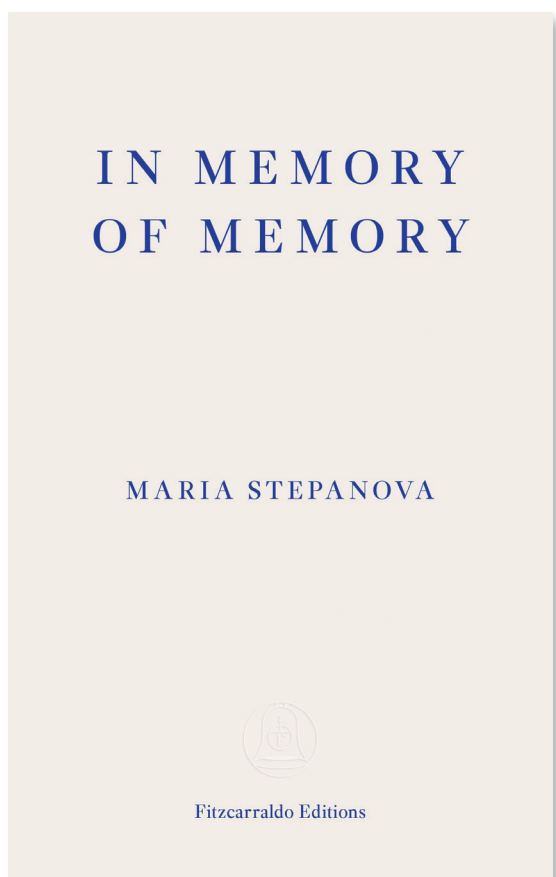




## From Judging Room to Living Room A Discussion Guide for Readers



# In Memory of Memory Maria Stepanova

Translated from Russian by Sasha Dugdale

Fitzcarraldo Editions

[thebookerprizes.com](http://thebookerprizes.com)

## What the judges decided

'An unclassifiable, *sui generis* book that begins with what you think is going to be a family history, then opens up, in slow degrees, to allow seemingly the whole world to enter. In its seamless fusion of history, memory, essay, meditation, literary criticism it creates its own indelible form, a new shape in the air. An act of truth-telling like no other.'

## What the judges discussed: ideas to explore

- *In Memory of Memory* mixes different forms – meditation, essay, memoir. The judges spent a lot of time discussing whether it was fiction or not. One judge finally said: 'It is fiction, not because it's made-up, but because the author does what real fiction-writers do, which is to transform the material, to work some alchemy on it and give it life.' Do you agree?
- Another judge described *In Memory of Memory* as a quest narrative. It takes the reader 'through an extraordinary landscape that is both personal and universal' at the same time. What is the power of the quest and how did it remind you of other quest novels you know of?
- Yet another judge said that 'the alchemising notion doesn't only transform the material, it transforms us as readers'. Do you agree?
- In Soviet times, people were forced to accept a certain official version of history. But people always have their individual stories, their own memories. What does this book tell you about how people remember, how the past speaks to them, and ultimately about who gets to write the history of a people or a country?

## About the book

*In Memory of Memory* tells the story of how a seemingly ordinary Jewish family somehow managed to survive the myriad persecutions and repressions of the last century. Following the death of her aunt, Maria Stepanova builds the story out of faded photographs, old postcards, letters, diaries, and heaps of souvenirs left behind: a withered repository of a century of life in Russia.

In dialogue with writers like Roland Barthes, W. G. Sebald, Susan Sontag and Osip Mandelstam, *In Memory of Memory* is imbued with rare intellectual curiosity and a wonderfully soft-spoken, poetic voice. Dipping into various forms – essay, fiction, memoir, travelogue and historical documents – Stepanova assembles a vast panorama of ideas and personalities and offers an entirely new and bold exploration of cultural and personal memory.

## About the author and translator

**Maria Stepanova** was born in June 1972 in Moscow, Russia. She is a poet, essayist, journalist and the author of ten poetry collections and three books of essays. She has received several Russian and international literary awards (including the prestigious Andrey Bely Prize and Joseph Brodsky Fellowship). *In Memory of Memory* won Russia's Bolshaya Kniga Award in 2018. Her collection of poems, *War and the Beasts and the Animals*, is published by Bloodaxe in Sasha Dugdale's translation in 2021, and is a Poetry Book Society Translation Choice. Stepanova is the founder and editor-in-chief of the online independent crowd-sourced journal *Colta.ru*, which covers the cultural, social and political reality of contemporary Russia. She lives in Moscow.

**Sasha Dugdale** was born in February 1974 in Sussex, UK. She is a poet, writer and translator and has published five collections of poems with Carcanet Press, most recently *Deformations* in 2020. She won the Forward Prize for Best Single Poem in 2016 and in 2017 she was awarded a Cholmondeley Prize for Poetry. She is former editor of *Modern Poetry in Translation* and is poet-in-residence at St John's College, Cambridge (2018-2021). She lives in Cambridge, UK.

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### The author says...

*'In Memory of Memory* is a love story which is facing backwards.'

'I was living with these stories for decades: some of them stayed fresh and vivid, some were half-forgotten, almost mummified, and in all the cases I needed to break through to the actual facts and harsh reality behind them. In Soviet times, people were forced to accept a certain official version of history, and it worked itself deep into the fabric of collective memory. So, uncovering individual stories and hidden meanings is a long and painful process, and even now, long after the book was written, I don't feel my research is complete.'



### The translator says...

'I learnt so much about Russian, and about what English can be made to hold. When you translate it is much like reading a text very intently, so I got to read a brilliant book in the slowest and most intense way, and that can be life-changing. I learnt a lot about my own culture and its attitude to history, memory and myth in looking outwards at another culture.'