ABSTRACT

This paper is about a famous narrative which was published in 1898: *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James. The story has been interpreted in many different ways. This is partly due to literary critics importing assumptions from different theoretical approaches. But, in addition, the text itself is notoriously ambiguous (and there is some evidence that the author deliberately constructed a confusing text in order to play a joke on the critics). After a hundred years of literary critical commentary, it is unlikely that I will be able to provide any startlingly new interpretations: there are perhaps too many of those already. But I may be able to provide a succinct account of a long history of interpretation, and to show how general models of meaning can make more explicit some central themes and explain how the ambiguities arise.

If you have time to (re)read the story before the conference, this would help the discussion after my presentation and in the bar. It's very short (only 120 pages) and a good ghost story (or perhaps it isn't a ghost story).