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### ***Unsettling fictions: generic instability and colonial time***

It has often been observed that the early phases of Europhone writing in Africa and Latin America produced generically unstable texts. For Franco Moretti, this is indeed the key formal characteristic of the novel's spread across the world: an uneasy compromise between imported form and local content. While drawing on this general observation, this paper will shift focus from the novel as genre to fiction as a literary mode. Specifically, it will look comparatively at the uses of fiction – notably as a way of structuring time – in the writing of Olive Schreiner (South Africa) and Euclides da Cunha (Brazil). Active in the late nineteenth century, both Schreiner and Cunha were affected by evolutionist, Spencerian modes of thinking, as well as by European literary realism. It is striking, however, that their signal achievements – Schreiner's novel *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) and Cunha's war documentary *Os sertões* (1902) – are thoroughly idiosyncratic compromises between critical truth-claims and literary techniques derived from realist fiction.

The obvious fact that *African Farm* is presented *as* fiction, whereas *Os sertões* is presented *as* documentary truth obscures the more important issue at hand: that the nineteenth-century European notion of fiction as *a mode of truth-telling* served as a malleable resource for articulating sharply divergent experiences of time in late-colonial/early post-colonial societies. This paper will thereby address the broader question of how fiction relates to historical, experiential, evolutionary (“scientific”) and mythical aspects of time – in the context of conflictual colonial histories. The wider (if somewhat speculative) implication of this discussion is that fiction gains critical momentum in diverse global contexts when “impurified”, i. e. when its received generic status is unsettled and reconfigured.