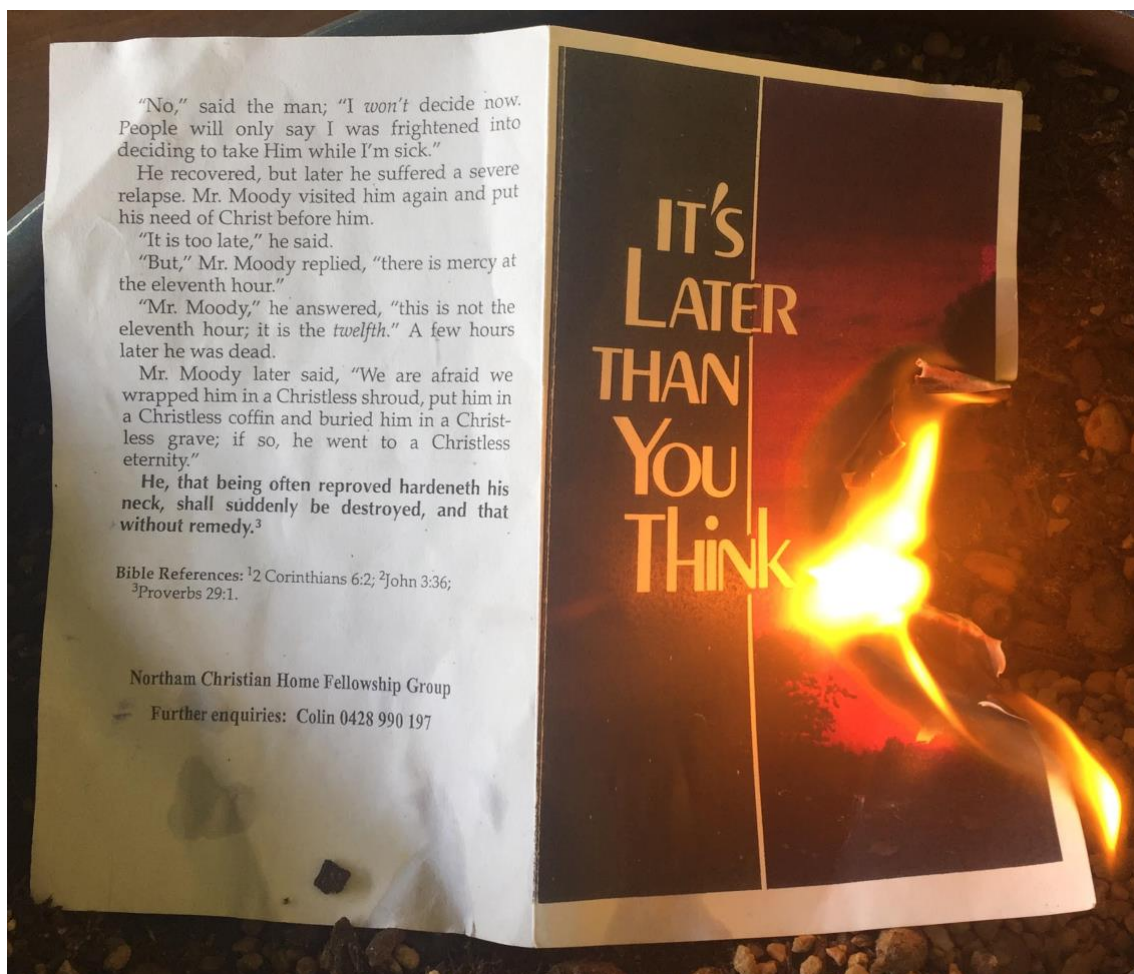


It's Later Than You Think – Guy Salvidge



"No," said the man; "I *won't* decide now. People will only say I was frightened into deciding to take Him while I'm sick."

He recovered, but later he suffered a severe relapse. Mr. Moody visited him again and put his need of Christ before him.

"It is too late," he said.

"But," Mr. Moody replied, "there is mercy at the eleventh hour."

"Mr. Moody," he answered, "this is not the eleventh hour; it is the *twelfth*." A few hours later he was dead.

Mr. Moody later said, "We are afraid we wrapped him in a Christless shroud, put him in a Christless coffin and buried him in a Christless grave; if so, he went to a Christless eternity."

He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.³

Bible References: ¹2 Corinthians 6:2; ²John 3:36;
³Proverbs 29:1.

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The mild Western Australian winters have always appealed to me more than the harsh summers and I've often done my best writing at this time of year. As a high school English teacher, I know when my windows of writing opportunity open—for two weeks in April, two weeks in July, two weeks in September/October and six weeks in December/January. Twelve weeks a year when I can write instead of going to work. At least that's the theory.

The winter holidays have often been my most fertile period of the year. In July 2013, I wrote 'A Void', which was later shortlisted for the Carmel Bird Award and published in

The Great Unknown. In July 2014 I wrote ‘Enter Sandman, Exit Light’, which found a home in *Tincture Journal*. In 2015 it was ‘Epoch O’Lips’. 2016 was a rare winter strike out, but in 2017 I produced ‘The Centre Cannot Hold’, which won the Joe O’Sullivan Writer’s Prize and was published in *Award Winning Australian Writing*. 2018 was another bust, but I had the excuse that my wife had just given birth to my third child and thus I was otherwise occupied. Between July 2018 and July 2019, I wrote precisely one story. Not surprisingly, I called it ‘Mr Agoon’.

In writing short stories, I’ve often found it helpful to rely on some kind of visual or musical stimulus. Some competitions, such as the City of Rockingham Short Fiction Award, require authors to respond to a painting in written form. In 2015, the painting was of a lighthouse in Fremantle entitled ‘(Light) House of the Rising Sun’. In preparation, I listened to the famous song by The Animals before starting work each day to get into the mood. For once the planets aligned for me and ‘Frank’ became my most successful story, not only winning the City of Rockingham Short Fiction Award but also finding homes in *Award Winning Australian Writing* and *Westerly: New Creative*.

This probably helps to explain why I carried around a leaflet from the Jehovah’s Witnesses, pictured (on fire!) above, for more than six months even though I am and remain the staunchest of atheists. It was the title, ‘It’s Later Than You Think’, which inspired me. At nearly thirty-eight years of age, I’m conscious of the fact that my time in this vale of tears is limited and no one knows just how limited it might be. Turns out there’s an old song by Guy Lombardo, ‘Enjoy Yourself (It’s Later Than You Think)’, that the Jehovahs had (presumably unwittingly) referenced in their leaflet. I’m sure you can

picture me huddled over the computer screen, religious material in hand, listening to a song from 1949 that exhorts listeners to seize the day by asking, ‘how far can you travel when you’re six feet underground?’

In a celebratory mood upon finishing the draft of the story, I finally got to do something I’d been itching to do for months—burn the leaflet. It’s not that I have anything against the Jehovah’s Witnesses, but the symbolism of a cleansing flame appeals to me deeply as a sort of writerly ‘scorched earth’ policy. So, phone in hand to capture the requisite picture, I burned it. And now, the more I look at the photograph, the more I can see a hummingbird or maybe even a penguin jumping out of the flames at me. What does it all mean? Who knows, but if I’m lucky I might get another story out of it.

Maybe next winter