

THE "VISCOUS TURN" IN 2026 LITERATURE: ANALYZING HOW CONTEMPORARY PROSE RENDERS MICROPLASTICS AND GLOBAL WARMING AS TANGIBLE, SENTIENT CHARACTERS

Ombeline Dussartre
Université Clermont Auvergne
France

Abstract

In 2026, a marked "Viscous Turn" has emerged in contemporary literature, characterized by the embodiment of hyperobjects—such as microplastics and global warming—as tangible, agentic, and often sentient entities within narrative prose. Drawing on Timothy Morton's framework of hyperobjects and material ecocriticism, this review article examines how recent works of fiction and creative nonfiction depict these environmental phenomena not as distant backdrops but as viscous, permeable forces that infiltrate human bodies, psyches, and societies. Through close analysis of key texts, theoretical underpinnings, and interdisciplinary intersections with climate science, this article argues that such representations foster a post-anthropocentric ethics of entanglement. It synthesizes over 50 scholarly and literary sources, highlighting narrative innovations in scalar entanglement, porous embodiment, and multispecies agency. The Viscous Turn signals a maturation of climate fiction (cli-fi) into a dominant mode of realist prose that demands readerly immersion in ecological crisis.

Keywords: Viscous Turn, Microplastics, Global Warming, Hyperobjects, Contemporary Ecofiction, Material Ecocriticism, Sentient Matter, Climate Fiction, Anthropocene Literature, Viscous Porosity