

## **THE LITERARY ARSONIST**

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*Fires in rural landscapes were imagined and represented in Portuguese literature from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present. We analysed a set of 55 excerpts from 43 published texts produced by 29 writers. These excerpts, which we call pyrostories, convey a literary and historical perspective of how and why those fires occur and their impacts as socioecological drivers. Arsonists are found in a third of these pyrostories, which stand out in the texts where fire origin is identified. Writers included in the literary corpus portrayed the characters of the arsonists as people struggling with difficult living conditions and subordination. A content analysis of the environmental and social contexts of fire ignition and the portrayals of fires given in the pyrostories reveal the anti-idyll of rural life in Portugal during the Estado Novo (1933-1974) and represent the use of fires as a tool of resistance and protest, also despair, against private interests and state forestry policies. Thus, from the writer's vantage point, fires are depicted as 'friends', 'foes' or both, depending on the perspectives of different local actors. Pyrostories grant notoriety to the arsonist, giving her/him a literary role with historical significance in the social and environmental research into rural fires.*

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