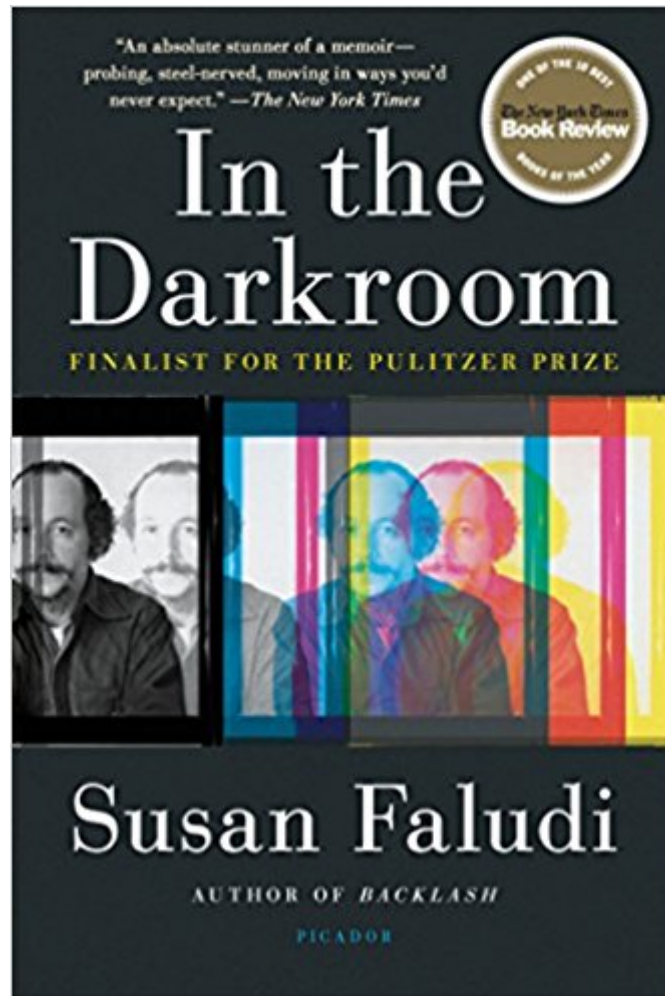




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# In The Darkroom



## Synopsis

PULITZER PRIZE FINALIST  
ONE OF THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW'S 10 BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR  
WINNER OF THE KIRKUS PRIZE

When feminist writer Susan Faludi learned that her seventy-six-year-old father—long estranged and living in Hungary—had undergone sex reassignment surgery, the revelation would launch her on an extraordinary inquiry into the meaning of identity in the modern world and in her own haunted family saga. How was this new parent who identified as “a complete woman now” connected to the silent, explosive, and ultimately violent father she had known, the photographer who’d built his career on the alteration of images? Faludi chases that mystery into the recesses of her suburban childhood and her father’s many previous incarnations: American dad, Alpine mountaineer, swashbuckling adventurer in the outback, Jewish fugitive in Holocaust Budapest. When the author travels to Hungary to reunite with her father, she drops into a labyrinth of dark histories and dangerous politics in a country hell-bent on repressing its past and constructing a fanciful and virulent nationhood. Faludi’s struggle to come to grips with her father’s metamorphosis takes her across borders—historical, political, religious, sexual—to bring her face to face with the question of the age: Is identity something you “choose” or is it the very thing you can’t escape?

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“This book is a masterpiece.” —Ann Patchett  
“In the Darkroom is an

absolute stunner of a memoir—probing, steel-nerved, moving in ways you’d never expect. Ms. Faludi is determined both to demystify the father of her youth—simultaneously inscrutable and volatile presence, a black box and a detonator—and to reexamine the very notion and nature of identity.

The New York Times (daily review) “Penetrating and lucid...In the Darkroom is Faludi’s rich, arresting, and ultimately generous investigation of her father.

The New York Times Book Review (front page) “A gripping and honest personal journey...that ultimately transcends family and addresses much bigger questions of identity and reinvention.

Entertainment Weekly “Riveting...Ms. Faludi unfolds her father’s story like the plot of a detective novel.

The Wall Street Journal “Many great writers eventually turn to biography, but rarely does it so directly crash into their lifelong intellectual pursuits....Few can dissect a prevailing cultural norm as well as Faludi can.

The Washington Post “Fascinating.

People “Faludi’s eloquent, timely, and sweeping-yet-intimate new book...is a mash-up of genres and themes about family secrets, masculinity and femininity, feminism, violence, the Holocaust, taking revenge. Knitting it all together are questions of identity: Who or what makes us who and what we are? How immutable is the end result?

Elle “Sometimes, reality delivers up not just a remarkable story, but a remarkable story containing a set of parallel motifs that seem too absurdly perfect to be credible. . . . Most of In the Darkroom, and the best of it, consists of the epic battle, and eventually the epic rapprochement, between Susan and [her father] Stefanie—an irresistible force meeting an immovable object.

Slate “Extraordinary: part riveting family memoir, part revelatory Holocaust history, but most of all a profound meditation on human identity....In the Darkroom is nothing if not timely. It is also highly significant....We live in an age overflowing with bitter battles over identity—with too little of Susan Faludi’s humane desire to understand.

The National Book Review “A wrought and multilayered memoir...Powerful and absorbing.

Publishers Weekly (starred review) “A moving and penetrating inquiry into manifold struggles for identity, community, and authenticity.

Kirkus Reviews (starred review) “Wow. Susan Faludi’s new book is so good. Like a really dry martini. Pow!

The Observer (London) “Astonishing, unique...Should be essential reading.

The Irish Independent (Dublin) “A record of Stefanie Faludi’s extraordinary life, and an unsettling interrogation of that modern obsession, identity....Few have asked these questions with such

riveting precision. *The Spectator* (UK) "In the Darkroom is a unique, deeply affecting and beautifully written book, full of warmth, intelligence and...humour. It makes a flawless weave of biography and autobiography with an examination of identity politics, Hungarian history, the Holocaust and the reparable bond between parent and child. *The Saturday Paper* (Australia)

Susan Faludi is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and the author of *The Terror Dream*, *Stiffed*, and *Backlash*, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction. A former reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, she has written for *The New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, *Harper's*, and *The Baffler*, among other publications.

Author and feminist Susan Faludi has written a memoir, "In the Darkroom", about her father. This is not a simple, loving memoir about a beloved father, but rather about a father who seemingly was at war with the world, including the world of his family. Faludi's father, born in Budapest in 1927 as Istvan Friedman, and died in Budapest in 2015, reinvented as Stephanie Faludi. It was the life between the birth and death that Susan Faludi writes about. Istvan Friedman seemed to be a man who lived a life with few "constants". Born of Jewish parents in inter-war Hungary, he was not close to his parents, though he rescued them in 1944 in Budapest when they had been taken by the Arrow Cross. After living through WW2, he touched down in Copenhagen and Brazil before settling in New York City, where he changed his name to Steven Faludi, married and raised a family in 50's, 60's, before being divorced in the mid-1970's. Susan's home life while growing up with him in the house was volatile, to say the least. Father and daughter split for many years after Susan became an adult and Steven moved back to Budapest. In 2004, she received an email saying that "Steven Faludi" was now "Stephanie Faludi" - her father had had a sex-change operation in Phuket, Thailand. In the years between 2004 and Stephanie's death, Susan and her father tried to understand each other. She spent time with him in Budapest, where the two wandered the city as Susan attempted to recreate her father's life in understandable fashion. From my reading of the memoir, Stephanie Faludi seemed to be a person in a lifelong search of his identity. Was he Jewish? He married a Jewish woman in a temple, but raised his two children without much Jewish knowledge; instead celebrating with a passion the major Christian holidays. Was he a man or a woman? Was he a Hungarian, despite the persecution Jews in Hungary had long endured? Even the title of the book, "In the Darkroom", which alludes to Steven Faludi's career in photography and to the Photoshop-like changes he was able to make to pictures, also seems to refer to the

permutations he makes to his life. Susan Faludi's book is about many things. Assimilation, the trans-gender movement, father-daughter relationships, even the history of Hungary. But most of all it is a story of a daughter trying to understand a father, who is trying to understand himself. It's a beautifully written book.

This is simply one of the best books I've read in a very long while. It was presented to the public as something sensational--middle aged woman finds her elderly father has had a sex change operation--well, that's sensational, no question. Who wouldn't ask themselves what if? But Faludi takes this dramatic event as an occasion to explore the psychological complexities of individual identity. Her transsexual father is an emblem of how fluid identity is, and how it gets formed not only by individual agency, but also by inexorable historical, outside events. She combines meticulous historical research with personal experience, and the result is an extraordinary book. I recommend it without reservation.

Susan Faludi writes honestly about an intensely dishonest person - her father, who, late in life chose to undergo gender reassignment surgery. While the story is primarily about the author's experiences as she attempts to understand and learn about her father, it is also a deft linking of larger historical currents - the Jews in Hungary, the sexual stereotyping of postwar North America, and the Shoah. The sections on the Faludi family also show the seeds of Faludi's own feminism, and how it was forged by her father with his relentless insistence on taking gender stereotypes to ridiculous and painful lengths in order to promote his own highly insecure self image. I've always been intrigued by Buda Pest ever since I read John Lukacs "Budapest 1900" a book that Faludi mentions in her text. She spends time exploring the city in which her father grew up, and for anybody trying to understand how this once backwater city came to rival Paris for a brief time prior to WWI you could not read a better book. I do not disagree with the reviewer who makes the point that Faludi's father tried to get her to write "his" side of the story. However I also think that while it would have been impossible for the author to uncover all of his deceptions, she creates enough of a sense of Stephen/Stephanie so that we know that there was no way anybody -- not even this gifted journalist -- could uncover the entire story. An amazing book.

Solid documentation, powerful but unaffected writing, and brave good humor. It's amazing that Faludi could make history so personal and unforgettable while pulling the reader through like a thriller. What will happen next? I kept asking myself that question. And then, how could these people

endure it? Published before the election, this book somehow also speaks to our time in the U.S. today. I can't remember a book so sad, so enlightening, and yet entertaining.

4.5 stars. The accolades this memoir/history/identity study has garnered are incredibly well-deserved. Susan Faludi, journalist, has beautifully documented her fraught relationship with her father, and his fraught relationship with identity. The book opens with Faludi heading to Budapest to visit her father who, via email, reveals to her that he has undergone a sex reassignment surgery and has transformed from Steven into Stefanie. What follows is part personal memoir of life with her father and part journalistic investigation. On the one hand, Faludi's writes a lovely if conflicted remembrance of her father, his creativity and knack for editing and airbrushing (he was a well known photographer), his violent outbursts, his controlling nature, and his internal struggles. On the other, her father's transformation leads her to an investigation into gender identity and into Hungary during WWII (her father came of age as a Jew in that nightmarish time). The book is wonderful and sad, confusing and fascinating. Highly recommended.

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