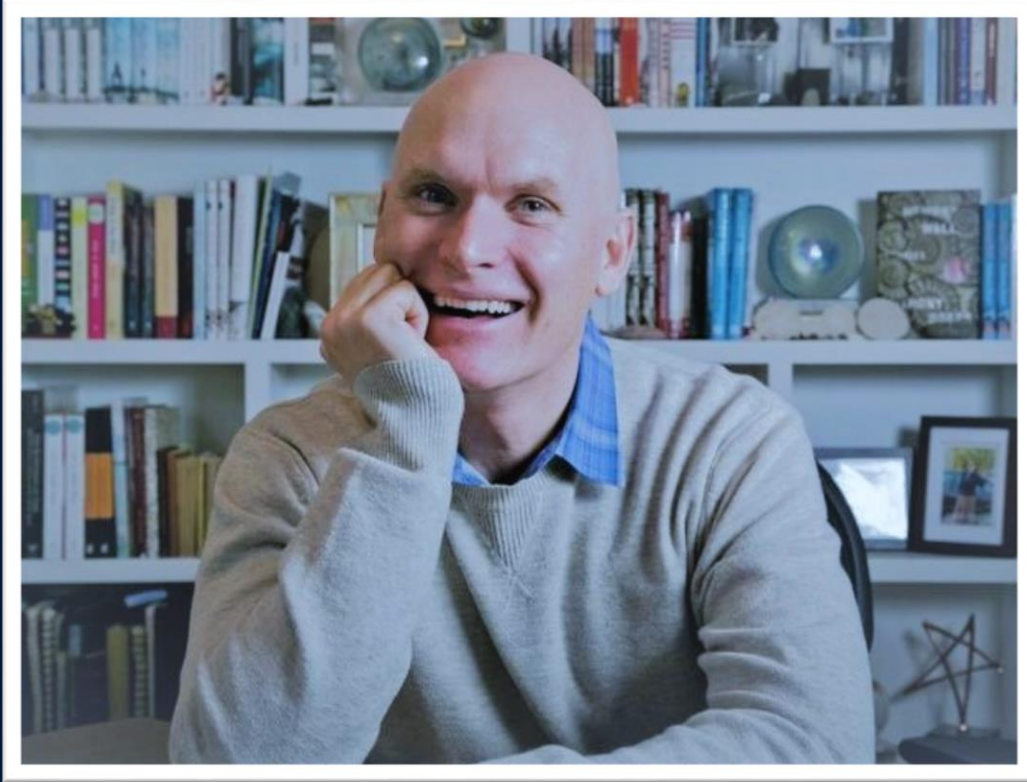


# Anthony Doerr



“On the map of my life, with its dark spots and blank spots and smudged spots, few spots glow more brightly than the libraries, those luminous repositories of stories and lives, little holy lands that have taught me, all my life, about the mysterious, dangerous, profound, and addictive magic of our shared language.”

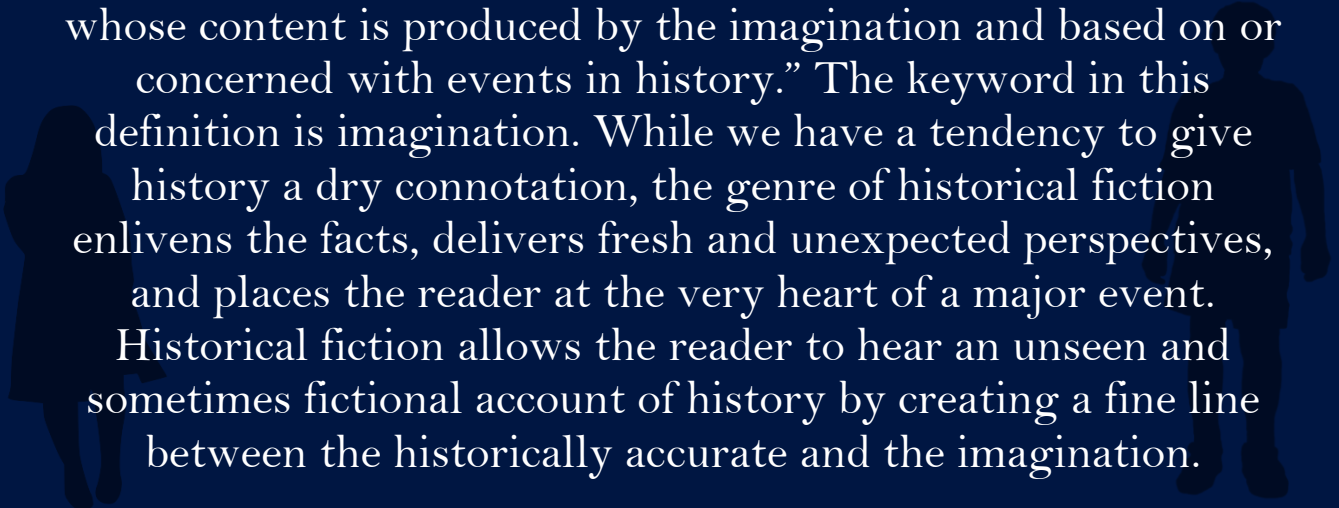
Let us now praise libraries, librarians

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# Historical Fiction

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Historical fiction may be broadly defined as “a literary work whose content is produced by the imagination and based on or concerned with events in history.” The keyword in this definition is imagination. While we have a tendency to give history a dry connotation, the genre of historical fiction enlivens the facts, delivers fresh and unexpected perspectives, and places the reader at the very heart of a major event. Historical fiction allows the reader to hear an unseen and sometimes fictional account of history by creating a fine line between the historically accurate and the imagination.

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Doerr’s contemporaries include acclaimed Markus Zusak, author of *The Book Thief*. Like Doerr, Zusak brings an imaginative twist to a narrative of World War II by having his novel told entirely from the perspective of death. Between these two authors, we see how the genre encourages readers and writers to experience life through a more explorative lens.

“The star-flooded nights, the dew-soaked dawns, the hushed ambulatories, the enforced asceticism—never has Werner felt part of something so single-minded. Never has he felt such a hunger to belong.”

*All the Light We Cannot See*

Doerr challenges the stigma that historical fiction is nothing more than a dressed up textbook entry. His writing is a prime example of the relevancy of historical fiction and how it “can do more than just provide a glimpse into the past - it can also provide insight into contemporary situations and ways of being.”

[50 Essential Historical Fiction Books Article](#)

## Anthony Doerr

Anthony Doerr was born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio. He currently lives in Boise with his wife and two sons. Doerr has had a variety of careers in his lifetime, including working on a sheep farm in New Zealand, cooking in Colorado, and teaching at Boise State University.



Doerr was mystified by literature at an early age, particularly while reading *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Unable to believe that just one person wrote the novel, it was at that point that he came to understand the magic accessible within an individual.



Doerr's short stories and essays have won four O. Henry Prizes and appear in several anthologies the most notable being *The Best American Short Stories*, and *The Best American Essays*.

*All the Light We Cannot See* won the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the 2015 Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction. The novel's success was initially apparent outside of the literary world when it spent multiple weeks on the New York Times bestseller list.

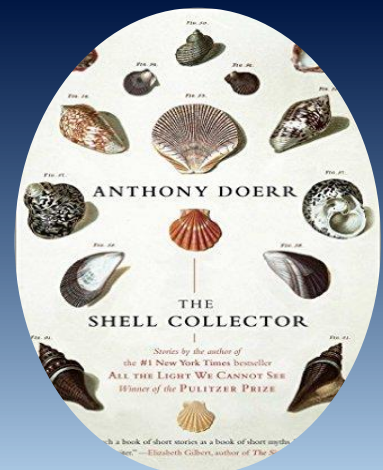


# The Mysticism of Reality

Doerr appears to have an eager fascination with how things work. Throughout *All The Light We Cannot See* his characters are enraptured with radios, and their invisible communication. Doerr presents a form of reverent mysticism that surrounds the very scientific, but also magical reality of wireless communication. Doerr has written multiple essays and short stories about subjects such as the human biome and other scientific phenomenon that are explainable, but also have otherworldly qualities. The juxtaposition between the magical and supernatural impresses to the reader that reality is just as awe inspiring as magic.

## “The Hunter’s Wife”

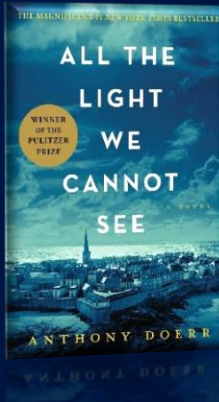
About a woman who can touch the newly dead, and see them in the afterlife. Though her talent is supernatural, the story is filled with real descriptions of the magic of living things that based in anatomical and biological truth, feel mystical.



“More clearly than ever she could see that there was a fine line between dreams and wakefulness, between living and dying, a line so tenuous it sometimes didn't exist... The heart of a hibernating newt was frozen solid, but she could warm and wake it in her palm. For the newt there was no line at all, no fence, no River Styx, only an area between living and dying, like a snowfield between two lakes: a place where dreams and wakefulness met, where death was only a possibility and visions rose shimmering to the stars like smoke. All that was needed was a hand, the heat of a palm, the touch of fingers.”

## “The Hunter's Wife”

# Approaches to Historical Fiction



In preparation for writing *All the Light We Cannot See*, Doerr “went to Europe three times... read dozens and dozens of books... studied thousands of photos,” and “always supplemented that research with imagination.”

“I figure: as fiction writers, we get to use smells and sounds and textures and thought patterns in ways that filmmakers cannot, so why not use them?” – Anthony Doerr

Doerr is focused on taking a concrete setting and a concrete history, uncovering their fairy-tale elements, and bringing them to the surface. He views the genre of historical fiction as a means of capturing history’s “otherworldliness, the sense that it’s almost a place of fantasy as much as reality.”

“Where is he? The sweet, slightly chemical scent of gun oil; the raw wood of newly constructed shell crates; the mothballed odor of old bedspreads—he’s in the hotel. Of course. L’hôtel des Abeilles, the Hotel of Bees.

Still night. Still early.”

*All the Light We Cannot See*

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“She is being sent east with a distant uncle to a place called Theresienstadt. ‘They say it’s a spa town,’ Mathilde murmurs.”

*Memory Wall*

“Afterworld”

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These views would serve to inspire TCNJ students to engage with the genre, because despite its very concrete roots in history, there is an opportunity to push creative boundaries. Doerr inspires young writers to engage with historical fiction by combining research and imagination to create realistic historical fiction that emphasizes the wonder of the natural world and the importance of understanding it. Writers are constantly using inspiration from other works and from their lives. Historical fiction uses a mix of these two forms of inspiration and encourages the reader to look for the extraordinary in their own lives and the world around them.