



## Early, in the Evening a short story by Ian Watson

### Foreword

"Early, in the Evening" was published in the April 1996 issue of *Asimov's Science Fiction*. It's a story which occurred to me all of a sudden when a friend said to me, "So I'll see you early evening, then," and I thought to myself: but the evening *isn't* early, it's fairly late on in the day. Stories quite often occur to me this way, ordinary reality turning inside out and upside down, then I let the story tell itself, taking off into whatever far region it chooses, in this case the whole history of the world and human evolution reversed within less than 3000 words, but with a sense of place and characters (I hope). In *Consciousness Explained* (consciousness being a bit of an obsession of mine) Daniel Dennett suggests that we are all fictional characters, telling ourselves an ongoing narrative which constructs our life and establishes who we are. Our existence depends on the persistence of narrative. Consciousness is the product, not the source, of stories. Furthermore, words fight it out within us for a chance of expression. We do not so much choose our words; within contextual constraints the words choose themselves. So, far from being something non-essential -- mere entertainment -- the creation and consumption of stories is rooted deep in our very existence and consciousness. In "Early, in the Evening" that consciousness is progressively lost as our story un-tells itself.

This is all rationalisation after the event. The story came first, and told itself to me as the characters and ideas deployed themselves, each giving rise to the other. And maybe the story has a different meaning. Maybe it muses about death.

Nor did I quite intend, when I started writing these words, that this would be what I would say about the story.

## Early, in the Evening

Even early in the morning St Thomas's Church consisted of a nave and chancel. However, Father Hopkins waited until almost noon before delivering his Snowdrop Sermon. By then the church had undergone numerous extensions and renovations. A south aisle had been added, followed by a north aisle. The chancel had been rebuilt. Then a tower had arisen -- otherwise how could Hopkins have rung a bell to summon his flock? North doorway and chancel arch were remodelled. A south porch was added. Windows became larger as the sun rose higher. Buttresses strengthened the walls.

A substantial setting for his sermon!

From the pulpit Hopkins proclaimed to his congregation: "Snowdrops push up spears through iron soil. They enter a world which is, as yet, so scantily populated. There's so much free space wherein to be the first to flower, thus the first to die.

"What does the snowdrop know of the riot of Summer?" he preached. "What does it know of the subsequent heat? Would that hot riot of the mid-months be a snowdrop's idea of hell? Or does the snowdrop

Let us know what you think of **infinity plus** - e-mail us at:  
[sf@infinityplus.co.uk](mailto:sf@infinityplus.co.uk)

**support this site - buy books through these links:**  
[A+ Books: an insider's view of sf, fantasy and horror  
amazon.com \(US\)](#) | [Internet Bookshop \(UK\)](#)

[top of page](#)  
[ [home page](#) | [fiction](#) | [non-fiction](#) | [other stuff](#) | [A to Z](#) ]  
[ [infinity plus bookshop](#) | [search infinity plus](#) ]