

About C.C. Saint-Clair, The ‘thinking woman’s lesbian romance writer’

Interview by Kathy Fox for Queensland Pride

On first impression C. C. Saint– Clair’s dynamic, articulate manner is what you might expect from a novelist renowned for creating evocative romances about cosmopolitan lesbians. Saint – Clair shares a few traits with her heroines, both Saint-Clair and her independent women are native French speakers, who’ve settled in Australia after years following wanderlust around the world.

Her current release, *Far From Maddy*, marks a change of direction, focussing on gorgeous but grungy and homeless younger dykes.

“Aren’t they cute? They’re my little baby dykes! I thought enough of Alex, Emilie, and Tamara (the trio of lovers from earlier books). I wanted to tackle a different type of character altogether ... as a personal challenge.”

The birth of C.C.s’ writing career was a less deliberate move, sparked by a night out in Brisbane decompressing on return from a sojourn in Paris.

“That came to be because as Alex, in the opening chapter (North and Left from Here) comes home early from a night on the scene disillusioned ... that sort of ‘invisibility’ first happened to me. So, I took a notebook and started writing my recollection of the moment, and by the time I had written some 30 pages, I thought, Oh, this is fun. Should I keep going?”

Her resulting debut novel about a lesbian living in Brisbane, reviewing her life in flashback, introduced C.C.’s style of reflective, vibrantly sensual, lesbian romance. It can be read standalone, or as part of Saint – Clair’s series on the intimate affairs between an ensemble of contemporary lesbian lovers. Admitting that she’s driven to write, Saint –Clair is now releasing a revised edition of her first novel.

“When I thumbed through it, some two years later, I realised I wanted to do it again, faster and sexier. And I’m actually quite proud of the *North (Take II)* effort.”

That level of dedication is typical of her enthusiasm to “connect the dots” in lesbian literary circles. In just three years since she took up romance writing, Saint – Clair has released 6 novels, collaborating with other women for publishing, web design and illustration. But there are a few hurdles to overcome. It’s a surprise when C. C. mentions in passing the trad bookstores who “won’t touch” her books for their sexual content. After all, her writing compares well with the best known, widely distributed, queer mystery authors.

“My plots are all about the sensual, same-sex desire. For the Claire McNab books and many others, the sexuality angle is not the main issue. It’s the intricacies of the mystery that counts. The sexuality of the characters seems quite incidental. But all I’m trying to do is paint with words the lesbian experience of love, the slow sensual arousal, the self-doubt and the finding of one’s self in spite of a social realism that ‘almost’ gets in the way.”

Saint-Clair isn’t fazed about getting her books out though. “Readers won’t get them in traditional bookstores. But that’s OK! They weren’t meant to”, she says, citing the independent bookshops specializing in LGBT works and the constant positive responses from readers to her free website releases.

“Quite a few want to thank me for the serialisation of *Benchmarks* and *Silent Goodbyes*, so that’s nice to know it’s making women happy. Quite a few have said, “Your free downloads are a godsend.” That’s mostly from women who, for whatever personal reasons, find it difficult to access lesbian-themed books.”

Saint-Clair has also garnered attention for her evolution as the “thinking women’s lesbian romance writer”. So, was there a grand plan from the beginning to take on that title and fill a gap in the genre?

“No!” she laughs, “I’m much more modest than that.” Nonetheless, the tag, as suggested by a reader, aptly describes her hallmark style of poetic eroticism intertwined with credible characters.

“My aim has always been to get inside the character, right inside her, because inside that character is a woman and whatever is happening inside that woman’s head and heart, is probably typical enough that, if I do it right, she will – not just appeal – but talk to and reach out to my readers. And these women will then be able to feel an affinity for the character and *her* personal circumstances.”

Comparing her characters to traditional hetero romances Saint-Clair says her focus is to ensure that her characters “don’t need to be rescued. They rescue themselves. Yes, they tend to be gorgeous one way or another but not airbrushed. So, there’s the sex appeal that is traditional to romance writing, absolutely. But, in a traditional romance the woman, the object of desire, has to be rescued. From a plane wreck, a mad man or cyclone, by a detective or by whoever happens to pass by. That doesn’t happen in my plots. ‘My’ women work out whatever they have to work out on their own terms.”

Saint-Clair’s passion for women’s stories is obvious as she animatedly discusses a new character, a female-to-male transsexual character, planned to appear in *Far From Maddy’s* sequel.

“Morgan, of Morgan In The Mirror, is 23. He’s a trans man who has not yet undergone phalloplasty but, for me, it’s still a woman’s story because Morgan is a genetic female. And on the continuum ... Morgan simply moved from sexual fluidity to gender dystrophia – nothing more. It still is a woman’s story.”

Ideally, Morgan will inspire a similar kind of intensely heartfelt response as the dykes in *Far From Maddy*.

“Now that I’ve established Morgan as a credible character, a hopefully endearing one, I need to dive into real grunt info about rock climbing.”

Because?

“Because that’s what Morgan does. He’s a rock climber, a free solo climber. He’s that kind of a guy!”