

夢裏不知身是客

南柯一夢

“南柯一夢”典出唐代李公佐《南柯太守傳》。遊俠淳于棼一天酒醉後在大槐樹下乘涼，夢入槐安國，獲招為駙馬，並當了南柯太守二十載，盡享榮華富貴。惜其後與鄰國交戰失利，公主又罹疾而終，官位不保。淳于棼一覺醒來，酒壺仍在身旁，方發現槐安國原是大槐樹下一個蟻洞，而南柯郡，則是槐樹南端的一枝。《南柯太守傳》道出世事無常，警惕時人不要貪圖享受，因為富貴如浮雲，到頭來還是一場幻夢。後人多以“南柯一夢”喻指一場歡喜一場空。



黃粱一夢

與“南柯一夢”意思相近的，還有“黃粱一夢”，典出唐代沈既濟《枕中記》。盧生上京赴考，在邯鄲一家客店巧遇道士呂翁。呂翁有感於盧生人窮志屈，遂探囊取出一瓷枕，贈予盧生，說該枕能使其心願得償。當時店主正在煮黃粱飯，盧生倚枕入睡，夢裏考取功名，官拜宰相，還娶得嬌妻，享盡

榮華富貴，在朝輔政五十載。醒來時，盧生方發現入夢前店主正在準備的黃粱飯還沒有煮熟。夢中所歷，不過須臾之間。《枕中記》道破功名富貴不過夢中虛幻，勸諭世人莫追名逐利。後人用“黃粱一夢”指好事或希望最後落得一場空。

唐代傳奇

《南柯太守傳》與《枕中記》是唐代傳奇的重要作品。傳奇是唐代文人撰寫的文言短篇小說，至唐末輯成《傳奇》一書。傳奇的內容多傳述奇聞逸事，諷世言情，題材廣泛，包羅才子佳人、江湖豪俠，以至神魔鬼怪等故事。除《南柯太守傳》和《枕中記》外，著名的作品還有李朝威的《柳毅傳》、元稹的《鶯鶯傳》、白行簡的《李娃傳》、蔣防的《霍小玉傳》、杜光庭的《虬髯客傳》、陳鴻的《長恨歌傳》等等。傳奇屬通俗文學，深受時人喜愛。傳奇比詩文辭賦更具趣味，因此傾注心力於這種文學的文人日多。唐代傳奇結構完整，藉虛構的故事反映人情世態，人物形象突出，性格鮮明，正是中國古典短篇小說趨於成熟的明證。此外，唐代傳奇對後世戲曲有深遠影響，當中不少故事成為明清戲曲的題材。



Let's Make It Clear

Examples of intended ambiguity abound in literature. Under the pen of literary masters, words demonstrate an astounding capacity for suggesting two or more equally possible senses in a given context. Take the line “And all the air a solemn stillness holds” from English poet Thomas Gray’s *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. It is wonderfully ambiguous, capable of being interpreted as “all the air holds a solemn stillness” (where “all the air” is the subject) or “a solemn stillness holds all the air” (where “a solemn stillness” is the subject).

Understandably, ambiguity is not desirable in official documents, especially legal writing which calls for absolute accuracy. The possibility of varying interpretations might result in endless discussion. In general, there are three kinds of ambiguity, namely lexical, referential and syntactic ambiguity.

Lexical ambiguity arises when it is difficult to determine the meaning of a particular word within a context. For example, from the sentence “Ryan is young” alone, it is hard to tell whether Ryan is “inexperienced” or simply “young of age”, since both interpretations make good sense. To find out the exact meaning, we need to examine the text for further clues.

Sometimes the use of pronouns gives rise to referential ambiguity. Take the sentence “Rita and Phoebe collided and then she started bleeding”. We have no idea whether it is Rita or Phoebe that got hurt, because the pronoun “she” may refer to either. To remove referential ambiguity, simply avoid using a pronoun when the person or object that it replaces in a sentence is not specific enough.

Syntactic ambiguity is related to the word order of a sentence. For example, “We will discuss violence on TV” could mean two different things. Either the discussion on violence will be conducted on a television programme or “violence on TV” is the topic of discussion. To avoid misunderstanding, we need to reconstruct the sentence. Here is another example of syntactic ambiguity arising from word order: “Michael saw Susan driving down the street”. Who was it driving down the street? It is better to rewrite as “Michael, while driving down the street, saw Susan” unless the intended meaning is “Michael saw Susan, who was driving down the street”.

Unintentional ambiguity is a common linguistic pitfall. Fortunately, it is absolutely avoidable if we give more thought to the way of expression and sentence structure.

Dreams are illustrations... from the book your soul is writing about you.

Marsha Norman