Books That Reflect Common Themes of Surrealism

The Yellow Wallpaper (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman
In this feminist work of horror, written as a series of diary entries from the perspective of a young woman confined to cure her ‘hysteria’, Gilman explores the difficulties of postnatal depression.

Metamorphosis (1915) by Franz Kafka
Surreal creatures and frightening dreams come to life in this tale of a young man who wakes one morning to find himself turned into an insect.

Mourning for Mourning (1925) by Robert Desnos
Robert Desnos was one of the most iconic literary Surrealists, and in this collection of writings he explores the use of automatism via the written word.

The Master and Margarita (1967) by Mikhail Bulgakov
In this iconic work, themes of religion and hell are explored in the surreal world of the supernatural where Satan is accompanied by a sassy back-talking cat.

Agua Viva (1973) by Clarice Lispector
Originally written in Portuguese, this book explores the surreal via form, using no other structure other than double paragraph breaks, lacking chapters or sections.

Life Is Elsewhere (1973) by Milan Kundera
Through the story of the young poet Jaromil, Kundera explores themes of childhood and strange dreams by using poetry and Rimbaud to escape the horror of the Communist revolution.

The Hearing Trumpet (1974) by Leonora Carrington
Leonora Carrington was best known as a Surrealist painter, but in this novel she explores the surreal world of 92-year-old Marian Leatherby, who is given the gift of a hearing trumpet only to discover that what her family is saying is that she is to be committed to an institution.

Nights At The Circus (1984) by Angela Carter
The story of Sophie Fevvers, a circus aerialist with the unusual anatomy of a pair of wings, deconstructs the fairy tale genre in adventures that take place across three cities.

Kafka On The Shore (2002) by Haruki Murakami
The story of Kafka Tamura, a runaway, feels just out of reach of the living world in this menagerie of talking cats, falling fish, a woman professing Hegel and eternally youthful soldiers.

Autumn (2016) by Ali Smith
In the first novel of her quartet, Ali Smith explores the surreal by way of the dreams and misty recollections of Daniel Gluck.