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Connections and Differences between Magical Realism and Surrealism

Literature and works of art in the genre of magical realism and surrealism are completely different, even if they appear to be the same. Magical realism and surrealism both depict the ethereal and what lies beyond the veil of the ordinary; however, the arts in both genres carry vastly different meanings and stimulate different parts of our psyche. Moving on, this essay will highlight the differences that are not apparent between the two genres.

Magical realism is a broad genre that encapsulates both literature and art. It was conceptualized in Latin America. Evidently, works in this genre depict ethereal and magical elements that convey fantasy. In stark contrast, these elements will usually be placed in a mundane and realistic setting, hence the name of the genre. Every author and painter will always have a unique perspective and goal with the release of their work, but there are prominent concepts that arise from mixing the otherworldly with the worldly. Many interpretations and definite meanings can be extracted from this. However, a notable reason that should be considered is the fact that the creator of the work might want to convey that there is magic to be found and seen if only one would stop to look for it. An alternative perspective would be to find the magical and mystical in everyday situations and places through the filter of your imagination.

On the other hand, surrealism also depicts the ethereal and the dream-like, but the concept emerged from painters', authors', and artists' desire to understand the unconscious mind.



Picture Salvador Dali's "The Persistence of Memory" painting, in which you can view three deflated clocks in a barren desert land reminiscent of the Grand Canyon. It is not difficult to recognize the dream-like elements in such work. Surrealism exists to depict the strange and symbolic nature of the unconscious psyche, and works in this genre typically depict imagery juxtaposition and creative associations that stimulate the imagination. The dream world and dreams, in general, provide heavy inspiration for this particular genre. What may seem random and nonsensical at first can slowly start to make sense, and a connection can be made if one looks deeper and truly analyzes a surrealist art or literature piece.

The similarities found in both genres are undeniably there. However, the way these elements are used and the deeper messages that are brought forth through imagery and symbolism are ultimately different in nature. In the realm of magical realism, we are brought back into the familiar world, and the mix of realistic elements and unrealistic elements is portrayed in a sober manner. In the world of surrealism, objects and concepts seem to blend into one another as if there are no boundaries. This successfully imitates the dream world and makes us aware of the existence of the unconscious psyche. Both use the same elements but have contrasting purposes.