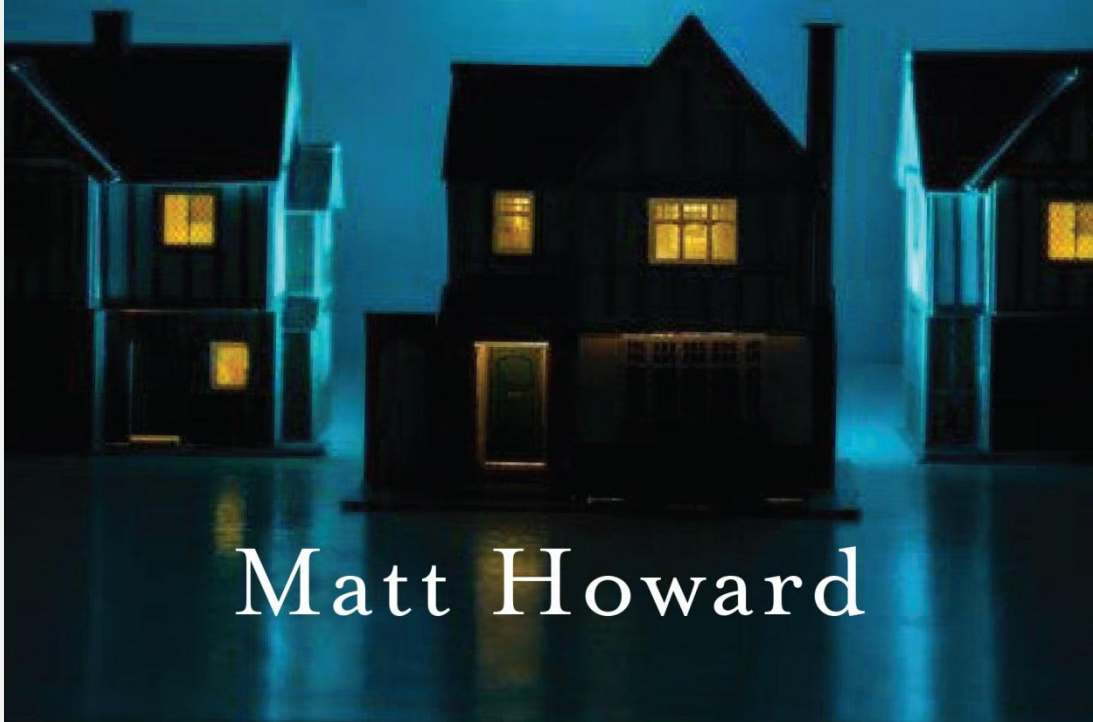


The Time
is Now,
Monica
Sparrow



READING GROUP NOTES

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About the book

Cast adrift by loss, Monica Sparrow is marooned in her semi in Neasden, the so-called 'loneliest village in London', her home stuffed with nothing she needs. Is it time for her to finally get her house in order? Can she isolate what really matters, and clear the junk? And while it's too late for her family to be as they were, can Monica fashion an entirely new one, from the unlikeliest set of contenders?

Monica's sister, Diane, already a right piece of work and looking to take it up a notch, seems lost to Monica forever. But a few unexpected diversions see her careering in a most unanticipated direction.

Xavier, a master of minimalism, discards people as easily as any other clutter. An editor at a prestigious publishing house, he's lumbered with Monica – a wannabe writer spectacularly different from any he's previously encountered.

Having lived virtually family-free into adulthood, Jamie suddenly acquires Monica and Diane as elder sisters, and a job, a proper one. Used to living on the margins and unfamiliar with group dynamics, this proverbial black sheep might just become the most improbable anchor.

Four isolated people. Thrown together by family and circumstance. A humorous and heartwarming story of second chances and new beginnings.

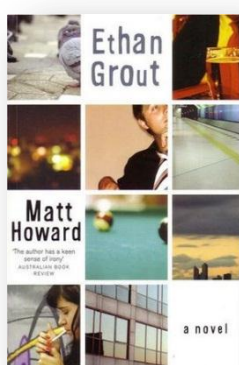
About the author

Matt Howard has lived in Sydney, London, Melbourne, and Reykjavik. He has written four novels, each set in a different city. *The Time is Now*, *Monica Sparrow* is the London one. His earlier novels are *Street Furniture* (Wakefield Press), *Taking Off* (Allen & Unwin) and *Ethan Grout* (Pier 9). He currently works as a book publicist for Harper Collins Australia.

Previous works



This entertaining and humorous coming-of-age story features a young man who languishes unemployed with his mates in the suburbs of Sydney until, at age 29, he finds himself suddenly employed in the city as a publicist for a large publishing firm. Young professionals and publishing insiders will delight in the narrative's wry and comedic tone as he delves into the social issues affecting life in the suburbs, life in the publishing fast lane, and the responsibilities of lifelong friendships.



Ethan Grout realises it's his 27th birthday when he receives a card from the fitness centre he recently quit along with the only job he had ever held. Having moved into a tiny room above a busy city bar, the buzz and lights of downstairs and the street soothing him to sleep, Ethan takes a new job, and another, and even another - collecting a life as he goes. Ethan Grout journeys through life, challenging himself to create his own gang of misfits when being alone just won't do any more. This bittersweet novel will strike familiar chords with anyone who has suffered through jobs that resemble glee clubs, cults or blind dates, and who have tried to fit in even when it all just seems too hard.



Ash Lynch has worked in the magazine industry for what feels like forever. But he's at loose ends—his ambition to climb the greasy pole of career success has long since expired and his personal life is at a standstill. Ash finds some sort of solace hanging out with Miller, an ex-roadie taking a break from his trip around Australia to work at the local bar. A weird turn of events finds them taking off overseas, and the first stop is Amsterdam—a destination not entirely surprising. Their often hilarious journey across Europe has more than a dash of sex, drugs, and rock and roll, taking them to new places in every sense of the phrase. But beyond the sex and drugs, the gorgeous Greek girl Ash meets in Amsterdam could be the one for him—maybe he is brave enough to visit her and find out, or his sojourn might dead-end back home with yet another potential relationship biting the dust.

Praise for Matt Howard's writing

'A master of the sparse, subtle drama of ordinary lives.' *Sunday Tasmanian*

'He builds characters of real substance, breathing life with rare skill into everyday people.'
The West Australian

'Modern, wry and thought-provoking. In a word: bittersweet' *Gold Coast Bulletin*

For discussion

- Consider the title of the book – *The Time is Now, Monica Sparrow*. What did you interpret it to mean? The time is now for what, exactly?
- Each chapter of this book is titled. What effect did this have to your understanding/enjoyment of the book?
- Consider the different ways people cope with grief. Discuss this in relation to Monica, Diane, their mother and their father.
- Where does the English expression 'Gordon Bennett!' [p31] come from, and what does it mean?
- Sparrows – both as Monica's surname and as actual birds – feature throughout the book. Consider when and how they are used. What symbolic meaning has Howard given them in this story?
- Consider some of the word choices Howard has made [eg; equivocating, conceded, prevarication, acquiesced, discombobulate, extrapolated]. Why do you think he frequently chose complex words for this novel rather than their simpler synonyms? What effect does this have on the story?
- Though Monica's and Diane's mother says and does little throughout the book, Howard has nevertheless made her an important character in this story. What techniques has he used to achieve this?
- Compare and contrast Xavier and Monica – are they really opposites of each other, or are they more similar? Discuss.
- Consider Monica's need to hoard. Why do you think she needs to do this? Is it the item itself that is important, what it represents, or both?
- What do you think are the real reasons behind Xavier's 'ascetic groove' [p125]? Is his severe self-discipline really because he does not need anything, or do you think there are deeper explanations?
- Discuss Monica's and Diane's relationship. Is it simply based on sibling rivalry?
- Consider Diane's behaviour towards the people in her life. What does this tell you about her personality? Do you think she really does believe herself better than others, or is a coping mechanism? If so, for what?
- Discuss the symbolic meanings of Monica's online trading books and Xavier's spice rack. How do they relate to each other?

For discussion [continued]

- Both Diane and Monica call Jamie 'Loose Change', but each means it differently. Discuss.
- When Monica changed the nature and disposition of one of her characters, she was – on a superficial level – 'creating a guy she'd once never countenanced' [p114]. But what was she really doing, on a subconscious level?
- 'Oddly, Xavier recognised something familiar – maybe he was just too close to the story now' [p114]. What does Xavier recognise?
- Discuss how the ways Jamie sees the things he then represents in his paintings [eg: shirts at the dry cleaners, the sun after closing his eyes etc] are a reflection of who he is as a person.
- Consider Jamie's attitude to the world and the people in it. Why do you think he is like that? Did you feel he changed as the novel progressed, or was it the world that changed to accommodate him? Discuss.
- Compare and contrast Diane to Tobias – how similar are they?
- How does Monica's latest developing manuscript relate to her relationship with Xavier?
- How is Jamie calling Xavier 'too wordy' [p128] a dichotomy?
- Consider the dog buying chapter [pp141-144]. In what ways is it a reflection of Jamie's and Xavier's lives?
- Did you notice Howard's foreshadowing of Jacob's infidelity early in the book? Whom did you assume it was with? Were you surprised to find out it was Cinnamon? Did you suspect Yasmin or Annette instead?
- Did you foresee the twist about Jamie being Monica and Diane's half-brother? Once you'd found this out, were there things earlier in the novel that you now realised pointed to this? Discuss.
- Is this novel a hopeful one? Did you feel at the end that this family will continue to support one another, no matter what may happen?

Suggested reading

Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine – Gail Honeyman [HarperCollins, 2018]

The Girl On The Page – John Purcell [4th Estate, 2018]

The Little Paris Bookshop – Nina George [Simon Pare trans.], [Hachette Australia, 2015]

The Rosie Project – Graeme Simsion [Text Publishing, 2013]

This Is Your Life, Harriet Chance! – Jonathan Evison [Algonquin Books, 2015]

A Man Called Ove – Fredrik Backman, Henning Koch [Trans.], [Atria Books, 2014]

The Lido – Libby Page [Orion Publishing, 2018]

The Time is Now, Monica Swallow

Matt Howard

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