

Why I Wrote...

The Breaking of Eggs

First novels are often said to be autobiographies in disguise. This one isn't. In fact, I went to great lengths to create a central character who was as unlike me as possible. Feliks Zhukovski is a lapsed Communist. I am not. He reacts to the fall of the Berlin Wall with a mixture of astonishment and regret. I reacted to it with astonishment and delight. He had a childhood disrupted by war that lacked stability and emotional warmth. Luckily, I suffered from none of those. He is pompous, arrogant and self-deluding. I am... no – I think I'd better stop there.

So when I first thought of Feliks as my main character, I wasn't sure it was a good idea. For a start, I didn't like him. Would I want to sit in a bar having a drink with this man, I asked myself? No. So why would anyone else want to read about him? But *The Breaking of Eggs* is about change, regeneration and second chances at a late stage in life – and those themes are no strangers to me. It is also about the restriction of ideological certainty, compared with the warmth and chaos of close human relationships – another subject close to my heart, and close to the times I have lived in. So Feliks and I have things in common.

And he is not dislikeable. It just takes a while to get to know him. He is funny, even though he doesn't always intend to be. He has provocative thoughts. He, and other members of his family, have tragic histories that demand our sympathy. And, by the end of the book, he has even become human. This is the Feliks I would have a drink with. And we would insult each other royally. Perhaps we are more like each other than I thought.

Jim Powell
