

2002/January NICKY SINGER - Publishing News

You know you've done something right when, a month before publication in your home territory, your first children's book has already been sold to twelve other countries and netted a six-figure deal in the US. "How do I feel about it?" says Nicky Singer, author of *Feather Boy*, the book that's raised so much dust. "Completely flabbergasted!"

Feather Boy may well be Singer's first children's book, but she's already written four adult novels and a brace of non-fiction titles "...but my agent doesn't do children's books and said I should find one who does handle them," she tells me. "So I sent the manuscript out to half a dozen people and got a reply back the very next day from Clare Conville. She'd received the book in the first post, read the whole thing in three hours and told me she could 'sell the socks of this book'. I put the phone down and thought I'd made the whole thing up...I am a writer, that is what we do."

But Singer hadn't been imagining anything; Conville was true to her word and the story of Robert Nobel, christened Norbert No-Bottle by the class clever-dick, looks like being the first lit-hit of this new year. "I can't say why it's worked," says Singer. "I like it because Robert's a klutz on the outside and golden on the inside...lots of us are like that, and maybe people like the fact that he becomes what he is on the inside,"

Singer feels that she's taken what she calls an anti-Disney stance with *Feather Boy*, because, she says, life is so much more intricate than they make it. "The stuff that's fed to kids now is just not real," she says, "and, in my view, there's not enough complexity and too much that's anodyne and saccharine." She wrote the book because her son asked her do something for his age group. "He read everything as I wrote it and turned out to be a natural editor," Singer explains. "And I kept on thinking that, even if the book never got published, I'd had an incredible parental experience."

Now working on her second children's book, Singer says she's not missing writing for adults. With children, she says, there's a much finer line between truth and fiction, which you can't walk with adults unless you're some great South American Magic Realist. "Children know, without being

told, what makes a good story...they have a fantastic understanding and are really connected to the pulse,” she says, as we finish. “You can have a lot of fun because they accept things that adults would say couldn’t happen.”