

Guilty (Un)pleasures: The Reception of Muriel Tramis's Erotic Trilogy in France and the United Kingdom

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Martinican female game designer Muriel Tramis, in addition to postcolonial and educational games, designed the most divisive part of her oeuvre: the Erotic Trilogy, composed of *Emmanuelle* (Tomahawk 1989), *Geisha* (Tomahawk 1990), and *Fascination* (Tomahawk 1991). While the Erotic Trilogy faced harsh criticism in the United Kingdom, French magazines elevated at least the third game to cult status. This presentation aims to account for the strong disparities in the trilogy's reception in the two countries mentioned.

The research was based on the trilogy's paratextual analysis, incorporating the methodology derived from Švelch (2020). Paratexts included both contemporary reviews and retrospective texts from France and the UK. French publications included *Tilt*, *Génération 4*, and *Joystick*, whereas English ones included *Amiga Power*, *PC Format*, and Richard Cobbett's retrospective reviews in *PC Gamer* (Cobbett 2011; 2013). The reception of *Emmanuelle* (a loose adaptation of Emmanuelle Arsan's books) and *Geisha* (a loose collection of minigames set in Japan) was uneven in France (Coulon 1988; Boulauck et al. 1989; Baron 1990; Jovanovic 1991), while British publications universally panned them (Howladar 1989; Cobbett 2013). *Fascination*, one of the first digital games featuring a Black female protagonist and prefiguring the plot and appearance of an analogous character in Quentin Tarantino's film *Jackie Brown* (cf. Tarantino 1997), provides a clear example of the stark disparities between the British and French press. While British journalists mocked the erotic content and plot inconsistencies (Davies 1992; Cobbett 2011), the French press embraced the game (Roux 1991; Harbonn 1992), and *Fascination* continues to receive positive reviews in contemporary blogs (Carali 2011).

How can one account for such British animosity toward the Erotic Trilogy? Several explanations are possible. First, Tramis's role as lead designer of all three games may have rendered her vulnerable to widespread mockery (none of the reviews cited here were authored by women). Second, cultural differences between France and the UK likely shaped reviewers' reactions. Whereas France has been regarded as erotically permissive—an assessment that can be linked to the enormous popularity of the *Emmanuelle* books, the source of Tramis's game—the UK, deeply rooted in Protestant or Puritan religious traditions, would scarcely welcome works of a sensitive content; the reaction often assumed a hypocritical tone, for example by mocking the game's feminist message while accusing the creator of giving Germaine Greer a “heart attack”

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(Davies 1992, 34). Finally, the Erotic Trilogy became an easy object of attack because of mutual French–English animosity; *Fascination*'s poetics was readily labeled the prime example of the “French touch” (Squires 1992, 70).

The research outcomes allow the summary that the Erotic Trilogy's reviews differed in three patterns. (1) Discussion of them in the UK was gendered because of Tramis's sexuality; (2) it was customarily discriminating; (3) it was steered toward chauvinistic tones. Thus, the reception of French games in the UK aligned with what Graeme Kirkpatrick (2015, 111–18) regarded as the development of aggressive masculinity in British gaming culture of the 1980s and 1990s. Although sexism was not absent in French gaming culture, local reviewers were somewhat more compassionate toward the towering female personality of the French gaming field.

KEYWORDS

Muriel Tramis, digital games and sexism, French gaming press, British gaming press

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