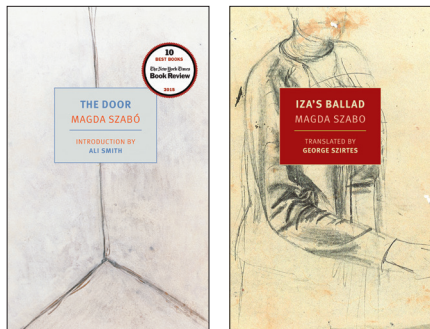


**Magda Szabó** (1917–2007) is considered one of Hungary’s greatest novelists. Her novels, dramas, essays, and poetry have been published in forty-two countries, and in 2003 she was awarded the Prix Femina Étranger for *The Door*, which was selected as one of *The New York Times* Ten Best Books of 2015. NYRB Classics also publishes *The Door* and Szabó’s novel *Iza’s Ballad*.

**Len Rix** is a poet, critic, and former literature professor. In 2006 he was awarded the Oxford-Weidenfeld Translation Prize for his translation of *The Door*.

Also by Magda Szabó:



## KATALIN STREET

by Magda Szabó

Translated from the Hungarian by Len Rix

NYRB Classics Original

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“A gorgeous elegy for the joy and the life once shared among three neighboring families in prewar Budapest. . . .

This is a brilliant and unforgettable novel.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

### ABOUT THIS BOOK

As with *The Door*, which was selected as one of *The New York Times* 10 Best Books of 2015, Magda Szabó’s stunning novel *Katalin Street* explores the ways in which history, ambition, and loss test the bonds between human beings. Here, Szabó presents the story of three Budapest families, all of whom live side by side on Katalin Street, and the shifts in their intertwining lives before, during, and after World War II. Told through the perspectives of various members of the three families, the novel weaves an unforgettable tale about the triumphs and limitations of love, the tyranny of the past, and how great moments in history can alter one’s sense of home forever.

### FOR DISCUSSION

1. Magda Szabó’s narrator opens the novel with a meditation about growing old. Of the residents of Katalin Street she writes, “But no one had told them that the most frightening thing of all about the loss of youth is not what is taken away, but what is granted in exchange” (1). What have the characters in the novel lost? What, in their older age, have they been granted in exchange?
2. One of the first things a reader may notice about *Katalin Street* is how the book frequently shifts in perspective. We read from the vantage point of the surviving residents of Katalin Street, as well as the dead ones—Henriette in particular. Then at times, we hear only from an unnamed narrator. What does Szabó accomplish in structuring the story this way? What would be lost if Szabó told the story from just Irén’s perspective or Bálint’s? What might be gained?
3. Early in the novel, Szabó reveals that Henriette, though dead, continues to watch over her neighbors, although she knows “they would never find their way back to Katalin Street.” What does Szabó mean by this?
4. Early in the novel, we see the ghostly Henriette attempt to recreate the Katalin Street of her childhood in the afterlife (pp. 32–40), down to the exact smells and sounds. In what ways do the living characters attempt to recreate something of Katalin Street? Is there anyone who seems less sentimental about the past than the others?

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5. Why does the ghostly Henriette find it so horrific when she sees her parents' ghosts regress back to childish behavior (p. 30-31; 213)?
6. What do you make of Henriette's strange relationship with the dead soldier (p. 29-30)? What do you think Szabó is trying to convey in this and Henriette's other ghostly relationships?
7. What do you make of Bálint and Irén's relationship? Irén at one point proclaims that the thought of their getting married "seemed the most natural thing in the world, almost preordained" (p. 83). However, if things had not turned out so tragically during the war, do you think they would have had a successful marriage? If yes, why and if not, why not?
8. More than once, Irén expresses being jealous of Henriette's seemingly innocent relationship with Bálint (p. 88-89; 117). What is so special about Bálint and Henriette's relationship that sparks this envy? Why do you think Bálint and Henriette are close (p. 203)?
9. When Henriette is killed, most of the Katalin Street residents seem to blame themselves, a feeling that haunts them all for the rest of their lives. Is there any one person who seems to take Henriette's death the hardest?
10. Why do you really think Blanka does what she does, years later, to get Bálint dismissed from the hospital (pp. 149-58)? Did you read Blanka's actions as outright revenge, betrayal, or something else? Why do you think Bálint is not angry at Blanka for what she did (p. 149)?
11. What does it mean that Bálint doesn't ultimately recognize Henriette when she reveals herself to him in bodily form (pp. 203-11)?
12. What do you think about Irén and Bálint's marriage much later in life? Is it simply a delusional attempt to recover something of their old lives, or is there something more legitimate and mature to their getting back together (p. 215)? Why Irén's feeling of "despair" when he proposes (p. 205)?
13. The novel ends with a plea to "bring Blanka home." Is Blanka somehow the key to all of the unhappiness experienced by Bálint and the Elekes family or is something else at stake?