



# The Stalin Epigram: A Novel

*Robert Littell*

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## **The Stalin Epigram: A Novel** Robert Littell

Based on a riveting historical episode, *The Stalin Epigram* is a fictional rendering of the life of Osip Mandelstam, perhaps the greatest Russian poet of the twentieth century -- and one of the few artists in Soviet Russia who daringly refused to pay creative homage to Joseph Stalin. The poet's defiance of the Kremlin dictator and the Bolshevik regime -- particularly his outspoken criticism of Stalin's collectivization rampage that drove millions of Russian peasants to starvation -- reached its climax in 1934 when Mandelstam, putting his life on the line, composed a searing indictment of Stalin in a sixteen-line epigram and secretly recited it to a handful of friends and fellow artists.

Would Stalin and his merciless state security apparatus get wind of this brazenly insulting poem? Would the poet's body and spirit be crushed under the weight of the state if they did?

Narrated in turn by Mandelstam himself, his devoted wife, his great friends the poets Boris Pasternak and Anna Akhmatova, along with vivid fictional characters, *The Stalin Epigram* is the page-turning tale of courage and the human spirit told in deftly poetic prose by a perceptive, talented writer. With the benefit of extraordinary research and an almost mystical empathy, bestselling author Robert Littell has drawn a fictional portrait of the beleaguered poet struggling to survive the running riot of Stalinist Russia in the 1930s. This memorable novel culminates in a wholly unexpected encounter that illuminates the agonizing choices Russian intellectuals faced during the Stalinist terror and explains what drew Robert Littell to the poignant subject in the first place.

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