

CYBERDRAMATIC GRIEF IN CLAIR OBSCUR: EXPEDITION 33

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how grief functions within the narrative structure of *Clair Obscur: Expedition 33*, addressing a gap left by previous research focused primarily on translation, trauma, and player experience. Combining A. J. Greimas's actantial model and modalities with Janet Murray's concept of cyberdrama, the study utilizes qualitative textual analysis of narrative events, dialogues, gameplay sequences, and cyberdramatic structures across three acts. The findings reveal that grief operates as a modal intensifier, sustaining the characters' orientation toward action (*vouloir-faire*) despite shifts in subjects, objects, and knowledge. Additional exploration and optional content further drive this narrative motivation rather than diminishing it. Consequently, this study offers a new structural perspective, showing how grief operates within interactive systems.

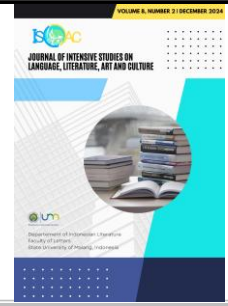
INTRODUCTION

Clair Obscur: Expedition 33 (Sandfall Interactive, 2025) demonstrates how digital games can compose complex narrative and procedural experiences that extend beyond

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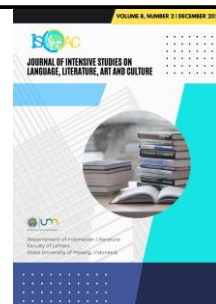
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conventional entertainment. As a contemporary narrative form, digital games integrate storytelling with interactive and procedural systems, enabling meaning to emerge through the interplay of rules, player choices, and narrative structures (Bogost, 2010; Galloway, 2006; Jenkins, 2004). Building on this capacity, *Clair Obscur: Expedition 33* (hereafter CO: Ex33) has gained recognition for its musical excellence, artistic visual design, and emotionally engaging storytelling, particularly through its sustained exploration of grief and loss (Higham, 2025). The game, therefore, offers a compelling site for examining how interactive systems and narrative structures jointly shape affective experience.

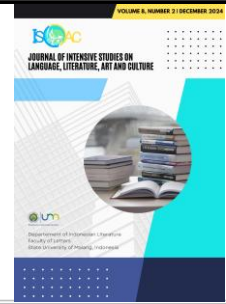
The representation of grief in CO: Ex33 is especially significant because grief is frequently understood as resistant to narrative resolution. Studies of grief often emphasize its nonlinear character, recurrent nature, and resistance to closure (Boss & Carnes, 2012; Klass et al., 2014; Melnick & Roos, 2007). Yet digital games are generally structured around progression and eventual completion. In CO: Ex33, grief is communicated not only through plot and dialogue but also through repetition, prolonged engagement, and moments of emotional suspension that interrupt the player's sense of forward momentum. Consequently, the game presents grief as an experiential condition sustained throughout gameplay rather than as a problem that can be overcome through narrative completion. This issue becomes particularly relevant within the broader debate between narratology and ludology. Since the emergence of game studies, scholars have debated whether games should primarily be understood as narrative forms comparable to literary texts or as procedural systems governed by rules, mechanics, and simulations (Chen et al., 2023; Iolanda Costa Bispo, 2025; Karabinus et al., 2025; Veloya, 2023; Wolf et al., 2008). Frasca (2013) argues that meaning in games is produced not only through storytelling but also through simulation processes experienced by players. When games address complex affective experiences such as grief, neither perspective alone appears fully sufficient. A purely narratological approach risks overlooking how emotional experiences are shaped through player action and systemic interaction. In contrast, a



purely ludological approach may struggle to explain how affective meanings are maintained across narrative development.

This challenge becomes even more pronounced in role-playing games (RPGs), a genre characterized by the integration of narrative progression, character development, moral decision-making, complex gameplay systems, and immersive forms of player engagement that encourage sustained investment in unfolding narrative trajectories (Cragoe, 2016; Domingues et al., 2024; Grose, 2026; Wang & Hao, 2022). RPGs resist reduction to either narrative text or procedural system because both dimensions operate simultaneously. CO: Ex33 exemplifies this hybridity by combining conventional RPG mechanics, such as character progression, exploration, and choice systems, with a narrative experience explicitly centered on grief and depression. In this context, grief does not exist as a thematic layer separate from gameplay but is embedded within the game's overall structure of action and progression.

Recent scholarship on *Clair Obscur: Expedition 33* has approached the game through distinct analytical lenses. From a linguistic perspective, Wu (2026) examines ambiguity in the game's Chinese translation, highlighting how non-direct translation strategies amplify uncertainty in lore-related elements. King-Smith (2026), drawing on Kristeva's theory of abjection, argues that the game produces an "abject player" through a fluctuating dynamic of beauty and violence that destabilizes the boundary between player and avatar. Meanwhile, Škripcová (2025) adopts a psychological framework to analyze grief through differentiated character-based coping strategies, emphasizing the game's complex representation of trauma. While these studies provide valuable insights into the linguistic, affective, and narrative dimensions of the game, they remain limited in explaining how grief functions as a force sustaining narrative continuity amid changing configurations of action. Translation-oriented approaches primarily focus on the mediation and interpretation of meaning, psychological approaches emphasize grief as an emotional or cognitive response, and affect-oriented analyses foreground player experience and subjectivity. Consequently, these approaches provide limited tools for examining how



grief organizes relations among subjects, objects, and actions throughout the game's evolving narrative structure. As a result, a gap remains in understanding how grief operates not only as an affective condition or thematic representation but also as a force that sustains and reorients action across the progression of an interactive narrative.

To address this problem, the study combines Janet Murray's concept of cyberdrama with A. J. Greimas's structural narratology. Murray's concept of cyberdrama understands digital narratives as dramatic systems sustained through interactivity, procedural organization, and player participation (Murray, 2017). This perspective provides a framework for examining how emotional intensity emerges from the structured relationship between narrative events and gameplay processes. Complementing this approach, Greimas's actantial model and theory of modalities enable analysis of how narrative subjects are oriented toward action through modalities such as wanting-to-do, having-to-do, knowing-how-to-do, and being-able-to-do (Greimas et al., 1982, 1983). Together, these frameworks make it possible to examine grief not merely as thematic content but as a condition shaping the motivation and persistence of action within the game.

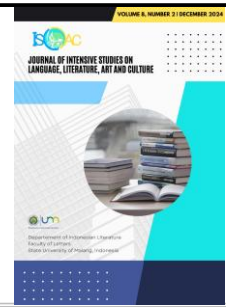
This study investigates the role of grief in *Clair Obscur: Expedition 33* by addressing three interconnected questions: (1) how grief functions within the actantial and modal structures of *Clair Obscur: Expedition 33*, (2) how cyberdramatic mechanisms sustain grief throughout the narrative progression, and (3) how grief persists despite transformations in actantial configurations and shifts in narrative objectives and objects of value. Accordingly, the study hypothesizes that grief serves as a modal intensifier, sustaining *vouloir-faire* throughout the narrative and functioning as a persistent motivational force that continues to drive characters' actions and narrative development even as actantial relationships and objects of value undergo significant transformation.



METHOD

Clair Obscur: Expedition 33 (Sandfall Interactive, 2025) demonstrates how digital games can compose complex narrative and procedural experiences that extend beyond conventional entertainment. As a contemporary narrative form, digital games integrate storytelling with interactive and procedural systems, enabling meaning to emerge through the interplay of rules, player choices, and narrative structures (Bogost, 2010; Galloway, 2006; Jenkins, 2004). Building on this capacity, *Clair Obscur: Expedition 33* (hereafter CO: Ex33) has gained recognition for its musical excellence, artistic visual design, and emotionally engaging storytelling, particularly through its sustained exploration of grief and loss (Higham, 2025). The game, therefore, offers a compelling site for examining how interactive systems and narrative structures jointly shape affective experience.

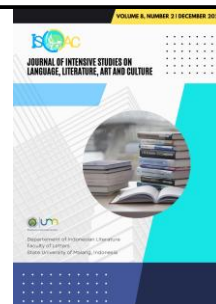
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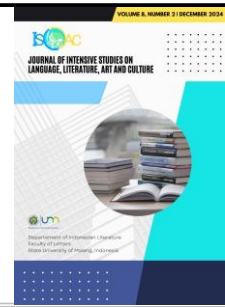
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FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Act I: Revenge as Structurally Stabilized Orientation

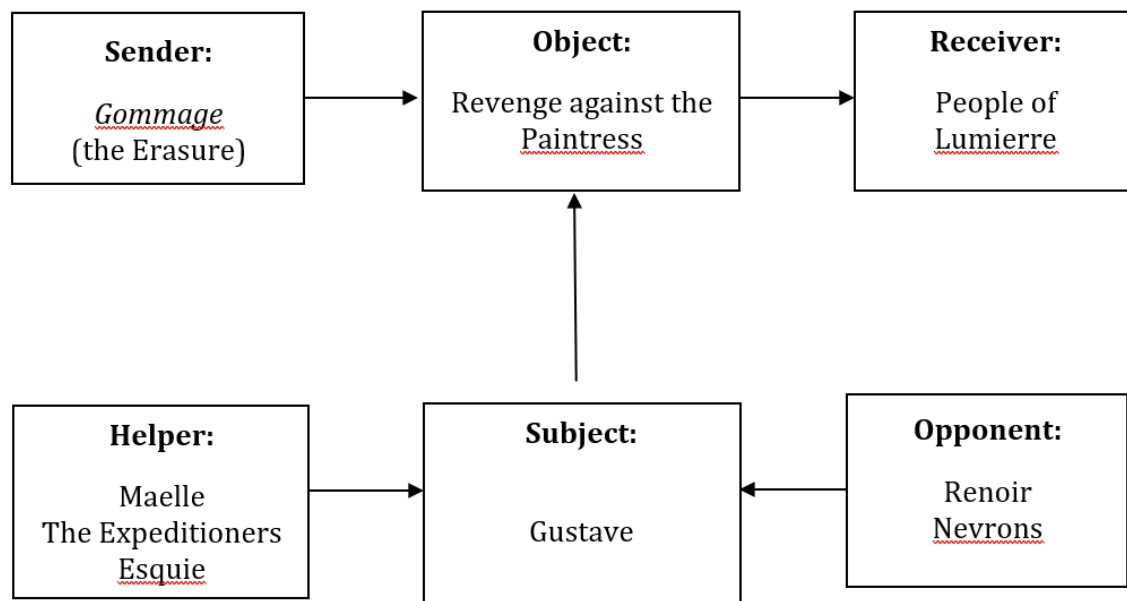
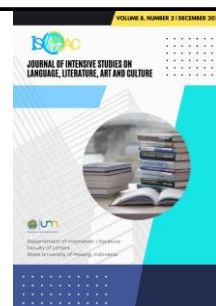


Figure 1. Actantial Scheme of Act 1

Emma: When you battle the Paintress, know that Lumière fights with you. Let the stones of her Monolith crumble. Let her body lie at the end of the world, unable to paint another death. Let the stars no longer be hidden by her oppressive silhouette. Let the world once again watch the sun rise without the shadow of her cursed figure. May the wind of renewal take you to the ends of the earth. Tomorrow comes. Thanks to you, Expedition 33. (Act 1, Sandfall Interactive, 2025)

In Act 1 of *Clair Obscur: Expedition 33*, the actantial configuration puts Gustave as the Subject, oriented toward the Object: revenge against the Paintress, who is believed to be responsible for the Gommage. Within Greimas's actantial model, this orientation is



structured by the Gommage itself as Sender, with the threatened people of Lumierre as Receiver. Maelle and the expedition team primarily function as Helpers; later on, the Gestrals and Esquie also serve as Helpers on the adventure. At the same time, Renoir and the Nevrons operate as perceived Opponents. This configuration establishes a classic quest; however, what motivates it is not just a resistance but grief born of accumulated loss, particularly Gustave's mourning of Sophie and others erased by the annual catastrophe.

Within Greimas's modal framework, Gustave's action is sustained by a powerful configuration of wanting-to-do (*vouloir-faire*) and having-to-do (*devoir-faire*). Yet these modalities do not arise in the abstract; they are shaped by grief, an enduring affective condition that resists resolution. Cyberdramatically, the game does not present grief solely as narrative motivation but embeds it within a dramatic architecture sustained by interactivity and procedural progression. Through compulsory encounters, escalating confrontations, and irreversible losses, the system continually reactivates Gustave's orientation toward revenge. In Murray's terms, the procedural structure organizes participation to sustain that dramatic tension, and in Greimasian terms, this results in the stabilization of Gustave's modal commitment to act.

Importantly, the player, similar to Maelle, shares Gustave's cognitive horizon at this stage. The Paintress is perceived as the unequivocal antagonist, and the objective of revenge appears both justified and necessary. This shared alignment between player knowledge and character belief illustrates how the cyberdramatic system regulates knowing-how-to-act (*savoir-faire*) by restricting alternative interpretive possibilities. Procedural gating ensures that progress develops within this framework, preventing destabilization of the revenge orientation. Thus, grief does not merely motivate revenge. Still, it becomes structurally embedded in the competence phase by sustaining the Subject's commitment to pursue the Object despite mounting resistance.



Gustave: I know we've been over this, but as your guardian, I need to say this one more time. The rest of us only have a year left, but you've got nine good years before your Gommage. You don't need to leave yet. It's a lot of risk.

Maele: One year out there's better than nine years in here.

Gustave: I know you think that, but–

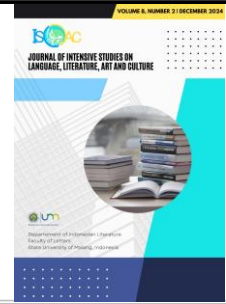
Maele: If anyone should stay, it's you. You have friends and family who want you here–

Gustave: So do you–

Maele: No, I don't. (Sandfall Interactive, 2025)

The excerpt above illustrates how Maele's role as Helper is also shaped by grief, with a different configuration. Her attachment to Gustave anchors her wanting to act, supporting his quest rather than generating an independent narrative motive. At this point, Maele occupies an auxiliary position. Moreover, this interaction between Gustave and Maele must occur before players can progress in the game. In this sense, Murray's participatory dynamics and Greimas's modal logic combine. The system's procedural demands enact modalities that define the actantial configuration. Grief thus operates not simply as narrative background but as a modal intensifier, enacted through cyberdramatic elements, sustaining the expedition's forward movement even as the narrative's underlying structure remains fundamentally misunderstood.

At the arrival of the expedition on the shores, Renoir and the Nevrons intervene and brutally massacre the expeditioners, thus functioning as modal escalation. What had been structured as a revenge-oriented expedition becomes a scene of devastation that amplifies the affective charge already present within the competence phase. In Greimasian terms, the configuration of *vouloir-faire* does not weaken under resistance; rather, opposition intensifies desire. Grief, initially tethered to the Gommage, is compounded by immediate, personal loss. The cyberdramatic system reinforces this escalation through participatory confrontation: players do not merely witness defeat but live it through enacted combat and irreversible consequences. In Murray's sense of



procedural drama, the system converts narrative catastrophe into experiential saturation, ensuring that the escalation is felt as structural pressure rather than narrative abstraction.

At the end of Act 1, the Subject, Gustave, is murdered by Renoir. Gustave's death produces not the disappearance of the revenge-object but an empty spot in the actant configuration. The Object of revenge remains intact, yet the Subject-position is now absent. This vacancy creates the conditions for transfer, allowing the narrative to progress. Grief reaches saturation at the moment of structural destabilization: the initial Subject can no longer sustain the quest, but the modal intensity he embodied does not dissipate. Instead, it becomes available for reorientation. The final confrontation of Act I, therefore, operates as both a termination and a preparation. It ends Gustave's subjecthood while preserving and even intensifying the *vouloir* that will migrate to Maelle. Act I closes not with resolution but with accumulated modal pressure, creating the structural necessity for reconfiguration in Act II.

Act II: Reconfiguration of Subject and Object

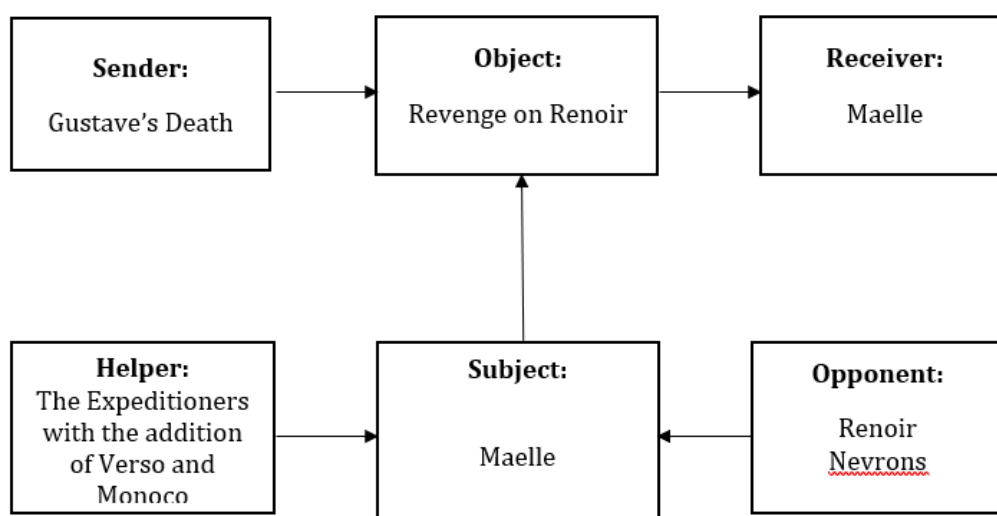


Figure 2. Actantial Scheme of Act II

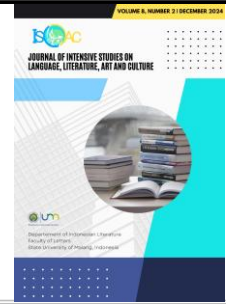


Act II marks the reconfiguration of the actantial structure after the collapse of the Subject position previously filled by Gustave. Maelle takes over as Subject, and the Object of Value is still on a revenge. However, the revenge motivation is now redirected specifically to Renoir, while Renoir himself acts as the Opponent in this configuration. The helpers in this act also include Monaco and Verso as new team members, while Esquie continues to serve as their transport aide. The Sender of this act is no longer the Gommage but Gustave's death. It becomes the force for action, and this feels less broad, more personal, and immediate. In this configuration, the narrative is not reset but reconfigured within the new structure, with Maelle at the center.

In Greimas' modal framework (1982), the intensity of Maelle's *vouloir-faire* (desire) is sustained, but it undergoes reorientation. The grief caused by Gustave's death does not weaken the impulse for action but instead strengthens it as a modal intensifier and maintains continuity despite the reorientation of the Object. On the other hand, Maelle's *vouloir-faire* is guided by false exposition from Verso, who states Renoir can only be eliminated by vanquishing the Paintress. Therefore, while the *vouloir-faire* is reoriented, Maelle's *savoir-faire* is misguided.

This configuration results in the internal tension of the competence phase. *Vouloir-faire* and *devoir-faire* are stable and even grow stronger, while *savoir-faire* is under a distortion. Maelle still commits to "... find a way to kill him" (Sandfall Interactive, 2025), and this commitment is mediated by Verso, who functions as an epistemic mediator who guides how action is supposed to be executed regardless of how false his exposition is. As a result, the trajectory of action continues to move forward, but under conditions of incompletely accurate understanding.

Viewed from Janet Murray's cyberdrama perspective, this condition is realized through the game's participatory and encyclopedic structures. The system reorganizes participation around Maelle's subjecthood, requiring the player to enact this reorientation through continued exploration, combat, and decision-making. At the same time, the game expands its encyclopedic dimension through Verso's exposition and the



gradual disclosure of information concerning Renoir, the Paintress, and the nature of the conflict itself. However, this accumulation of knowledge does not immediately stabilize understanding; instead, it temporarily reinforces an inaccurate epistemic framework that structures the subject's orientation toward action. Spatial expansion through newly accessible routes and continued traversal, the addition of a new team member, and the continuation of the journey despite the shift in subject position do not alter the direction of action; rather, they deepen engagement with the reconfigured trajectory.

Crucially, grief remains the underlying force preventing modal collapse during this transition. The death of Gustave does not dismiss the narrative trajectory but instead intensifies the conditions under which it must be continued. Rather than producing hesitation, grief acts as a stabilizer for Maelle's *vouloir* and *devoir*. Thus, enabling the reconfigured actantial structure remains dynamically oriented toward action. Act II, therefore, demonstrates how the narrative can undergo a significant internal transformation while maintaining forward momentum, with grief as the force sustaining continuity despite changes in the Object of Value.

Act III: Object Reconfiguration and Reorientation

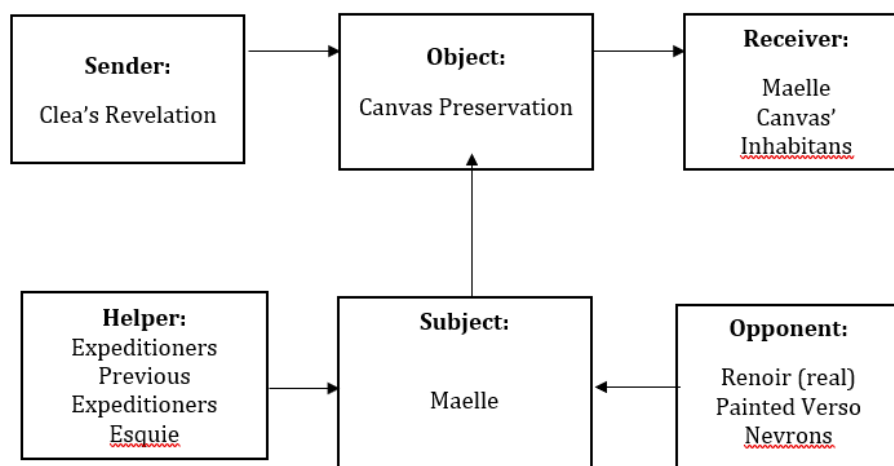


Figure 3. Actantial Scheme of Act III

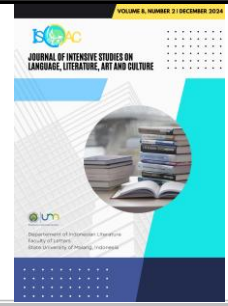


Act III presents the most radical actantial reconfiguration in the whole scheme in the entire narrative structure of the game. Maelle still occupies the Subject actant, but the Object of Value undergoes a fundamental shift from revenge to the preservation of the Canvas. This change is not triggered by grief, but by revelations from Clea, who functions as the new sender. Clea operates by providing a new framework that completely changes how reality is interpreted. Unlike the previous act, where the object transformation only shifts the target of the revenge, this act's object transformation does not occur gradually but as a sudden restructuring of the configuration.

In the Act III configuration, the Opponent also undergoes redistribution. Renoir is no longer the target of the revenge motive, but he becomes a figure who directly threatens the preservation of the Canvas. Painted Verso is also present as a more complex opposition, as he manifests a destructive will rooted in his own existential condition. The Helper composition also expands with Maelle's addition of previously resurrected expeditioners. This configuration suggests that the actantial structure is no longer individualistic, limited, or focused on Maelle's personal motive, but instead emerges as a more communal and societal field of relations.

Crucially, the change in object does not immediately collapse the action. Maelle does not cease her actions when the object changes; rather, she immediately reorients them toward the new object. This demonstrates that structural continuity lies not in the stability of the object, but rather in the continuity of the subject's orientation toward the action itself. In other words, what is maintained is not the goal, but the intensity of the attachment to the action.

Even though Act III changes the Object of Value, the structure's stability persists due to the rigidity of the modal configuration. Maelle's *vouloir* does not transform; it continues under a reevaluated orientation. The grief itself does not cause the production of a new object, but it ensures the intensity and the continuity of the desire to act. Without the grief sustaining the desire, a change of object can result in motivational collapse or fragmentation. However, the opposite happens, where *vouloir* remains intact and

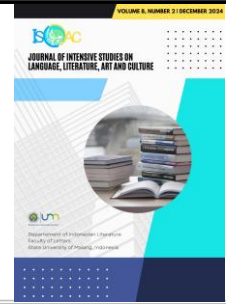


immediately adjusts to the new value configuration.

The most significant expansion occurs in the *savoir-faire*, which develops through Clea's revelations and further exploration of the game world. Information about the origins of the Canvas, the relationships between the characters, and the existential conditions of the parties involved not only adds to the lore but also changes how the object is understood. In Murray's cyberdrama framework, this corresponds to the encyclopedic affordance, through which the accumulation of lore, revelations, and contextual information deepens the player's understanding of the game world and its conflicts. This does not weaken the orientation of the action. On the contrary, the expansion of *savoir* strengthens the orientation because each new knowledge is integrated into the existing intensity of *vouloir*.

Meanwhile, the game's optional content also expands *pouvoir-faire* through access to new areas, enhanced combat capabilities, and additional forms of involvement. Previously inaccessible regions become available for exploration, expanding the game world's navigable space and exemplifying Murray's spatial affordance, in which the enlargement of accessible environments creates new opportunities for movement, discovery, and engagement. At the same time, additional narrative elements provide a depth of knowledge that enriches the understanding of the game world. Although this exploration is not mandatory, the system procedurally invites further engagement by providing spatial and narrative incentives to delay the final confrontation. Within Murray's cyberdrama framework, the spatial expansion of the game world and the procedural organization of optional activities work together to increase the subject's capacity for action without altering its fundamental direction.

Overall, the modal configuration in Act III demonstrates that a disruption in the structure of the action does not accompany the change in object. Instead, through the continuation of *vouloir* intensified by grief, and the cyberdramatically mediated expansion of *savoir* and *pouvoir*, the system maintains the cohesion of the subject's orientation toward the action. This is what allows the narrative to move toward

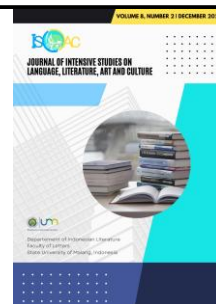


resolution without first reducing the affective intensity that sustains it.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that although the actantial configuration undergoes substantial transformations across the three acts, including the transfer of the Subject position, the reorientation of the Object, and shifts in the Sender and Opponent positions. The continuity of action is preserved through modal persistence. While the specific modal configuration changes in each act, grief consistently operates as the force that stabilizes and intensifies the subject's orientation toward action. The table below summarizes the major actantial and modal reconfigurations identified throughout the analysis.

Act I	Gustave → Revenge against the Paintress	<i>Vouloir-faire</i> and <i>devoir-faire</i> are stabilized by grief, while <i>savoir-faire</i> remains restricted by the belief that the Paintress is solely responsible for the catastrophe.
Act II	Maele → Revenge against Renoir	<i>Vouloir-faire</i> and <i>devoir-faire</i> persist despite actantial reconfiguration, while <i>savoir-faire</i> becomes unstable through Verso's misleading exposition.
Act III	Maele → Preservation of the Canvas	<i>Vouloir-faire</i> persists despite object revaluation, while <i>savoir-faire</i> expands through revelation and <i>pouvoir-faire</i> expands through optional exploration, prolonging the competence phase.

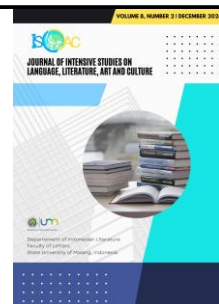
Table 1. Summary of actantial and modal reconfiguration across Acts I–III.



Discussion

The findings of this study can be situated within three broader discussions in game studies. First, they contribute to scholarship on character death and narrative continuity by demonstrating how grief sustains action following the loss of a playable protagonist. Second, they extend studies of epistemic instability by showing that grief preserves modal orientation even when action is structured by misleading knowledge. Third, they contribute to discussions of quest structures and procedural progression by illustrating how optional content prolongs competence without disrupting narrative direction. Taken together, these findings position grief not merely as a thematic representation of loss, but as a structural mechanism that maintains continuity across changing actantial and modal configurations.

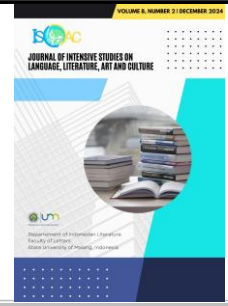
The findings from Act I resonate with studies of character loss in role-playing games, particularly those examining how the death of playable characters restructures both narrative progression and gameplay systems. Repetto (2022) proposes a taxonomy of death in video games, distinguishing among deaths that function purely as narrative devices, purely as gameplay mechanics, and those that operate at both levels simultaneously. Gustave's death in *Clair Obscur: Expedition 33* can be situated within this latter category, where character death carries both narrative and ludic significance. A comparable configuration can be observed in the game *Final Fantasy VII*, where attachment to Aerith is not only narratively established but also systemically reinforced through gameplay mechanics (Harrer, 2018). However, while Aerith functions structurally as a helper rather than the central subject of action, her removal produces both emotional disruption and significant procedural consequences, such as the loss of her healing abilities, requiring players to reorganize their strategies under conditions of loss. A similar dynamic can be observed in the present analysis. However, it operates at a different structural level: unlike Aerith, whose loss destabilizes the system through the absence of a supporting function, Gustave's death creates an actantial vacancy at the level of the subject itself, necessitating a reconfiguration of the narrative structure. While both cases fall



within the same taxonomy, the intensity and structural role of their ludic dimension differ significantly, as Gustave's death is systemically absorbed through character substitution, resulting in a reconfiguration rather than a destabilization of gameplay. Yet, rather than producing disorientation, this shift demonstrates how grief sustains the continuity of action. In this sense, while both cases involve the loss of a playable character, the present study shows that this loss does not necessarily fragment the action trajectory. Still, it can instead preserve and reorient it through the persistence of modal intensity.

The epistemic instability identified in Act II closely resembles findings from the analysis of *BioShock* by Oktodila and Hapsarani (2023), which demonstrates that the protagonist operates under a condition of false knowledge in the early phase, where the perceived sender later shifts into the position of the opponent following a narrative revelation. A similar epistemic instability is observable in this analysis, where Verso's misleading explanation structures the subject's orientation toward action despite being founded on inaccurate knowledge. However, while the Bioshock analysis primarily emphasizes the reconfiguration of actantial roles resulting from epistemic correction, the present study extends this by examining how such instability does not disrupt the continuity of action. Instead, grief operates as a modal intensifier that sustains *vouloir* and *devoir* even when the underlying knowledge (*savoir*) is unstable or incorrect. In this sense, the shift in knowledge does not produce disorientation, but rather preserves the trajectory of action under a reconfigured epistemic condition.

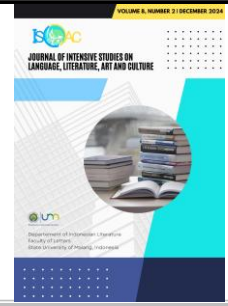
The findings from Act III contribute to ongoing discussions of quest structures, optional content, and procedural progression in digital games. The procedural configuration observed in this act resonates with Bizzochi's concept of 'micro-narratives', understood as smaller narrative units that unfold within a broader narrative arc and contribute to ongoing progression (2007). A comparable logic is identified by Howard (2022), who argues that side quests generate multiple episodic activities while the main quest prevents such multiplicity from becoming random by providing an overarching structure. Similarly, the optional content in *Clair Obscur: Expedition 33* extends



engagement before resolution without undermining narrative direction. The relationship between optional activities and overarching narrative orientation is particularly important because such expansions may risk producing ludonarrative dissonance when player activity diverges from narrative motivation (Fox, 2023). However, the findings of this study indicate that the expansion of *savoir* and *pouvoir* remains aligned with the overarching trajectory toward the final confrontation. As a result, these micro-narrative units function as structurally necessary mechanisms that prolong the competence phase without fragmenting narrative orientation.

Taken beyond the specific actantial and modal transformations identified in each act, these findings suggest a broader interpretation of grief within the narrative structure of *Clair Obscur: Expedition 33*. Across all three acts, grief functions not merely as an emotional response to loss but as a structural force that preserves continuity through changing narrative conditions. Whether confronted with the death of a playable protagonist, the destabilization of knowledge, or the reconfiguration of the object of value, grief maintains the modal intensity necessary for action to continue. In this sense, the tension posed at the beginning of the analysis between grief resistant to closure and the game's movement toward resolution becomes structurally intelligible. The findings demonstrate that progression toward narrative resolution does not necessarily result in affective resolution. Rather than resolving the tension by choosing one over the other, the game allows both processes to occur simultaneously, thereby advancing the narrative toward closure. At the same time, grief persists as the force sustaining continuity across changing configurations of action. This observation resonates with Kalender's (2025) argument that grief in video games extends beyond thematic representation and emerges as a process mediated through narrative, design, and interaction. However, the present study further demonstrates how grief operates structurally within the narrative system itself, sustaining the subject's orientation toward action across shifting actantial and modal configurations.

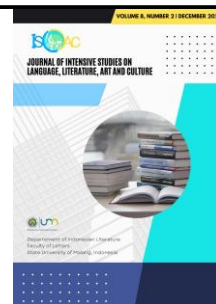
An alternative interpretation may attribute the continuity of action primarily to moral responsibility or the conventions of heroic quest narratives. Previous studies have



shown that video games may position players and protagonists within ethical frameworks that encourage morally responsible action (Bartel, 2015), while heroic narrative structures often sustain progression through quests, trials, and movement toward resolution (Cassar, 2013). However, these explanations alone do not fully account for the persistence observed across the three acts. In Act III in particular, both the object of value and the epistemic conditions of action undergo substantial reconfiguration, resulting in corresponding shifts in obligation and moral orientation. Despite these changes, the intensity of sustaining action remains continuous. Likewise, while heroic quest conventions may explain why the narrative continues toward resolution, they do not sufficiently explain why the motivational force underlying action remains stable despite changes in subjects, objects, and knowledge. For this reason, grief is interpreted not as a replacement for *devoir-faire* or narrative convention, but as the modal intensifier that preserves continuity across successive reconfigurations of the narrative structure.

While obligation, moral responsibility, and heroic quest conventions contribute to the continuity of action, the present study argues that grief functions as the modal intensifier that preserves continuity across changing narrative conditions. The interpretation of grief as a modal intensifier and structural force contributes to game studies by shifting attention from grief as representation or player experience toward grief as a mechanism of narrative organization. From a narratological perspective, the study demonstrates how modal persistence can stabilize actantial reconfigurations despite changes in subjects, objects, opponents, and epistemic conditions. Furthermore, for affect-oriented approaches to digital narratives, the findings highlight grief's capacity to function not merely as an emotional theme but as a structuring force within procedural narrative systems. In this respect, the study extends existing scholarship by positioning grief as a narrative mechanism that sustains continuity rather than simply a thematic expression of loss.

The findings also carry broader implications for the study of digital narratives. By demonstrating how grief operates as a structural mechanism rather than merely a



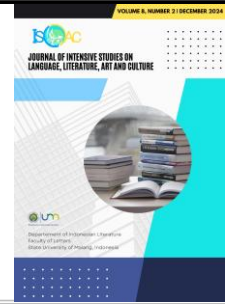
representational theme, the study suggests that affects may play a more significant role in narrative organization than is often assumed. The findings further indicate that analyses of narrative games may benefit from integrating structural narratology with procedural approaches, thereby allowing researchers to account for both narrative transformations and the systems that sustain them.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study demonstrates that *Clair Obscur: Expedition 33* does not merely represent grief as a narrative theme but, structurally, operates grief as a force that sustains continuity amid changing narrative conditions. By integrating Greimasian narratology and Janet Murray's cyberdrama framework, the analysis shows that grief functions as a modal intensifier, preserving the continuity of action despite shifts in actantial configurations, epistemic conditions, and narrative objectives. The findings therefore support the hypothesis that grief sustains narrative progression not by initiating action itself, but by maintaining the modal intensity necessary for action to continue across successive reconfigurations of the narrative structure. In this sense, the tension between grief's resistance to closure and the game's movement toward resolution is not resolved by subordinating one to the other; rather, narrative progression becomes the very mechanism by which grief is sustained throughout the game's unfolding structure.

The study contributes to game studies by conceptualizing grief as a structural mechanism rather than merely a thematic representation or player experience. More specifically, it demonstrates how grief sustains continuity despite transformations in subjects, objects, and conditions of knowledge, thereby extending existing discussions of affect and narrative progression in digital games. These findings also have practical implications for game designers, suggesting that emotional experiences may be sustained not only through narrative representation but also through procedural structures that preserve affective intensity throughout gameplay.

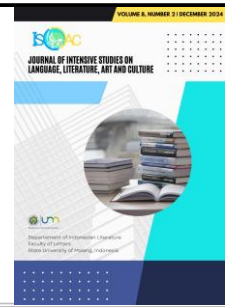
However, several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the study



focuses on a single game, and therefore, its findings should be understood as analytically transferable rather than generalizable. Second, the analysis adopts an interpretative textual approach and does not incorporate player reception studies or empirical audience responses. Consequently, the conclusions primarily concern the structural organization of grief within the narrative rather than how players experience grief. While the findings may offer useful insights for the study of other narrative-driven role-playing games, particularly those that incorporate character loss, shifting objects of value, and procedurally mediated progression, further comparative research is needed to determine whether similar modal and actantial patterns operate across other RPGs. Likewise, although the analytical framework may apply to narrative games beyond the RPG genre, additional studies are required to examine how these dynamics function in games with different narrative structures, procedural systems, and forms of player engagement.

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