



NICKY PELLEGRINO

The golden egg

The success of Jim Powell's debut novel has enabled him to become a full-time writer.

TURNING 50 coincided with the lowest ebb of Jim Powell's life. His business had gone bust, he was flat broke and the landmark birthday had prompted him to consider the limited amount of time and energy he might have left to do the things he really longed to do.

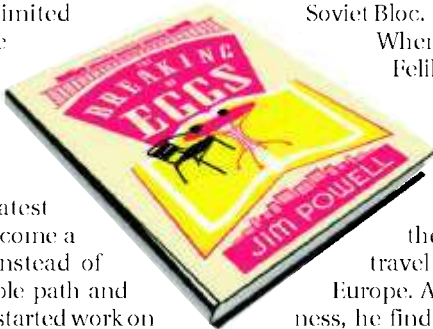
Powell's greatest dream was to become a writer and so, instead of taking the sensible path and finding a job, he started work on a novel.

"I'd decided it was time to think about what I wanted and do it," he explains over the phone from his home in Northamptonshire, England. "And I'm really pleased I made the decision I did. It would have been easier to forget about writing and decide the main thing was money."

Powell's first attempt at a novel was rejected by publishers but he kept going, supporting himself with part-time work as a business consultant, and now, at the age of 61, he's made his debut with a thoughtful and charming book called *The Breaking Of*

Eggs (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, \$34.99).

It's the story of Feliks, an ageing Polish former communist trying to come to grips with the way the world is changing after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc.



When the novel opens, Feliks is at something of a low ebb. Split from his family during World War II, he has spent his life in Paris working as the publisher of a travel guide to Eastern Europe. After selling his business, he finds himself adrift and forced to question his lifelong values.

The Breaking of Eggs is that unlikely thing — an emotional book about politics, and Feliks' journey is desperately sad and uplifting. From the outset, Powell was worried that readers wouldn't like his main protagonist.

"By necessity, Feliks had to be buttoned-up and unsympathetic in the early chapters for a softening to take place and I worried that no one was going to want to read about this man," he says.

"I must admit it took me a while to love him — I saw his faults before I saw his virtues — but now I not only like

him, I'm very grateful to him."

Thanks to the success of *The Breaking of Eggs*, which sold for a six-figure sum, Powell has become a full-time writer. It's the cherry on top of a rich and varied career that began in 1968 when Powell did a stint as the Beatles' office boy, and continued with work in advertising, a bid to stand as an MP (he lost, but on reflection he's quite glad), a role in local politics and his ill-fated pottery business.

Powell doesn't regret such a late start to a writing career.

"That's because I absolutely refuse to have regrets," he says. "Also I think if you're going to write then any life experience is relevant and useful."

"I'd like to try to make sense of the life I've lived and the times I've lived through so, for me perhaps, experience is even more important than it is for many other writers."

Essentially, *The Breaking Of Eggs* is about the ruinous effect grand ideologies has on the lives of the little people. Far right and far left politics have had a deleterious effect on Feliks. And although Powell says he has tried not to be a heavily interventionist author in terms of his opinions, his own political beliefs have clearly flavoured the story.

"I'm very much a conservative centrist," he admits. "I dislike ideologies of any sort because I feel they prompt the people who believe in them to think they hold the entire secret to life."

"It's a short step from there to trying to impose them on other people."

"It's a basic human desire to have certainty," Powell adds. "But life is not certain and never can be and it leads you to the most terrible consequences if you pursue it."

Powell is now working on what he describes as a "slightly ambitious" second novel set in America.

"It's a bit of a conceit to think you can write about someone else's country, but in a way I've done that in *The Breaking Of Eggs*," he says.

There are still many more stories he wants to write and he is conscious of the way his age may begin to limit him in the future.

"I'm doing the books that involve travel and exploration now in case the time comes when that gets difficult," he explains.

"There's a lot I want to write about. I'll probably be ploughing the same furrow but in a slightly different way. And I hope to have a good few travelling years ahead of me."



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Jim Powell, at 61, has fulfilled his writing dream with *The Breaking of Eggs*.