



The 7 Question Interview with Tess Callahan

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Tess Callahan has written for The New York Times Magazine, Boston College Magazine, Cottonwood, The Stylus Anthology: 1950-2000, New York Newsday and elsewhere through syndication. An excerpt of her novel, *April & Oliver*, appeared in *Agni* and was nominated for The Pushcart Prize. When not writing, teaching, painting or parenting, she finds nourishment in periodic travels to wild, austere landscapes around the world. Her amazing debut novel is:

- *April & Oliver*

Her official website can be accessed here: <http://tesscallahan.com>

The WritingRaw.com 7 Question Interview

Please let us know who you are and how we might know you:

My work has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Boston College Magazine*, *Powells.com original essay series*, *Cottonwood*, *Stylus Anthology*, *Newsday*, and elsewhere through syndication. An excerpt of *April & Oliver* was published in *Agni* and subsequently nominated for the Pushcart Prize. I have attended conferences and workshops at Bread Loaf, Squaw Valley, the Ragdale Foundation, the Writer's Voice, the University of Kansas at Lawrence, and the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. I did my MFA at Bennington College.

Any news you would like to share concerning upcoming projects:

I will be doing a "You Must Read This" segment for NPR's *All Things Considered*, which gives authors the opportunity to talk about the books they love. We'll be recording this week, with the broadcast date TBA.



With regard to *April & Oliver*, I have readings scheduled for *April & Oliver* in L.A., San Diego, Boston, Livingston, NJ, and Buffalo, New York. More readings may be added. Details can be found on the events page of my website, www.tesscallahan.com.

Needless to say, I am at work on another novel.

Thoughts concerning the current state of the literary world:

Plenty of quality fiction is being published these days. Take Jhumpa Lahiri, Elizabeth Strout, and Josh Weil. These are tremendous talents. On the other hand, it is harder than ever for gifted writers whose work might be deemed "mid-list" to break into the market at all. Many publishing houses are suffering financially and are less likely to take a chance on work that does not easily fit into a marketable box. Of course, great editors are still willing to stick out their necks. Mine did.

Who is your favorite author and why?

This is like opening a box of chocolates and asking me to choose just one. Although I can give you today's answer, tomorrow I may have another favorite.

I love the clean, spare quality of Amy Hempel's writing. She presents images and dialogue and lets them resonate without author commentary. There is very little exposition in her fiction. Her story, *In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson is Buried*, is particularly crushing. The intense emotion is never stated, merely suggested. That kind of restraint is phenomenal.

Have you written a book you love that you have not been able to publish?

I sent out an earlier version of *April & Oliver* that was not published despite having some close calls. How lucky for me that it was rejected, because the book is infinitely better now than it was then. I put the manuscript aside for a long time, which could have been forever if my friend, novelist Sasha Troyan, had not pushed me to go back to it. When I finally did, so much time had passed that I could treat the manuscript like someone else's material. I knew exactly how to fix it.

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Do you have anything specific that you want to say to your readers?

I have been moved by the conversations, emails, and blog reviews in which readers have shared their experience of the book. I believe many readers were taken by the book because of the deep, if troubled, bond shared by April and Oliver. Many of us long for that kind of depth in a relationship.

How do you feel about what WritingRaw.com and other literary sharing sites are attempting to do for new writers?

Each year's crop of new writers alights like a bucket of confetti. Distinguishing one from another can be daunting. To make matters worse, the shelf life for new books is generally short. Sites like this one give new authors the opportunity to discuss their work in more than a sound bite. I am grateful for that opportunity.

WritingRaw.com would like to thank Ms. Callahan for taking the time out of her busy schedule for this interview.