

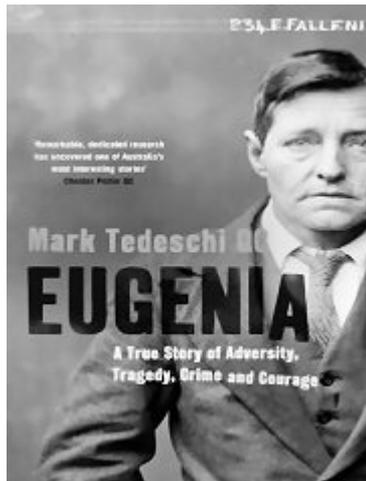
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Book Review: Eugenia

A True Story of Tragedy Crime and Courage

Reviewed by Katherine Cummings

Article appeared in Polare magazine: April 2013 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



Eugenia: A True Story of Tragedy, Crime and Courage, by Mark Tedeschi

Eugenia: A True Story of Tragedy Crime and Courage

by Mark Tedeschi
Simon & Schuster (2012)
I.S.B.N.-13 978 1922052292

[Mark Tedeschi's] book is as fine a memorial as Harry could hope to have ...

A biologically female but innately male-gendered child was born into the Falleni family in Italy in 1875. Christened Eugenia, he was brought up in Wellington after his parents emigrated to New Zealand in 1877. Harry showed his innate gender very early and was seen as a tomboy by his family. He would dress as a boy and play the rough games of boys. By the time he was fifteen he had run away from home at least once and at nineteen went through a forced marriage, a marriage that failed almost instantly when the husband was revealed as a bigamist and fraud.

Harry adopted the guise of a young man and took the name Eugene, and tried several times to obtain employment as a male, but these attempts invariably foundered when he was recognised by an acquaintance or otherwise had his masquerade exposed. As a result he came in conflict with the law, and his family reached a point where he was no longer welcome as part of the Falleni family.

He finally cut his family ties for ever by running away to sea in male guise at the age of twenty-one. He apparently performed creditably as an ordinary seaman on a merchant sailing vessel. Sadly his biological gender was discovered and the young man trapped in a biologically female body was raped repeatedly and forced ashore in Newcastle, N.S.W., destitute and pregnant.

These are the basic facts that set up the life of Harry Crawford. First, the knowledge from an early age that he was not female, despite his anatomy and forced socialisation, and second, the fact that he could, given the right circumstances, succeed in living the life he craved as a man. A verbal slip had betrayed him on the barque he had served on, and he would be more cautious in the future.

These are the basic building blocks from which Harry built his life, and the same blocks have been used by Mark Tedeschi, who became fascinated by Eugenia/Harry and has used the elements of Harry's life to create an absorbing and challenging book that not only tells us much of Harry and his difficult life, but also supplies a clear-eyed view of Sydney and Australia as they were in the first third of the twentieth century.

The social and historical milestones of Harry's life are cleverly underscored by tagging some of the important dates with historical footnotes, such as the invention of wireless (1897), the sinking of the Titanic (1912), the zeppelin bombing of London (1917) and the opening of the Panama Canal (1920) and by providing brief biographical sketches for key characters in Harry's life story.

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the book concerns Harry's trial for the murder of his first wife, Annie Birkett. Mark Tedeschi's documented view is that if Harry were being tried today, given the same witness list and the same evidence, he would, in all probability, be acquitted, not because he was necessarily innocent, but because the evidence was inconclusive and certainly not beyond reasonable doubt. Tedeschi knows what he is talking about. He is, after all, Senior Crown Prosecutor for the State of New South Wales.

Returning to Harry's younger days, he appears to have been a typical working-class man in the Sydney of his time. Having little or no formal education (he could neither read nor write) he fell back on skills acquired in his youth, mainly centred around the care and use of horses. He appears to have had considerable skill as a driver of horse-drawn transport and this skill and his willingness to work hard at manual labour meant he could usually rely on finding employment.

His non-working hours, too, seem to have been typical of the time. He drank to the point of drunkenness, he swore, he treated women and children with a degree of violence that was probably normal for a man of his time and social station. He appears to have been popular with women and, thanks to a skilfully crafted strap-on dildo, and his insistence on intercourse in the dark and under rigidly controlled circumstances, he indulged in sexual acts with a number of women, including his wives.

Harry's first wife, the aforementioned Annie Birkett, had a son by a previous marriage, and her son, also named Harry, appears to have

accepted Harry as his stepfather without the kind of rebellion that is common among modern teenagers. When Annie disappeared from the scene, young Harry seems to have accepted the story that she had gone off with another man.

It is amazing that Harry Crawford managed to convince virtually everybody that he was male, despite having no support from a peer group and no medical modification of his physical anatomy. We know that he bound his breasts, as many F.T.M.s do in the early stages of their transition, but he had no knowledge of hormone therapy, nor the surgical procedures that might have assisted him in living as a male. To have lived among working men without being able to strip to the waist, to conceal his monthly periods not only from his friends and fellow-workers but also from his wives, to feel the social pressure of constantly needing to be on the qui vive against a careless word or reminiscence, and the necessity to ensure that nobody from his past life as Eugenia was going to betray him, must have placed him under tremendous stress. In all probability he spent much of his life, perhaps all of it, believing that he was unique in the history of the world, with a dark secret he could not afford to tell to anyone in the medical profession or any other possible confessor and guide, such as a priest.

It is no wonder that the pressure reached a level where he needed to tell someone about himself, in addition to the woman who had raised his illegitimate daughter, Josephine, and knew that he was transgendered, although the medical profession at that time preferred to lump homosexuals, cross-dressers and those with physical sexual anomalies as 'inverts', suggesting that they were perversions of normality, rather than a statistical variation within a larger group.

We will never know the full circumstances of the death of Harry's first wife, Annie. We know that she had been told by an interfering neighbour that Harry was not all that he seemed to be, and we know that Harry and Annie went on a picnic to Lane Cove River Park, from which only Harry returned. Annie died in the park, but there is not enough evidence to tell whether she died as a result of premeditated murder; from an act of unplanned violence that resulted in death; or by simple misadventure.

It does seem probable that Harry tried to dispose of the body by burning it, and again we do not know if this was the result of preplanning or a panicked reaction to a belief that her death would be called murder, and he would be blamed.

When Annie's body was first found she could not be identified, despite police attempts to have witnesses come forward, and one conclusion was that she might be a homeless and mentally disturbed woman who had been seen in the area and could have stumbled into the fire under the influence of alcohol.

It was not until three years later, when Harry had married Lizzie Allison, an office worker in a hotel where Harry was employed, that the identification of Annie's body was made and the police reopened the case with the almost inevitable result that Harry found himself charged with the murder of his first wife. The evidence was largely circumstantial as to the mode of Annie's death, but the revelation that Harry was anatomically female and that he had been concealing this fact for so long set off a furore in the press, who stirred up the public with lurid stories and images of the 'man-woman' that could only have been prejudicial to Harry's case.

The papers also published numerous photographs of Harry, so that when the trial was being held and witnesses were claiming to have seen Harry in the Lane Cove River Park three years earlier, their evidence was suspect, to say the least.

Tedeschi handles the account of the trial with consummate skill, as one might expect. The events of the trial are presented in logical order, with informed comment on many aspects of the Crown case and the shortcomings of the defence.

Harry does not seem to have offered much of a defence beyond a denial of having murdered Annie, but one can only guess at the panic and despair that Harry must have been experiencing, as his life came apart and his hope of ever living a 'normal' life as Harry became ever more unlikely. Since his arrest he had been forced to present as female, and now this cruel punishment was almost certain to be extended to the end of his days.

Tedeschi makes it clear that Harry saw himself as completely male, despite his anomalous anatomy, and that he loved his wives sincerely and pleased them as best he could with his home-made dildo. There may have been some concept of masculine power involved in the use of this arcane tool in the consummation of his couplings, but there is no doubt that the women enjoyed the experience, even if they were unaware of its genesis. Lizzie, in fact, was unable to believe that Harry was 'female' when he was arrested, assuring the police that not only had she had normal intercourse with him but that she was pregnant by him at the time of his arrest. This belief had been sparked by her having ceased to menstruate, a consequence, not of pregnancy, but of menopause. When she was finally convinced of the deception she chose to disappear from the scene and played no further part in Harry's trial.

When the jury predictably brought in a verdict of guilty, Harry responded with one of his few contributions to the proceedings of the trial. When asked if he had anything to say before sentence was passed he said, "I am not guilty, your Honour. The jury found me guilty on false evidence. I know nothing about this charge".

The mandatory death sentence was imposed, commuted a few weeks later to life imprisonment and Harry (who changed his name to Jean during his time in prison) was released on compassionate grounds after thirteen years. Release was conditional on 'good behaviour' which clearly meant that he was condemned to life as a woman, as far as society was concerned. He died in 1938.

There are some odd details which deserve retrospective consideration. Harry was in possession of a revolver, which he had 'liberated' from an employer who had used Harry as a payroll guard. We are told that he fired it twice to see how it worked and that when it was found by the investigating detectives it still had two rounds in it. This probably means it was a five shot revolver. It was sensible, when carrying a gun of this type, not to load the chamber in the firing position under the hammer. The pistol had no safety catch and it was possible if the hammer was jarred while resting on a cartridge, that the pistol would discharge accidentally.

But why did he keep two bullets? Did he foresee a day when he might want to commit murder or suicide or both? If he took Annie to Lane Cove River Park with the intention of murdering her, why did he not take the pistol with him?

Other questions are prompted by episodes that occurred soon after Annie's death, Tedeschi suggests that Harry was so depressed and distressed that he wanted to kill young Harry Birkett, to save him from a predictable sad and empty life, and then to commit suicide. Harry took young Harry to the Gap, and climbed the safety fence, ostensibly to throw rocks into the surf from the cliffs above. He encouraged young Harry to join him and Tedeschi assumes Harry intended to grab young Harry and jump with him over the cliff. Of course, if one takes the blackest view of Harry Crawford's character one might equally well assume he simply wanted to murder young Harry and then claim the whole incident as a terrible accident. Young Harry sensibly refused to climb the fence.

Not long after, Harry took young Harry on an even more ominous excursion in a rainstorm, carrying a shovel. Arriving at a patch of bush in the Woollahra area, Harry started to dig a hole. Unbelievably, young Harry does not seem to have drawn the obvious conclusion from this bizarre behaviour, and even took his turn at digging. "How big do you want the hole, Dad?", I imagine him asking Harry. "Oh, I don't know, son ... how tall are you?" This episode petered out when the hole and the shovel were abandoned, and the two men returned to their lodging, dishevelled, wet, and covered in sand.

I should emphasise that Tedeschi's book is what is nowadays rather disagreeably called 'faction', a work based on fact that incorporates assumptions and inventions by the author. An example of this occurs in the description of the hole-digging expedition where we are told that Harry intended to "hit the boy over the head with the shovel, and then, after making sure that he was dead, to bury him in this makeshift grave. After that, he was planning to get a tram to Gap Park where he would throw himself off the cliff". There is no way we could know Harry's thought processes and intentions without Harry having made a confession of some kind, and this is not cited.

Tedeschi is meticulous in observing the facts of the case when they are known, but he also records thoughts, attitudes and beliefs that do not seem to have been recorded anywhere, particularly in light of Harry Crawford's illiteracy, and the fact that much of the evidence arises from interviews held well after the events they record. As long as this supplementation of known fact is recognised for what it is, it is not a weakness but rather a strength, as it makes the book more interesting and entertaining than if it were a bald statement of the few verifiable facts.

Near the end of the book there is a supplementary list of places associated with Harry's life and his marriages to Annie and Lizzie. Tedeschi has also found the unmarked grave where Harry Crawford was buried at Rookwood and is hoping to raise funds to place a headstone over it, partly from book sales and partly by conducting tours of these places of interest and raising donations.

One place that has defied identification is the exact location in Lane Cove River Park where Annie Birkett died but this may yet be found and would then be part of any tour that might eventuate.

There are a few slight and unimportant errors in the book, such as the common mistake that the body of water east of The Gap is the Pacific Ocean whereas it is, according to the Hydrographic Board of Names, the Tasman Sea. There are also minor errors of grammar and some typos but what work do not have these?

The illustrations have been well chosen and are clear and informative. One mystery Mark Tedeschi has not been able to solve definitively for me ... Sir William Cullen, who presided over Harry's trial was admitted to the Bar in 1883 but did not complete his law degree until 1885. I queried this with Tedeschi and he verified the dates, but was unable to explain this apparent discrepancy to my satisfaction.

One final note: Mark Tedeschi came to the Gender Centre to address us on the topic of his book. He mentioned his intention to provide a marker for Harry Crawford's grave and I said, and truly believe, that his book is as fine a memorial as Harry could hope to have and that his story will live on in libraries and be preserved in people's memories in a more human way than visits to a grave stone in a remote cemetery could ever achieve.

Eugenia Falleni (1875–1938)

From the [Australian Dictionary of Biography](#) :  written by Carolyn Strange

Eugenia Falleni (c.1875-1938), convicted murderer, was born reputedly in Florence, Italy, and moved with her family to New Zealand about 1877. According to later medical reports, she had frequently run away as a child, seeking jobs in brickyards and other places where she dressed as a boy. In her teens Falleni found employment aboard a ship that plied the south seas. At some point during her voyages, her sex was discovered and she became pregnant. About 1898 Falleni disembarked at Newcastle, New South Wales, friendless, with a baby girl. It is possible that she was the unmarried Lena Falleni, born at Livorno, Italy, who gave birth to a daughter Josephine in Sydney in 1898. The child was put into a Sydney woman's care and Falleni proceeded to present herself to the world as "Harry Leo Crawford".



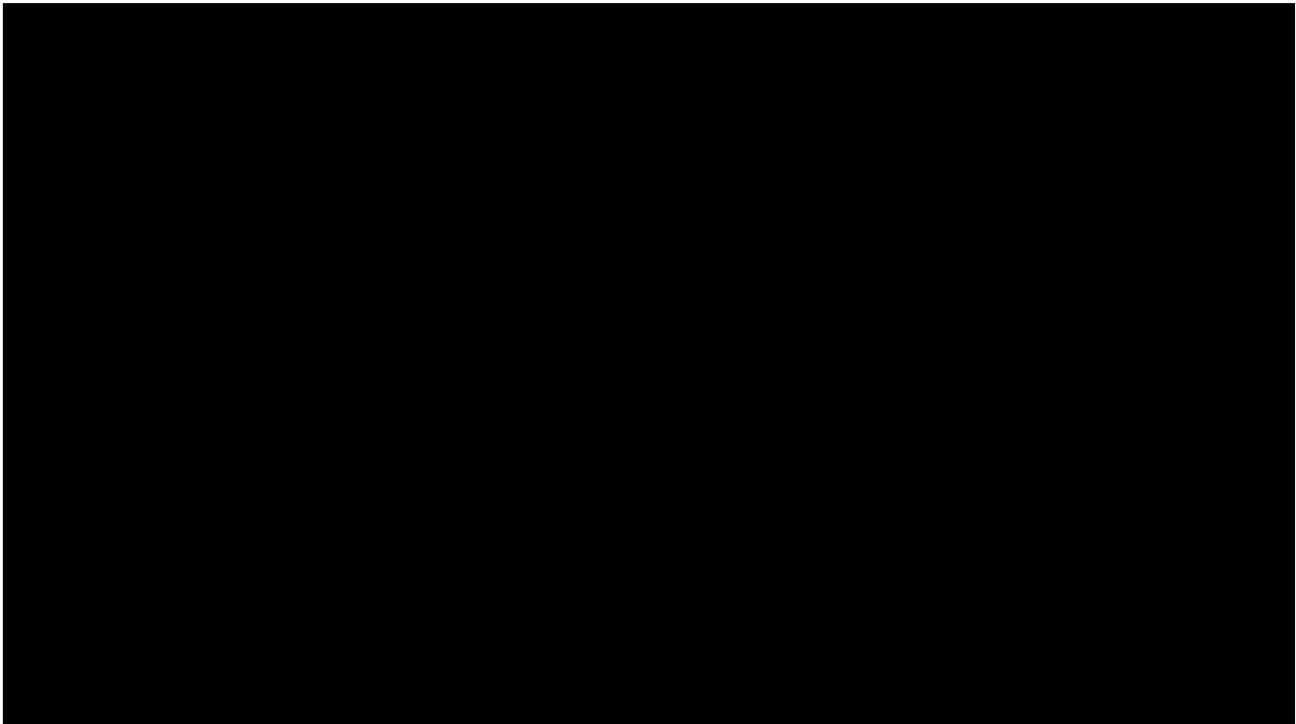
Crawford worked in Sydney for employers who thought nothing of the gruff, taciturn man's bearing. He held a series of manual jobs — in a meat factory, hotels, laundries, a rubber company and in private service. By 1912 he was a yardman and driver for Dr. G.R.C. Clarke of Wahroonga, where he met Annie Birkett. A widow with a nine-year-old son, Annie was a general domestic with the Clarks but had saved a nest egg. Harry took mother and son on sulky rides and to visit the circus. The courting pair resolved to leave service and set up a confectionery shop in Balmain. Claiming to be a widower aged 38, son of a master mariner, also named Harry Leo Crawford, Harry went through a marriage ceremony with Annie on 19th February 1913 at the Methodist Parsonage, Balmain South, and embarked on a brief, stormy family life. It remains unclear whether Annie realized that her husband was not a man. Neighbours later reported that the pair quarrelled frequently, particularly after Falleni's daughter Josephine reappeared.

While young Harry Birkett was away from home, the Crawfords celebrated the Eight-Hour Day holiday in 1917 with a picnic at Chatswood. Mrs Crawford did not return. On 2nd October a woman's body was discovered, charred beyond recognition and

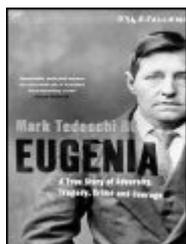
apparently battered. Crawford did not report his wife missing; rather he claimed that she had left him. Josephine moved out and, selling the household goods, Crawford moved to inner Sydney with his stepson. On 29th September 1919 at Canterbury registry office Harry Leo Crawford, a widower and a mechanical engineer, married Elizabeth King Allison. The groom's parents were given as Harry Crawford, ship-owner, and Elizabeth Falleni. By 1920 the body at Chatswood had been identified as Annie Crawford and police tracked down her husband. Arrested on suspicion of murder on 5th July, Crawford asked to be held in the women's cells.

The press relished the revelation. Sydney's "man-woman" created a sensation. At his preliminary hearing in July 1920 the defendant appeared in men's clothes. At the trial for murder in October, however, the accused sat in the dock dressed as a woman. The Crown argued that Falleni had perpetrated "sex fraud" and had killed to cover her deception. The defence countered that she was innocent and merely a "congenital invert". Falleni was convicted and condemned to death, but her sentence was commuted. Released from Long Bay prison in February 1931 she assumed the name "Jean Ford" and worked as a landlady. She was living at Paddington when she was struck by a motorcar in Oxford Street on 9th June 1938. Falleni died of her injuries the following day in Sydney Hospital and was buried with Anglican rites in Rookwood cemetery.

Speculation about Falleni's identity and guilt did not stop with her death. At her 1920 trial her daughter had testified: "My mother has always gone about dressed as a man". Since then doctors, psychiatrists, journalists, endocrinologists, feminists, playwrights, film makers and historians have tried to make sense of Falleni. They have labelled her variously as a sexual hermaphrodite, a homosexualist, a masquerader, a person with misplaced atoms, a sex pervert, a passing woman, a transgendered man, and as gender dysphoric. Falleni proclaimed her innocence of the murder but never explained what induced her to live as a man.



On July 5, 1920 Harry Crawford was arrested and charged with the murder of his wife Annie Birkett, whose body had been found off Mowbray Road in Lane Cove, Sydney. But Harry was not, in fact, Harry. He was Eugenia Falleni, a woman who had lived as a man in Australia for twenty-two years. Publishers Simon & Schuster have made this video publicly available through YouTube where Author Mark Tedeschi Q.C. takes us on a tour of Eugenia Falleni's Sydney, from the home she shared with Annie Birkett and the picnic spot on which the terrible tragedy occurred to where her true identity was discovered and where she was charged with the murder of her wife Annie Birkett.



Eugenia, A True Story of Tragedy Crime and Courage

Author: Mark Tedeschi

Publisher: Simon & Schuster Australia (2012)

I.S.B.N.-13 978 1922052292

From Booktopia:  This is the true crime account of Eugenia Falleni, a woman who in 1920 was charged with the murder of her wife. Eugenia had lived in Australia for twenty-two years as a man and during that time officially married twice. She lived a full married life with her first wife, Annie, for four years before Annie realised that her husband was a woman. Even after Annie knew, they lived together for eight months before they went on a bush picnic, when Annie mysteriously died.

Her body was not identified for almost three years, and during this time Eugenia married again, this time to Lizzie. When Eugenia was finally arrested and charged with Annie's murder, the police attempted to tell Lizzie that her husband was a woman. She laughed at them - she was so convinced that her husband was a man that she thought she was pregnant to him. This is the story of one of the most extraordinary criminal trials in legal history anywhere in the world. The book traces Eugenia's history: from her early years in an Italian immigrant family in New Zealand, to her brutal treatment when she first tried living as a man. The story then follows the twenty-two years that she lived in Sydney as Harry Crawford - exploring how Harry managed to convince two wives that he was a man. The trial of Eugenia Falleni for Annie's murder is

extensively analysed in a clear and easily understood way by the author, Senior Crown Prosecutor Mark Tedeschi Q.C., one of Australia's foremost criminal law barristers with experience both as a prosecutor and a defender. The book continues with Eugenia's fascinating life after her trial. The last eight years of her life are described, in which she was forced by an unforgiving society to live life as a woman. This book is true crime, true grit and truly gripping. It includes: a tragic main character who believed she was a man trapped in the body of a woman.



Eugenia: A Man
Author: Suzanne Falkiner
Publisher: Pan (1988)
I.S.B.N.-13 978 0330271127

From the book's back cover: Born in Italy in 1875, Eugenia Falleni migrated to New Zealand with her family at the age of two. Settling in Wellington, in the south of the North Island, the family were hardworking, law-abiding and respectable - except for Eugenia, who grew up restless, wilful and undisciplined. She wore boys' clothes when she could and repeatedly ran away from home. In her teens, and again dressed as a boy, she ran away to sea. Some years later when she turned up in Newcastle, a seaport on the south eastern coast of Australia, having apparently worked in the intervening time as a cabin boy. Soon after she gave birth to a child. Eugenia fostered the baby to an Italian family, and from then on, for nearly twenty years, she continued to live as a man. It was this same Eugenia, who as Harry Crawford, called by the newspapers "The Man-Woman Murderer", was later tried for murdering the woman living with him as his wife.

Further Information

[Mark Tedeschi A.M. Q.C.: Contemporary Australian Photographer and True Crime Author](#) 
[Eugenia Falleni at Wikipedia](#) 
[EugeniaFalleni.com](#) 
[Eugenia Falleni - convicted murderer at N.S.W. Government: State Records](#) 
[He was a she. But a killer? Sydney Morning Herald Sunday 19th February 2012](#) 
[Who was Eugenia Falleni? at Passing Research Notes](#) 

Polare Magazine is published quarterly in Australia by The Gender Centre Inc., which is funded by the Department of Family & Community Services under the S.A.A.P. program and supported by the N.S.W. Health Department through the AIDS and Infectious Diseases Branch. Polare provides a forum for discussion and debate on gender issues. Unsolicited contributions are welcome, the editor reserves the right to edit such contributions without notification. Any submission which appears in Polare may be published on our internet site. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, The Gender Centre Inc., the Department of Family & Community Services or the N.S.W. Department of Health.

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