The task of setting Zinoviev in any kind of context is a daunting one, for, like many great writers and, probably, no less minor ones, he is entirely *sui generis*. Superficial resemblance to his Third-Wave contemporaries may be seen in many areas, but in each Zinoviev remains strongly individual. For example, in his desire to teach and preach the ‘truth’ about his homeland he belongs to a tradition initiated by Herzen and renewed by Solzhenitsyn that takes in all but a small number of his fellow-emigrants; in his patent *yurodivyi*-like wish to shock, achieved most successfully in *Nashei yunosti polet* and his other pronouncements on Stalin and Stalinism, he has thoroughly irritated Western and *émigré* sensibilities alike, just as Solzhenitsyn did with his Harvard speech of 1978,¹ Maksimov with his rhinoceroses in 1979,² or Edichka Limonov with his flagrant politico-sexual exhibitionism.³ In his use of what was once regarded as unconventional language, however, Zinoviev is far from exceptional in the post-Aleshkovsky world, though it may be noted in passing that his vocabulary is far less disfigured by superfluous Western doublets of the *poezd/tren* variety than the work of many other *émigré* contemporaries, particularly those living in America. Likewise, as a quasi-documentary writer, he has many partners, ranging from Solzhenitsyn to Sinyavsky and Voinovich, whilst the ranks of his fellow-satirists include many of the outstanding writers of the Third Emigration, although it is, perhaps, here that Zinoviev’s claim to pre-eminence is strongest.

Since the gargantuan satire *Ziyayushchie vysoty* appeared in 1976, leading directly to its author’s enforced expatriation two years later, a series of highly original albeit rather repetitive books have appeared, some but not all of which may be described as novels, presenting a mordantly satirical picture of Soviet society and ideology. Of his
non-specialist books to date, *Ziyayushchie vysoty* is not only the first but also, in many ways, the most significant. Some, like *Svetloe budushchee* and *Zapiski nochnogo storozha* have been described by Zinoviev as missing parts of *Ziyayushchie vysoty*, whilst others, written outside the Soviet Union, are linked to the earlier work by temporal and geographical setting, sociological purpose, and satirical manner, as well as in some cases the continuation of several characters from one book to another. In view of the centrality of *Ziyayushchie vysoty*, I propose to take it as the basis for a consideration of the major features of Zinoviev as a writer, paying considerably less attention to his later works.

*Ziyayushchie vysoty* has often been referred to as a novel, though this genre description is not acceptable to the author himself. In his eyes, this book, like those that follow it, represents a radically new type of literature, a literature of ideas and facts, stripped of all circumstantial or background description (in an interview with Vail' and Genis in *Kontinent* Zinoviev claims to have written only one superfluous sentence in the entire book: ‘Teacher’s daughter came and said they should go for lunch’). Not only is there no physical description or background; nor are there any living characters with individual names and consistent biographies. This is not unique in modern literature, of course, and there is a splendidly witty example of the absence of personalities in Vyascheslav Sorokin’s conversation piece *Ochered* but the relentless avoidance of individuality in *Ziyayushchie vysoty* is unusual for such an extended work.

The setting of *Ziyayushchie vysoty* is an imaginary and amorphous village, Ibansk, which clearly represents the Soviet Union, its name being derived from the commonest Russian personal name and the commonest obscenity. The characters whose conversations fill most of the book are given generic names such as Krikun (Shouter), Boltun (Chatterbox), Mazila (Dauber), Klevetnik (Slanderer), Vozhd’ (Leader) and Khozyain (Boss). Most are representatives of the Moscow intelligentsia or political figures, and some can be easily deciphered, although the author has warned against excessive zeal in this activity. In their endless discussions these characters expound and debate myriad views on society, Zinoviev shifting the point of view, often it seems arbitrarily, from one character to another. Interspersed with these sometimes serious, sometimes wittily burlesque conversations are passages of direct discourse, short scientific or pseudo-scientific disquisitions on political and sociological matters, anecdotes, frequently bawdy, and, from time to time, verses;