plays are clowns or jesters. They are typically the sidekicks that provide moral support and counsel to the protagonist.

provide moments of levity in the midst of the intense drama.



Figure 14. Jesters of Ilocos Norte



Figure 15. Jester of Ilocos Sur



Figure 12. Jesters supporting the prince



Figure 13. The Jester supporting the Moros

Supportive Family Roles. Both of the *Comedia* plays play a supportive role in the decision of the protagonist or antagonist.

Comic Relief Characters. Comedic characters are a common feature in both provinces. These characters, often portrayed as humorous and sometimes bumbling,

The similarities in character traits portrayed in *Comedia* plays between Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur emphasize the archetypal nature of characters within the genre. Bright (2022) has stated that characters mainly represent certain morals or qualities and how those morals or qualities affect the plot's outcome. In this study, the portrayal of heroic protagonists, antagonistic forces, comedic relief, and community representations creates a familiar framework that aligns with the moral and theatrical conventions prevalent in traditional folk theater. While each province may infuse its own unique cultural nuances, the universal character archetypes contribute to a cohesive and relatable storytelling experience across the Ilocos region.

Theme. The comparative analysis of both *Comedia* plays revealed the following findings: similarities between Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur. In this study, both provinces have encompassed themes that resonate with universal human experiences while incorporating specific provincial elements.

Religious Conflict. The central theme of both plays is religious conflict, where opposing religious beliefs or

practices clash. The plays have involved indigenous beliefs or traditions conflicting with the influence of Christianity.

Parental Authority. The authority of parents or guardians played a significant role in both plays. The main characters contended with parental disapproval, authority, and expectations and experienced conflicts with their families.

Sacrifice and Suffering. Some of the characters are willing to make great sacrifices and endure suffering in the name of love or in the name of their religion. This theme underscores the depth of their love and dedication.

Humor and Comic Relief. Despite the serious themes, the play also incorporated humor and comedic elements, providing comic relief and entertainment for the audience.

Reconciliation and Resolution. Ultimately, both *Comedia* plays aimed for a resolution, highlighting the possibility of reconciliation, understanding, and a harmonious ending.

The similarities in themes presented in both plays highlight the universal and timeless nature of certain themes while integrating provincial elements. The exploration of religious devotion, parental authority, sacrificial actions, comic relief, and reconciliation creates a familiar framework that reflects the cultural, moral, and historical values of the Ilocos region. The following themes support the idea of McCreary (2022), which shows the philosophy that forms the base of the story or a moral lesson that the characters learn. These themes contribute to a cohesive and meaningful storytelling experience that resonates across audiences.

Dialogue. The shared characteristics in the dialogue of *Comedia* plays in Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur suggest a common language style deeply rooted in cultural, historical, and theatrical traditions. In this study, both provinces have utilized dialogue as a crucial tool to convey narrative, express cultural nuances, and develop character dynamics.

Ilokano Language. Both of the *Comedia* plays of the Ilocos region used the Ilokano language. Orlando (2023) discussed that the use of the mother tongue not only enhances the artistic quality of the performance but also facilitates a more profound and immediate emotional impact, creating a shared experience that transcends language and resonates on a universal level. The use of one's mother tongue in the performing arts thus becomes a powerful tool for cultural preservation, individual self-expression, and the establishment of a deep, meaningful connection between performers and their audiences.

Pattern of Speeches. The script used in the play of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur is written in poetic verses, where the character lines in the play are rhymed.

Pattern of speeches in Ilocos Norte.

Iti kaasi ti Dios a namarsua, iso Ama awan duadua. Nakautangantay tulong na ta nakasubliak ditoy Verbania. Idi addakam iti langalang, Disso nga inkam nagsardengan,

daydi higante a kadawelan, nakaturug iti nargaan.

With God's Grace, there was no turning back.
Because of him, I was able to return to Verbania.
When we were in the middle of the road, we stopped
Then there were these huge waves that were calm and resting.

Pattern of speeches in Ilocos Sur.

Senior Heneral a nangato, ania la ti aramidentayo?

Ket dagiti Moro, balbalakenda a sugudentayo.

Senior Heneral a nangatwan, intayon sagsaganaan.

Ta di tayon marigatan ton intayo makilablabaan.

Your highness, what should we do?
The Moros are planning to attack us.
Your highness, we should start preparing
So that we are ready when we will fight.

The analysis revealed that the *Comedia* plays of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur share a common dialect and follow a rhyming structure. Petri (2012) stated that rhyming can deepen contact and understanding of messages that are not explicitly stated in the text. If the rhythm of the verbal language is changed away from its realistic form, a shift takes place in the understanding, or rather in the message. With that, the listener hears not only the words and their semantic significance but also begins to reflect on the speaker's emotional state.

Music. The comparative analysis of both *Comedia* plays revealed the following findings: similarities between Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur. In this study, both provinces have utilized the use of sounds throughout the play.

Live Band. Both plays have their own live band. Hogan (2020) discussed that the live music from the band enhances various aspects of the performance, contributing to the vibrancy, emotion, and cultural richness of performances. Its contributions are vital to the success of the performance, enriching the overall theatrical experience for both performers and the audience.



Figure 16. Live band of Ilocos Norte



Figure 17. Live Band of Ilocos Sur

Songs. Songs are not just entertainment but essential components that contribute to the narrative, emotional resonance, and cultural identity of these traditional Filipino theatrical performances. In both provinces, similarities were analyzed in terms of the songs incorporated.

Opening and Closing Songs. Both plays have incorporated songs in the opening and closing parts of the play.

Battle and Victory Songs. Both plays have included songs to accompany conflicts, wars, or battles.

Entrances and Exits. Both plays also included a song played by the live band to accompany the entrances and exits of the characters.

Sound Effects. Sound effects play a significant role in enhancing the overall theatrical experience. While live music and vocal performances contribute to the musical and emotional aspects of the play, sound effects provide additional layers of realism, atmosphere, and engagement.

Trumpet Fanfares. In both provinces, trumpets or brass instruments are utilized to announce the arrival of important characters or significant plot developments.

Clashing Swords. For scenes featuring combat or duels in both plays, the clashing of swords or weapons is simulated to add a sense of action and danger.

Generally, the analysis revealed that the music used in the *Comedia* plays of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur is an essential and dynamic component that enhances the cultural, emotional, and narrative dimensions of the theatrical experience. This supports the idea of McCreary (2022), who stated that music plays a multifaceted and integral role in enhancing the overall theatrical experience and contributing to the unique cultural and provincial identity of the performance. This proves that the role of music in a play extends beyond mere accompaniment, making it a fundamental element in the rich tapestry of theater.

Spectacle. The comparative analysis of both *Comedia* plays revealed the following findings: similarities between Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur. In this study, similarities were only found in the movement or choreography of both plays.

Movement or Choreography. In both provinces, movement and choreography play an essential role in the entirety of the theatrical experience. *Comedia* is a

dynamic and lively genre, and the choreographed movements contribute to the energetic, entertaining, and culturally rich nature of these traditional Filipino performances.

Sword Fighting Choreography. Both plays include stylized fight scenes, especially in situations involving heroes, villains, or comedic characters (Figures 19 and 20). These fights are choreographed to be entertaining rather than realistic, with exaggerated movements and comedic elements.



Figure 18. Sword fight of Ilocos Norte



Figure 19. Screengrab of sword fight of Ilocos Sur

Dance Sequences. Both provinces included dance sequences, as they are an integral part of *Comedia* plays. Choreographed dance sequences are often included, featuring traditional or stylized dance forms. These dances add a visual spectacle to the performance and are closely coordinated with the live music.



Figure 20. Dance sequence of Ilocos Norte



Figure 21. Dance sequence of Ilocos Sur

Entrances and exits. In both provinces, the entrances and exits of characters are stylized and theatrical, contributing to the overall rhythm and pacing of the play. These movements are accompanied by music and serve as transitions between scenes.

Comedic Movements. In both provinces, comedic interactions and physical comedy were involved, including humorous encounters and other playful movements. Some of the characters engage in comedic duels, chase scenes, or choreographed moments of misunderstanding, eliciting laughter from the audience.



Figure 22. Characters of Ilocos Norte doing comedic movements



Figure 23. Characters of Ilocos Sur doing comedic movements

The analysis revealed that the movement and choreography of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur are likely to be characterized by a combination of dance forms, expressive gestures, and dynamic interactions that add depth and visual interest to the storytelling process. Hurwitz (2021) discussed that dynamic movement and choreography create a visually engaging spectacle for

the audience. The aesthetic appeal of well-choreographed sequences contributes to the overall enjoyment of the performance and captures the audience's attention. These elements contribute to the cultural richness and entertaining nature of *Comedia* as a traditional theatrical genre in the Philippines.

Distinctions of the Comedia play of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur

During the comparative analysis of *Comedia* plays in Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur, notable distinctions were observed.

Plot. The comparative analysis of both *Comedia* plays revealed the following findings: the distinctions between Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur. Below are the distinctive plot characteristics that have been analyzed.

Audience Participation. The play in Ilocos Norte involves a call to the audience, inviting them to join in the festivities and be part of the performance. This communal engagement fosters a sense of unity and shared experience.



Figure 24. Jester doing comedic movements with an audience

Festive Atmosphere. While both provinces conclude with a sense of celebration and victory, Ilocos Norte's play includes a more pronounced emphasis on festive elements, such as dances, music, and other entertainments. This joyful ambiance adds a unique flavor to the exposition and climactic moments, setting it apart from its counterpart in Ilocos Sur.



Figure 25. The celebration dance sequence of the play

The analysis highlights that the play of Ilocos Norte is livelier as it provides more entertainment than the play of Ilocos Sur. Lilley (2021) testified that the role of public participation is vital to theater as it showcases theater's immense power to serve the audience it represents. In addition, Leonardo (2023) also discussed that the atmosphere plays a crucial role in transporting an audience into the world of the play. From the moment an audience member steps into the theater, the atmosphere sets the tone for the performance and sets the stage for an unforgettable experience. While some parts of the plot bind these two provinces, the unique incorporation of public participation, as well as the festive atmosphere, reflects the diverse cultural influences and historical narratives that have shaped *Comedia* in Ilocos Norte.

Characters. The comparative analysis of both *Comedia* plays revealed the following findings: the distinctions between Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur. Below are the characters analyzed in both provinces.

Protagonist. These characters are often the heroes that the audience sympathizes with.

Protagonist in Ilocos Norte: The Prince of Christians. Typically, one of the lovers is involved in a forbidden relationship. The prince defies societal norms, such as class distinctions or parental disapproval, to pursue forbidden love.



Figure 26. Prince of Christians becoming the King

Protagonist in Ilocos Sur: Prince of Moros. The leader is responsible for organizing and leading the Moro warriors in their efforts to achieve victory over external threats, whether they are colonial forces, rival groups, or other adversaries. The character's actions and decisions often play a significant role in the overall success and triumph of the Moros in the play's plot. This character embodies leadership, courage, and the determination to defend the Moro people and their way of life.



Figure 27. The prince of Moros doing his entrance routine

Antagonist. These characters take on the role of the villain in the story.

Antagonist in Ilocos Norte: Emperor of Moros. The Emperor is the strict parent of one of the lovers who enforces societal constraints, opposes the forbidden love, or stands in the way of the lovers' happiness.



Figure 28. Emperor of Moros during a fight scene

Antagonist in Ilocos Sur: Prince of Christians. He, along with the Spanish colonial authorities, represents the external force attempting to exert control over the Moro community, attempting to convert them to Christianity and suppress their indigenous beliefs.



Figure 29. The prince of Christians doing his entrance routine

Supporting Characters. These characters support the protagonist and antagonist of the story.

Supporting Characters in Ilocos Norte:

Two Clowns or Jesters. The clowns, or comedic characters, are often referred to as *alalay* or *comico*. These characters provide comic relief and add humor to the performance. They play a vital role in entertaining the audience with their witty lines, physical comedy, and humorous antics. Jesters are known for their exaggerated personalities, costumes, and antics, and these characters contribute to the overall lighthearted and entertaining atmosphere of the play.



Figure 30. Jester 1 of Ilocos Norte



Figure 31. Jester 2 of Ilocos Norte

Family of Christians. These characters play a supportive role in the prince's decisions.



Figure 32. Princess of Christians



Figure 33. King of Christians



Figure 34. Queen of Christians

Family of Moros. These characters are often responsible for forbidding the love affair, adding tension to the story.



Figure 35. The family of Moros, along with the warriors

Supporting Characters in Ilocos Sur: Clown or Jester. Unlike the play in Ilocos Norte, the play in Ilocos Sur only has one clown, or jester.



Figure 36. Screengrab of Jester of Ilocos Sur

Family of Moros. The family members of Moros play a supportive role in the prince's decisions. They contribute to the emotional depth of the story and provide personal stakes for the central characters.



Figure 37. Screengrab of the family of Moros with its warriors

Family of Christians. They are often responsible for exerting control over the Moro community, adding tension to the story.



Figure 38. Screengrab of the family of Christians with its soldiers

Minor Characters.

Minor Characters in Ilocos Norte:

Three Kings or Wise Men. They are traditionally associated with the nativity story in Christianity. These characters are typically portrayed as wise, and noble, and often carry an air of regal authority.



Figure 39. Three Kings of Ilocos Norte

Angel. The angel was encountered by the prince giving him the golden sword attempting to mediate the situation and successfully resolve the conflict.



Figure 40. Angel giving the prince the Golden Sword

Crazy Woman. The crazy woman is one of the characters encountered by the prince which hinders him in saving the princess.



Figure 41. Crazy woman holding a voodoo doll

Christian Soldiers and Moro Warriors. They are depicted as participants in the conflicts and conquests. Their roles involve engaging with other characters, including the communities, rebels, or opposing forces within the storyline.



Figure 42. Christian Soldiers of Ilocos Norte



Figure 43. Moro Warriors of Ilocos Norte with the crazy woman.

Minor Characters in Ilocos Sur:

Moro Warriors. Moro warriors in Ilocos Sur are depicted as resisting Spanish colonization. The conflicts between Moro warriors and Spanish forces in Ilocos Sur contribute to the dramatic tension within the narrative, reflecting historical resistance movements against colonial rule.



Figure 44. Screenshot of Moro warriors during a meeting for preparation

Christian Soldiers. Christian soldiers in Ilocos Sur are symbolic of the authority and power of the Spanish colonial regime. They represent the military arm of the colonial government and serve as enforcers of laws and orders within the play.



Figure 45. Screenshot of Christian soldiers of Ilocos Sur

Other Characters.

Other Characters in Ilocos Norte:

Narrator. The narrator in Ilocos Norte plays a significant and multifaceted role, such as storyteller, cultural interpreter, and entertainer rolled into one. The narrator's presence is integral to the traditional and communal nature of *Comedia* in Ilocos Norte, enhancing the audience's understanding and enjoyment of the performance.



Figure 46. The narrator of Ilocos Norte

Dancers. These characters contribute to the visual appeal of the performance. Their movements, choreography, and costumes enhance the overall aesthetics of the production, providing a visually captivating experience for the audience.



Figure 47. Belly dancers of Ilocos Norte



Figure 1. Festival dancers of Ilocos Norte

The analysis revealed that the *Comedia* play of Ilocos Norte has more characters than the *Comedia* play of Ilocos Sur. The incorporation of a narrator and additional characters in Ilocos Norte offers a unique lens of the province. Davidson (2023) testified that a narrator establishes a direct connection with the audience, engaging them in a more personal and intimate way. When used thoughtfully, a narrator can be a powerful tool to enhance the theatrical experience and convey the story in a compelling and accessible way. While both plays feature common characters, some of the character's roles differ in each play. These distinctions underscore the adaptability and cultural richness of *Comedia* in preserving and expressing the heritage of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur.

Theme. The comparative analysis of both *Comedia* plays revealed the following findings: the distinctions between Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur. Below are the distinctive themes that have been analyzed.

Main Theme.

Ilocos Norte: Forbidden Love. The most obvious theme in the play of Ilocos Norte is the forbidden nature of the love between the central characters. The play delves into the conflict between love and honor. The characters grapple with the choice between following their hearts and upholding their families' or society's honor and reputation. This theme highlights the challenges and consequences of defying societal norms and expectations.

Ilocos Sur: Religious Conflict and Tension. The *Comedia* play of Ilocos Sur explores the conflicts, tensions, and confrontations that arise when different religious groups or beliefs interact. The play depicted the struggles between adherents of different faiths, highlighting the challenges, misunderstandings, and hostilities that occurred.

Minor themes.

Minor themes of Ilocos Norte:

Social Class and Status. The play in Ilocos Norte portrayed love affairs across social class boundaries. This theme explores the challenges of love transcending

societal hierarchies and the prejudices associated with class differences.

Romantic Rivalry. Rivalry for the affections of the beloved is incorporated in the play of Ilocos Norte. The villain or antagonist resorted to rivalry to thwart the lovers' relationship.

Crisis of Faith. Characters in Ilocos Norte experienced a crisis of faith, questioning their beliefs and the actions of religious authorities. This theme explores personal and spiritual struggles.

Conversion. The play in Ilocos Norte depicted the efforts of religious authorities or individuals to convert others to their faith, often through force or coercion.

Minor Themes of Ilocos Sur.

Resistance and Rebellion. The characters of the play in Ilocos Sur engaged in acts of resistance or rebellion against religious authorities or those attempting to suppress indigenous beliefs. This theme focuses on the fight for religious freedom and cultural autonomy.

Power and Corruption. The theme of power and corruption within religious institutions is portrayed in the play of Ilocos Sur, highlighting the abuse of religious authority for personal gain.

Justice and Redemption. Themes of justice and redemption are incorporated in the play of Ilocos Sur as characters seek justice for religious persecution or strive for personal redemption in the context of religious conflict.

Tolerance and Understanding. The play of Ilocos sur conveyed messages of religious tolerance and understanding, emphasizing the importance of respecting diverse beliefs and coexisting harmoniously.

The distinction in themes between *Comedia* plays in Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur is likely rooted in the distinct histories, cultural practices, and local narratives of each province. McConnell (2019) testified that incorporating themes is fundamental to good storytelling as it gives the characters and events of the story a meaning that often leads to great spiritual or emotional involvement and release by an audience. Letourneau (2014) also discussed that the theme allows readers to relate to the characters and their struggles and to feel invested in the outcome. While both provinces share a common Philippine and *Comedia* heritage, they may differ in the specific stories, characters, and cultural elements they choose to highlight.

Dialogue. The comparative analysis of both *Comedia* plays revealed the following findings: the distinctions between Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur. Below are the distinctive dialogue characteristics that have been analyzed.

Language.

Language in Ilocos Norte. The play in Ilocos Norte has also incorporated a few English and Filipino lines into its script.

Language in Ilocos Sur. The language used in Ilocos Sur in the play was purely Ilokano.

Baxter (2018) discussed that incorporating diverse languages reflects the mosaic of human experience, captures the nuances of multicultural societies, and contributes to a more inclusive representation of the world on stage. It allows for the exploration of linguistic diversity as a storytelling device, offering a unique texture to characters and their interactions. Furthermore, the use of multiple languages can enhance the play's thematic depth, portraying the complexities of communication, identity, and cross-cultural encounters. By embracing linguistic variety, a theatrical production transcends linguistic boundaries, inviting audiences into a dynamic, multilingual tapestry that mirrors the diverse and interconnected nature of the globalized society.

Diction.

Diction in Ilocos Norte. The actors in Ilocos Norte used exaggerated elocution and diction, which involve the clear and precise pronunciation of words.

Diction in Ilocos Sur. The lines of the characters are not clear, and the pronunciations of words are not precise.

Woodhead (2018) stated that exaggeration causes something to seem more significant than it is in reality, and this brings greater attention to that specific context. This not only captivates the audience's attention but also facilitates a deeper understanding of the underlying messages and themes. It grants the production a heightened sense of theatricality, breaking away from the constraints of realism to create a heightened reality that resonates with the audience's emotions and imagination, ultimately making the theatrical experience more vivid, thought-provoking, and memorable.

Tone.

Tone in Ilocos Norte. The actors in Ilocos Norte were marked by melodrama, where emotions and actions are heightened for dramatic effect. Characters expressed extreme joy, sorrow, anger, or fear in an exaggerated manner.

Tone in Ilocos Sur. The tone of all the characters, excluding the clown, throughout the play of Ilocos Sur was purely serious.

Pitch.

Pitch in Ilocos Norte. Every end of the character's line is prolonged in a high or low pitch depending on the mood/situation

Pitch in Ilocos Sur. Most of the lines of the characters are monotone.

Hurwitz (2021) discussed that tone and pitch set the mood, guiding the audience's emotional response and establishing the framework through which the narrative unfolds. Whether it be comedic, tragic, suspenseful, or poignant, the chosen tone creates a dynamic lens through which characters and events are perceived. A well-crafted tone and pitch not only immerse the audience in the world of the play but also enhance the depth of characterizations, making the theatrical experience a visceral and emotionally resonant journey that lingers in the hearts and minds of spectators long after the final curtain falls.

The analysis between the two provinces revealed that the *Comedia* play of Ilocos Norte has a broader and more understandable dialogue as it includes other languages, a wide range of emotions, and excellent elocution and diction. McCreary (2022) testified that diction is important in theater because it allows the audience to understand what is being said on stage and appreciate the beauty of the language being used in the play. Additionally, Hyde (2020) discussed that emotions and feelings are key to storytelling as it allows the audience to understand and relate to the character. Ilocos Sur, on the other hand, focused on using the Ilokano language and having a serious play. With that, it can be concluded that the distinctions in dialogue between Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur are likely rooted in their unique cultural, historical, and linguistic characteristics.

Music. The comparative analysis of both *Comedia* plays revealed the following findings: the distinctions between Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur. Below are the distinctive musical characteristics that have been analyzed.

Other Songs in Ilocos Norte.

Comic Songs. Comedic characters in Ilocos Norte, such as the sidekicks or humorous figures, have comic songs that add humor and entertainment to the performance.

Group or Chorus Songs. Ensemble songs, sung by a group or chorus of characters, are incorporated in the play of Ilocos Norte. These songs convey a sense of community or unity among the characters.

Dance Songs. The play of Ilocos Norte included dance sequences, and the songs used in these moments are accompanied by choreography and physical movements.

Sound Effects

Sound Effects in Ilocos Norte:

Drum Rolls and Beat. Drums are used in Ilocos Norte to signal important moments or create tension, as shown in the accompanying entrances and exits. The drum rolls indicate impending action or a climactic event.

Cymbal Crashes. Cymbals is used to emphasize key moments, particularly comedic or dramatic climaxes, providing a sharp and attention-grabbing

Thunder and Lightning. Thunder and lightning sound effects are employed to create a stormy atmosphere or heighten dramatic tension.

Other Sound Effects in Ilocos Sur.

Whistle Blows. A whistle is used to signify the arrival of characters or important events. The cue for each religion is different, as the director of Ilocos Sur expressed in sharing how the whistle is used to signal a cue:

Tapno maawatan dagiti banda no ania iti tukarenda, agusarakam iti pito a mangsenial kadakuada. Siak a direktor ti mang senyal kadakuada no ania ti tukarenda. Mesa nukua a pito para kadagiti Kristiano No met kadigiti Moros ket mamindua a pito. (In order for the band to know what to play, we use a whistle to signal them. It is I, the director, who will tell them what to play. One whistle for the Christians. Two whistles for the Moros.)

The analysis revealed that the play of Ilocos Norte has included more songs than the play of Ilocos Sur. Brown (2007) stated that the addition of songs to a standard play heightens emotion, reinforces dramatic action, and evokes atmosphere and mood in ways that words alone cannot. Additionally, the analysis shows that both provinces utilize an instrument to signal a cue, where Ilocos Norte uses drum beats and Ilocos Sur uses whistles. Holley (2023) discussed that cues are essential in a play as they convey information about the setting, the set and props, the lighting and sound, and the physical actions and emotional state of a character. This music in *Comedia* plays is a vital component, contributing to the overall atmosphere and cultural representation of both provinces.

Spectacle. The comparative analysis of both *Comedia* plays revealed the following findings: the distinctions between Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur. Below are the distinctions that have been analyzed. In this study, spectacle is categorized as everything that the audience sees as they watch the play. Below are the distinctive elements of spectacle found in the study.

Props.

Props in Ilocos Norte:

Swords.

Sword of Christians.



Figure 48. Sword of Christians held by the soldiers

Sword of Moros.



Figure 49. Sword of Moros, held by the Emperor of Moros

Golden Sword.



Figure 50. The Golden Sword held by the Prince of Christians

Mask.



Figure 51. Mask worn by the Prince of Christians

Comic Props. Props used by the jesters for entertainment.



Figure 52. Comedic props used in Ilocos Norte



Figure 53. Comedic props used in Ilocos Norte

Festive props. Props used in celebrations and dance routines.



Figure 54. Festive props during celebration sequence

Props in Ilocos Sur.
Swords.

Long Sword.



Figure 55. Long sword of Ilocos Sur

Pika Sword.



Figure 56. Pika sword of Ilocos Sur

Thrones/Chairs. These props are used to signify seats of authority or formal settings. Thrones, in particular, may represent the seat of a king or ruler.



Figure 57. Screenshot of thrones and chairs in Ilocos Sur

Costume/Wardrobe.

Costume/Wardrobe in Ilocos Norte:

Color.

Christians: White and Gold

Moros: Black, Green, and Gold

Headpieces

King: Golden Crown

Queen: Five-stacked Crown



Figure 58. King and queen wearing their crown

Emperor: Black and Gold Turban



Figure 28. Emperor of Moros during a fight scene

Moros: Turbanettes



Figure 6. Confrontation between Christians and Moros

Capes

King: White Cape



Figure 33. King of Christians of Ilocos Norte

Moros: Black, green and orange Cape



Figure 6. Confrontation between Christians and Moros

Costume/Wardrobe in Ilocos Sur.

Color.

Christians: Green and yellow

Moros: Maroon

Headpieces.

Christians:

King: Green crown

Prince of Christians: Yellow veil

Soldier: Hat



Figure 59. Screengrab Moros having a meeting

Moros:

Emperor: Maroon crown

Warriors: Hats.



Figure 60. Screengrab of Moros having a meeting

Lighting.

Lighting in Ilocos Norte. Different kinds of hues were utilized throughout the play. The changing of hues is utilized depending on the mood of the scene.

Lighting in Ilocos Sur. Only used one color for lighting.

Other Movement/ Choreography in Ilocos Norte.

Romantic Gestures. Comedia play in Ilocos Norte mainly focuses on the romantic plot. The choreographed romantic interludes have involved characters expressing their affections through dance or stylized movements.

Exaggerated Gestures. Comedia is characterized by exaggerated and expressive gestures. Actors use broad and theatrical movements to convey emotions, actions, and relationships between characters. These gestures contribute to the energetic and playful nature of the performance.

Makeup.

Makeup in Ilocos Norte:

Beard and Mustache Makeup (Male Characters)



Figure 42. Beard makeup of Ilocos Norte

Face Painting
Age Makeup



Figure 61. Face painting of Clowns and age makeup of Narrator

Scenery.

Scenery in Ilocos Norte. The background of the play has incorporated different design elements.



Figure 62. Set of Ilocos Norte

Scenery in Ilocos Sur. The whole background of the play is a curtain that changes color depending on the scene. All scenes were done in the same background



Figure 63. Set of Ilocos Sur

The spectacle of the *Comedia* play of Ilocos Norte is far more creative than the play of Ilocos Sur. The play of Ilocos Norte utilized a variety of visionary elements, such as more props, lighting, choreographies, and makeup, which makes the play even livelier, colorful, and visually appealing. Memon (2022) testified that plays that rely on spectacles are often considered more enjoyable than plays that lack it due to their immersive nature of engaging with large-scale events. Both provinces have unique architectural styles, historical settings, and locally significant props that are incorporated to create visually appealing and contextually relevant scenes. The way the narratives are visually represented, whether through costumes, set design, or symbolic elements, differs from one another, reflecting the unique stories of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the comparative analysis, the study revealed a rich tapestry of cultural expressions deeply rooted in the history and traditions of these two provinces. While both provinces share fundamental elements of the *Comedia*, distinct variations emerge that reflect the unique cultural nuances and influences of each locality.

In Ilocos Norte, the *Comedia* play is modernized as it exhibits a fusion of romantic, comedic, and festive elements, with the incorporation of several characters, movements, props, and other elements. The performance reflects a dynamic interplay between historical narratives and the colorful tradition of the province, creating an entertaining and captivating experience for the audience.

On the other hand, Ilocos Sur's *Comedia* play is traditional as it showcases a blend of local traditions and Spanish influences, creating a performance that resonates with the province's historical and cultural heritage. The strict incorporation of local language, seriousness, and simplicity of the play contribute to a distinct flavor that sets it apart from other provincial variations.

While both provinces celebrate the religious and cultural significance of the *Comedia*, the differences in execution, style, and thematic emphasis highlight the diversity within this traditional art form. These distinctions are not only a testament to the adaptability of the *Comedia* across different cultural landscapes but also speak to the resilience of these traditions in preserving and promoting local identity.

In essence, the comparative analysis underscores the importance of recognizing and appreciating the provinces' similarities and distinctions within the broader framework of the *Comedia* tradition. As custodians of these cultural expressions, it is crucial for communities in Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur to continue preserving and transmitting this invaluable

heritage to future generations. By understanding the similarities and distinctions, there is a contribution to the broader tapestry of Philippine cultural diversity, fostering a sense of pride and identity that transcends time and boundaries.

RECOMMENDATION

This research has improved comprehension of the similarities and distinctions between the *Comedia* plays of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur. As the investigation progressed, a few areas emerged as potential future research areas. The following are the recommendations:

1. As a result of conducting this study, the researcher has come to the realization that Ilokano Theater represents a potentially rich field of study for communication studies that has not yet been examined. The researcher recommends that future studies focus more on documenting this dying art form of local theater, such as *sarswela* and other local pieces.
2. In this study, the elements of theater under the framework of Aristotle were explored. Future researchers can use other frameworks than Aristotle to discover other findings regarding the elements of theater.
3. To aid the discussion, the directors of both theater plays were interviewed in this study. Future researchers can also focus on studying the theater directors and uncovering their experiences or techniques of directing.

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