The Policy Pitch - Prime Minister's Summer Reading List 2018

4 December 2018

Grattan Institute launched our annual Summer Reading List for the Prime Minister, in Melbourne at the State Library Victoria on Tuesday 4 December**.**

Every year Grattan Institute releases a summer reading list for the Prime Minister. It recommends books and articles that the Prime Minister, or any Australian interested in public debate, will find both stimulating and cracking good reads. Melbourne-based journalist Madeleine Morris joined Grattan Institute CEO John Daley in Melbourne to discuss how this year's titles illuminate some of Australia's most important debates.

Speakers: Madeleine Morris, Journalist
John Daley, CEO, Grattan Institute

SARAH SLADE: Good evening and welcome to State Library Victoria. My name is Sarah Slade and I'm the Director of the Project Management Officer here at the State Library. Before we commence, I'd like to acknowledge that this evening's event is being held on the homelands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation and I wish to acknowledge them as the traditional owners and to pay my respects to their elders past and present, along with the elders of other communities who may be here today.

It's my great pleasure to welcome you to the *Policy Pitch* presented by Grattan Institute and State Library Victoria. I'd particularly like to welcome the speakers this evening, John Daley and Madeleine Morris, Grattan Institute members and Friends of the Library, as well as all of you. We're delighted to partner with Grattan Institute to present this series, which we've worked on together since 2014. The Library and the Grattan Institute have much in common. The Library's aim to provide the public with access to knowledge and Grattan Institute's focus on practical solutions to Australia's most pressing problems both support the development of a civil and prosperous community. Always topical, in the series this year we've covered issues from Melbourne's population growth and innovation policy to traffic congestion. Whatever the topic, we've seen engaged audiences all year long and I'm sure that will be the case tonight. We look forward to seeing many of you next year as we continue to present intriguing and challenging discussions. We also hope to see you at the many other events and programs we offer here at the Library and to find out more, as always, please keep an eye on our What's On website pages as there is always much to do.

Now to our discussion this evening. Grattan Institute, in partnership with Readings Bookstore, is launching this year's annual *Summer Reading List for the Prime Minister*. The list includes books and articles that play a critical intervention into Australia's public debates and is a must-read not only for the Prime Minister, but for all Australians. It comprises a great section of reading material for the holidays and I look forward, as I'm sure you do, to hearing more about it soon. With that in mind, I'm very pleased to introduce our speakers this evening. Madeleine Morris is a Melbourne-based senior journalist for 7:30 and a regular fill-in host of ABC News Breakfast. For over a decade she was based in London as a reporter and presenter for the BBC where she reported from more than 20 countries, including working

as Washington Correspondent. She's the author of parenting guide *Guilt-free bottle feeding: why your formula-fed baby can be happy, healthy and smart,* which is great - my baby was bottle-fed, so I like it.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Thank you. Happy, healthy and smart I imagine?

SARAH SLADE: He is, yes. I'm biased, but I would say so. John Daley has been CEO of the Grattan Institute since it was founded eight years ago. He has published extensively on economic reform priorities, budget policy, tax reform, housing affordability and generational inequality. He's worked at the University of Oxford, the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet, consulting firm McKinsey & Co, and ANZ Bank in fields including law, public policy, strategy and finance. I'm now going to pass over to Madeleine, so please join me in welcoming our speakers tonight.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Thank you very much everyone. Thank you very much for that lovely introduction and that's a note to self, never have my CV next to John Daley's ever again! I will not be making that mistake if we ever do that again. It's delightful to have you all here this evening and thank you very much for giving up what is a burgeoning summer's evening, thank goodness. It is great to have so many books already laid out for you isn't it, so I hope that you've all grabbed the guide at the entrance. This is a fantastic list of books which I have ploughed my way through - and I say "plough" because there are some fairly heavy tomes in there, but they are all must-read books and have a been a joy to actually get through. First of all, I should say thank you to you, John, for having me along because otherwise I would not have broken out of the Liane Moriarty funk which I'm currently in at the moment I'm not ashamed to admit. No Liane Moriarty on the list, John?

JOHN DALEY: No, I'm afraid not, although it's not a bad idea.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Yes, I think that we could. You've been doing this for a couple of years now.

JOHN DALEY: This is number ten.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Number ten!

JOHN DALEY: Yes. You're very special; you're here for the tenth anniversary of the *Prime Minister's Summer Reading List*.

MADELEINE MORRIS: It started off – what, so that would have been 17 Prime Ministers ago?

JOHN DALEY: Something like that, yes.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Yes. Have you had any feedback from the previous Prime Minsters about how many they read?

JOHN DALEY: We have had feedback from them. We do in fact physically send the books to the Prime Minister. Usually they, or I suspect more accurately their office, writes back a sort of polite "thank you very much". It's become more traditional for Prime Ministers to reveal their reading matter over their holidays and a number of them have nominated at least one of the books that was on our list, but whether that was correlation or causation is always hard to know.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Let's not kid ourselves. Frankly, it would be a bloody miracle if they read all of these books over the holidays because there are some serious books in there.

JOHN DALEY: There are some serious books, but if you had a week off I reckon you could make it through the lot.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Not sure how many hours in the day you have, John.

JOHN DALEY: Well, it depends how you measure a holiday. There are, of course, people who measure holidays in feet, i.e. the feet of books that they get through.

MADELEINE MORRIS: I'm sure that you're one of these people. What's great about the group of books that you have is that they're very diverse, there are some great Australian authors in there and some really interesting authors from overseas as well. Do you want to start by kicking off with the first book?

JOHN DALEY: Maybe I'll just talk about how we pick them first.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Oh yes, of course. Please do.

JOHN DALEY: The process appears to have got more and more elaborate over the years as the Grattan Institute staff try to find more and more elaborate ways to create a process which doesn't ultimately end in "John likes this one, not that one". This year it's got to the point that there is now a thing called the Malvina Place Review of Books, a regular newsletter that goes out to talk about all of the books that might be on the newsletter - Malvina Place is the location of Grattan Institute, it's just a tiny little street that runs off Grattan Street - and that advertises all of the books that we might put on it. Vast numbers of Grattan Institute staff volunteer to read them, usually they get gonged out very quickly because we're looking for things which are all of: say something to power; are really, really well-written - if it's badly written it doesn't matter how worthy it is, it goes; and then, of course, we're looking for a list which, as you say, has a variety of different things. So we try and pick them and then we put them together.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Do you have book club where you have wine and cheese and you talk about them?

JOHN DALEY: We do have book club and we have wine and cheese and ham and lots of other things, and it usually goes for quite a long time.

MADELEINE MORRIS: I can only imagine. And you have read all of these books?

JOHN DALEY: Of course I have. Have you read all of these books?

MADELEINE MORRIS: I have read all of the books, most of them. No, I've read all of the books, but not all of all of the books, if you know what I mean. There was the slight matter of the state election and then I've been very deep in gangland for the last two days, so it's been a complete delight to come here to talk to you. How many of these were your choice, before we kick in?

JOHN DALEY: Well, ultimately all of them are my choice.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Right. I might ask the Grattan Institute staff about it actually, seeing as this -

JOHN DALEY: That's a really good introduction to the first one.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Yes.

JOHN DALEY: As we will talk about this evening, pretty much all of these books fall into genres. It's actually quite interesting how many of the books this year are almost representative of any number of other books published on the same topic. So this year there is a genre which is called "the world isn't as bad as you think it is". We went through all of the books that fall into that genre and there was actually a really good one which I thought was particularly fantastic called *Enlightenment Now* by Steven Pinker, only I was told by someone at Grattan that it was a book that only appealed to people who thought that they were the smartest person in the room. Given that, it was impossible to put it on the list and so it didn't make the cut, although it's another take on this question about is the world as bad as we think it is. We picked *Factfulness* instead which is written by Hans Rosling. I guess by profession he's effectively a Third World medicine expert, would be how he would probably not describe himself.

MADELEINE MORRIS: No, he wouldn't describe himself that way. He certainly wouldn't use the term Third World.

JOHN DALEY: No, he certainly wouldn't use that term. It's trying to both talk about how the world is better than most people think it is and also a little bit about why it's better. He starts with a pop quiz which he has apparently administered literally thousands of times to any number of audiences to see how well they do, so we'll just randomly pick one of these and, I should add, none of the Grattan staff are allowed to vote, including the interns. How many people in the world have some access to electricity? You have three possible options: 20%, 50% or 80%. So hands up how many people think that 20% of the world has some access to electricity? How many people think that 50% have some access to electricity? How many 80%? Well this is an unusual audience, they got that one right.

MADELEINE MORRIS: It is. They did, because the answer is 80% and I think most of you or more of you said 80%.

JOHN DALEY: Yes. I think that's an unusual audience.

MADELEINE MORRIS: It is.

JOHN DALEY: Most audiences get this very badly wrong and I'm suspecting there are a few more people who have been cheating and reading the blurbs. So he starts off by talking about that, but then I think one of the other things that's useful about this book is the way that he brings us back to a really basic understanding of what it means to be rich and what it means to be poor. What it means to be poor, really poor, is that you have to walk for several hours each day to get water and the reality is there's a substantial portion of the world's population that has to do that.

MADELEINE MORRIS: But what he also does in this book is actually try to downplay the substantial number. His main message is, "Look, there's still a substantial number, but actually there's a lot fewer than there used to be".

JOHN DALEY: Yes.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Which may be true, but it still doesn't mean that it's not really bad for that very large, substantial number, I think it's a billion people or so, who still live below that extreme poverty.

JOHN DALEY: Yes.

MADELEINE MORRIS: He argues as well that we should not divide the world up into First World/Third World, developed/developing, but rather that we should have four categories of wealth doesn't he?

JOHN DALEY: Yes, that's right. The second group are people who don't spend more than half an hour each day going to fetch water; they're people who do have a gas stove; they probably do have a pretty basic mattress; and if they had an illness they'd probably have to sell everything, but they would be able to do that and would probably survive. His point is that sounds pretty bad, but it's a lot better than level one, the first one I described, where you walk several hours to get water and if you get sick basically it's all over. His point is that an enormous number of people have gone from the first level to the second level really in just the last couple of decades. Then if you look at level three, which is where you probably have a tap; you can probably save up to get a motorcycle; and if you get ill then you'll almost certainly have money to buy medicine, which may well mean that you don't have as much money to educate your kids, but you're not going to die. Again, a huge number of people have moved from level two to level three. We think about level three, crikey, so you're saying you're really, really lucky if you have a motorbike and it's kind of yes, but remember that's a lot better than level two.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Here's my problem with this book. I enjoyed the book, but when I was at the BBC I was the developing world correspondent, so I spent a lot of time in developing countries reporting on basically how shit life is. For a lot of people living in developing countries life really is pretty shit still. His point is yes, but it's getting better and my point is that doesn't mean that it's any good. He makes the argument that because we're improving we should be happy about that, we should be positive about that, but you make the point about someone who has to sell everything and they'll probably survive. Case in point, I had an email from a friend of mine in Zambia whose husband died last year. She's a trained social worker and has always had a job. She has three daughters who she'd love to start school and she said, "Since my husband died, I've had to move back in with my parents and I've lost my job. Is there any way that you can help me?" This is, for me, a very strong case in point about why we shouldn't be too happy about this book.

JOHN DALEY: And I think he's quite explicit, we shouldn't be happy, we should not be content, but his point to you would be, I think, that the standard of living that you see in Zambia today is the same as the standard of living both in terms of income and life expectancy that Sweden, his country and obviously a highly developed country today, had in 1920. I mean, there are still lots of people alive in Sweden today who were born in 1920 and their lives have gone from Zambia to Sweden within a single lifetime.

MADELEINE MORRIS: And that is a very valuable point to make when you're feeling gloomy about it, but it's interesting, I told my Norwegian brother-in-law that I was reading this book and he said, "Oh, so here's this educated man who's going to shower lots of facts on you and he's going to make you feel as though, because he's showered lots of facts on you, you should feel better because he's so manly

and factual". This could be a little bit of Norwegian/Swedish rivalry, let's not discount that because that is quite strong. But it was interesting, as I was reading this, I think possibly because I have had personal experience of a lot of developing countries, it didn't make me feel that good. Having said that, I think it would be a useful book for the Prime Minister to read because he probably hasn't had that experience and I think that learning about the reality and the daily life of people who, to quote another Minister, are going to be under water soon would probably be a good thing to do.

JOHN DALEY: I think that's right, but I think it's important for another reason. It's important because it slightly begs the question about if lives have got that much better, how did that happen and why don't we talk about it? His point is it doesn't make news because almost all the things that mean that you go from being Zambia today to Sweden today within a single lifetime are boring things.

MADELEINE MORRIS: That's true. He gives journos a really big serve, which is fair enough actually.

JOHN DALEY: Yes, now we know why.

MADELEINE MORRIS: It is fair enough but, interestingly, just before we move on, he talks about the series of instincts that we have. He talks about the gap instinct, the negativity instinct, our propensity to be negative, the fear instinct, our propensity to feel fear, and our propensity to blame other people, the blame instinct. What he's trying to do is basically fact-based psychology to get us to recognise that. It's kind of like CBT (cognitive behaviour therapy) for global development to think about how we recognise our failings and our foibles so then we can actively work against them, which I think is a valuable thing to do. Going back to the journo thing, at the end I was happy to hear that his message is it's not up to journos not to tell the bad news, it's up to the media consumers to wise up.

JOHN DALEY: Yes.

MADELEINE MORRIS: So it's not my fault.

JOHN DALEY: There are two other things that I think you can take away from this book. One is that business of getting the facts actually makes a real difference and to understand which facts do you need to worry about and which facts not. He gives a lovely example about the Ebola virus. As a public health official, he saw some of the early data coming in on Ebola and he knew they had a problem because you were seeing essentially the number of deaths from Ebola going up in geometric series and, as anyone knows whose done any work in epidemiology, you see that pattern and you hit the very big panic button. So he and many others jumped on it because they saw that particular pattern and they knew what it meant. Then, as he was working on it, it became apparent to him that although the number of suspected cases was still going up in that sort of geometric way, the number of actual deaths wasn't, it had gone flat and then started to decline. Of course, what that means, for somebody who really cares about the data, is we have moved into a new phase of this disease in which we are probably starting to get on top of it and therefore we need to reallocate resources. So his point is that the business of getting the data is one of the reasons why you go from one to another. The other thing that I think you can really take away from this book is the way that he does have all of these stories about his life in it.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Which is beautiful, yes.

JOHN DALEY: My favourite of these is he's in deepest wherever it is and he gets told, "Here is the pièce de résistance of the dinner" and it's larvae grubs. As he says, he's eaten pretty much everything in Africa and he was just looking at it and thinking, "I can't do this. What am I going to do?" Then he's hit by inspiration and he says, "Can you just bring me a map?" and, to your point about Scandinavian issues, he said, "See this map? We come from Sweden. See over the water there? That's Denmark. In Denmark they do eat larvae, but in Sweden it's culturally really bad to eat larvae so I'm sorry, I can't".

MADELEINE MORRIS: Which was brilliant. His companion was from Denmark and was scoffing the larvae. How's that as a brilliant way to get out of not liking something? So just remember that for next time. I think he used the words, "My tribe, we just don't eat that" and they all understood that, which was a really beautiful thing I thought.

JOHN DALEY: But don't tell your children.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Yes, don't use that one. So this was the book that was supposed to make us happy.

JOHN DALEY: Yes.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Now you've got the book that's going to make us very sad.

JOHN DALEY: Yes. The next genre for this year, and I might add it's unfortunately a rather larger list than the former genre that we've just talked about, is books about why the world, and particularly democracy, is going to hell in a handbasket. I actually spent last Friday at the 30th anniversary for the Centre for Comparative Constitutional Studies and all of the countries' senior constitutional lawyers were talking about how the world is going to hell in a handbasket and, in particular, democracy, and that's what this book is about. It's *The People Vs. Democracy* by Yascha Mounk, who's a political theorist and scientist from the United States. Like all of these books, he starts with the observation that the world seems to be a less happy place than it has been, at least in terms of the way that our democracies are working. I think one of the key reasons why there are a lot more political scientists and theorists working on this than there were, say, ten years ago is that ten years ago there was, as he points out, a kind of consensus in the political science literature that if a country made it to an income of about $16,000 per capita and was a functioning democracy, it would always remain a functioning democracy.

The reason why that was a rule of thumb was that in the last 2,000 years of history there's never been a counterexample. You should always be careful about arguing from induction and the last eight years have proven that, so we've had countries like Hungary, like Poland, like Turkey, places that appeared to have a pretty functioning, robust democracy that has essentially ceased to be so. So the starting question for the book is why is that and then, of course, the more interesting question in many ways for policy wonks is what should we do about it?

MADELEINE MORRIS: As you say, he talks a lot about liberalism and democracy which he describes as the two core tenets of our system and we had always assumed up until this point that the two went naturally together, but he is talking about how, due to a number of forces, the two are splitting so we're getting illiberal democracy and - what's the opposite of that, Liberal?

JOHN DALEY: Non-democracy.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Liberal non-democracy. So he's talking about liberal non-democracies and in that he talks about the rise of the power of lobbyists, he talks about the rise of the bureaucracy. Because he's German, he gives a really non-Anglo-centric view of the world, which is really great actually isn't it?

JOHN DALEY: Yes.

MADELEINE MORRIS: He gives lots of European examples, which makes a nice change, even though he's a Harvard political scientist. So he talks about the growth of - I'm going to get myself confused now - undemocratic liberalism and also illiberal democracy which in his example is the United States. It's amazing reading these examples of how that's happening because it's happening in real time.

JOHN DALEY: Yes.

MADELEINE MORRIS: He talks, first of all, about how autocrats get to power, the first thing that they do while they're getting into power is disparage their opponents and then lie about them, then they get into power and they start disparaging the pillars, the institutions, the judiciary - case in point, President Trump tweeting about the Supreme Court - and the media.

JOHN DALEY: And Brexit if you think about the way The Telegraph talked about judges who issued a ruling and they said, essentially, they should go.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Yes, absolutely. He gives that example as well and we had the whole Jim Acosta thing with CNN and the attacks on CNN as well. What he does is points out beautifully the theory actually coming into practice in this particular time. He also uses the examples of Poland, Hungary and also Greece and how Greece got to the stage that it is now, which is great because it sort of expands. He doesn't talk about Australia, which I think was interesting and you wouldn't expect him to, but it feels like he lays out beautifully why those countries that we are talking about are bellwethers and warnings for us. A couple of fun facts from his book, and this I found absolutely extraordinary, in research that he has done that's been backed up by other research only 30% of 30 year old US citizens think that living in a democracy is important, 30%; and in the US, 1/6th of people favour military rule. Can you actually believe that? I mean, how is that even possible? He also gives an Australian statistic which I found quite useful, people born in the 1980s are half as likely to value democracy as people born in the 1930s and he lays out very well why those people who are closer to having lived experience of fascism and communism were obviously much more likely to value their democracy.

JOHN DALEY: The thing I loved about this, and you've sort of touched on it, is the way that he draws out the patterns. History may not repeat itself but it does rhyme and he shows you all of those rhymes, particularly the way that many democracies have acquired a whole series of liberal institutions that are things that ultimately curtail the power of the masses and that there's a common pattern for demagogues to come to power on a popular wave essentially promising to undo a lot of those institutions. One of the patterns that he identified that I guess I hadn't quite put together was he said if you want to come to power as a demagogue then by definition you have to say there's a whole pile of things out there that you don't like that can be fixed and can be fixed easily.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Easily, yes.

JOHN DALEY: But, of course, as soon as you're in power then you're going to have to deal with the fact that most of those things can't be fixed easily and you have to explain that. So what you do is you say, "Well, the reason I can't fix them is that there's all of these institutions in the way and if I can only get rid of them then my very simple common-sense solutions could be implemented". So almost the first thing that most demagogues do is to start attacking those institutions, blaming them for all of the woes of the people so that the people don't blame the person that they just elected, they start undermining all of those institution. As he points out, you can start with something that is a reaction to a liberal non-democracy and it may well start off as being a relatively illiberal democracy, but it usually becomes an illiberal autocracy very quickly and it remains an open question as to whether those illiberal autocracies will revert back to democratic type or not. The reason it's an open question is we've only had eight or ten years of history of this stuff and we're living through it. His point is we are living in a different time. He's got a lovely reference in this book to the concept of chronocentricity, the belief that you live in a special time. Of course, all those Boomers like to believe that they lived in a special time when they were young and maybe it was true, but the number of books being published on this subject literally in the last 12 months is an indication that maybe this time is a little bit different, at least for students of political theory, and we should really think about that. The other great thing about the book is he says, "This is what I reckon we should do about it..."

MADELEINE MORRIS: Yes, which all seem like quite common-sense solutions. Domesticating nationalism is one of them. He makes a beautiful case for why the Left has gone too far in its rejection of nationalism and it's very convincing the way that he talks about. He talks about how although nationalism and the nation state is actually a creation of the elite in his view, which is something I'd never really thought about before, naturally we congregate in small groups, in families, in tribes, in groups of 150 people, so the concept of a nation is a relatively new concept which is effectively for government so elites can control and organise people. So he talks about domesticating nationalism so that we can make it work for us. The other simple stuff though he talks about is fixing the economy and the stuff that he talks about is, very helpfully, all of the things that Grattan actually writes about, such as restructuring tax, solving the housing crisis and building better cities. I think it's a measure of how cynical - perhaps it's just me being a journalist, but I think probably as a group of people to a certain extent - we've become that all of the stuff that he lays out as solutions I just naturally thought, "Well that's never going to happen".

JOHN DALEY: Yes. I think one of the toughest ones is the way that so much has been tied up by lobby groups and it has become harder and harder in a lot of these so-called democracies for sensible policy change to happen if it's opposed by powerful vested interests, that it's precisely that perception and there's a bit of a reality to it that powerful vested interests are stopping sensible policy reform that is indeed one of the root causes. I think there's a tendency to say, "All this stuff about the democratic process and the way that money buys you influence and the way that donations are influencing the cause of politics, isn't that a fringe issue?" I think his point is no, it's not a fringe issue; it's actually a really, really important issue.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Certainly in the US I think so more than in Australia at this point in time. I mean, it's certainly much more obvious when you have $3 billion or $6 billion elections, or whatever it is, where

Citizens United means that a company is actually a person for the purposes of funding elections. I feel like that's more of an issue in the US.

JOHN DALEY: As the head of an institute that published a paper this year called *Who's in the room? Access and influence in Australian politics*, I think we can be a little complacent about that. I'm not suggesting for a moment that the United States doesn't have very substantial problems on that score, but they have better donation disclosures than we do, they certainly have much more timely disclosures than we do -

MADELEINE MORRIS: Yes, that's true.

JOHN DALEY: And they have much better regulation of lobbying than we do. Again, I'm not suggesting that these things are complete solutions, but they would certainly help and there are plenty of things that we could do a lot better. To go back to your point about Hans, we should never just say it's better than it was; we need to say we could do a lot better.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Before we move on, I just want to point out that his third solution for democracy was renewing civic faith and as part of that he suggests that we should all learn about the value of Western democracy, which has been quite the controversial issue in Australia, as we all know. But he makes a really good case for it actually and he says here, "David Brooks put the point in a recent column the history of Western civilisation should be taught in a confidently progressive manner. There are certain great figures, like Socrates, Erasmus and Rousseau, who helped fitfully propel the nations to higher reaches of the humanistic ideal". He makes a very convincing case for why in our rush to accept other cultures we should not forget our own and forget about the values of our own. We should not be too prescriptive about what our culture does and what other cultures do. Essentially, great democracies are built on a melting pot and we need to be open not only to other cultures, but also to other cultures absorbing our ideas as well. I thought he wrote about that in a really eloquent way and in a way which I hadn't seen written about before.

JOHN DALEY: I think that's right. One of the things that ties these two books together is that they're both trying to talk in some way about how do we deal with imperfection. Rousseau had all sorts of terrible things in his private life. One way of reacting to that is to say, "We should just forget about anything he said". Another way of reacting to that is to say, "Those things are bad, but there are nevertheless some good things we can take away from that and we wouldn't want to throw out the good things just because they happen historically to have been associated with a bunch of happenings". It's exactly the same point that Hans Rosling is making.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Yes, like *Baby its Cold Outside*. Are you aware of the issues around that song and how it's been banned on the radio? It's a living example of those sorts of things and I think this book is great at dealing with things which are issues that are cropping up on a daily basis and questions that we need to wrestle with on a daily basis. So, what's next?

JOHN DALEY: The next one is *Rusted Off* by Gabrielle Chan. What did you think of this?

MADELEINE MORRIS: I adored this book and every single person in this room needs to read this book. Who here has lived in a rural area? Okay. For you, this book will be a beautiful crystallisation of everything that you know about the country and everything that annoys you about the politicians' and

the cities' approach to the country. Gabrielle Chan was a political journalist, she writes for The Guardian currently, she was a press gallery journalist in New South Wales for a long time, and then she met and fell in love with a farmer and moved to a country town where she raised children. She's also half-Singaporean Chinese, so she has this interesting dynamic of being one of the very few non-white people in her new country town. She grew up in inner city and suburban Sydney and then moved to this farm, so she has a very unique, incredibly insightful view on the things that city Australia gets wrong about the country, and it's a lot.

JOHN DALEY: Yes. I'm afraid she's another one who's kind of got it in for journalists.

MADELEINE MORRIS: She does. Everyone has it in for journos.

JOHN DALEY: She opens with a lovely comment about journalists who are more frightened of spiders than stereotypes and she talks about the way that many city journalists stereotype the country. I think a lot of the book is about trying to unpack what is it that is in fact different about country Australia relative to city Australia? There are the lifestyle things, like the fact that apricots actually taste of apricot. There's an extended discussion about class, not a subject we talk about very much in Australia, and the way that in cities people actually don't interact that much with people from different social classes, so people with radically different levels of education and income probably don't know very many in a city, whereas in a regional town of, in her case, a couple of hundred people or even 5,000 people, which is by regional standards a reasonably large town, you will know a bunch of people who have quite a different income to yours and who've got a very different level of education, and that creates a quite different social dynamic.

MADELEINE MORRIS: You brought up class there. She not only has it in for journalists, she also has it in for the National Party a little bit and she talks about how the National Party has singularly failed, particularly in recent times, to represent the views of all of country Australia. It basically represents a certain tranche of wealthy typically landholders, but she points out that there are a lot of working poor in the country and they are absolutely not represented by the National Party. She also talks about how there are an increasing number of progressive ex-city type tree-changers who are moving to the country and they are not represented by the National Party. This is one of the reasons why she talks about the drift within some rural areas to One Nation in particular but also to more and more independents, for whom she has a lot of sympathy actually. You can see why.

JOHN DALEY: The Cathy McGowans of this world, you can see exactly what they're doing and exactly what they might be appealing to. I think one of the other things that she points out, and it's a really interesting distinction, is the way that identity in cities is very much tied up with levels of education and, to some extent, levels of wealth, whereas identity in regional areas is really tied to a sense of place; where do you come from, where do your parents come from, where did you grow up, where have you gone, where have you come back to and the stories that are embedded in the local paddock about who did what to whom 25 years ago. All of those things are by reference to place and, consequently, the politics is much more about place as well. The reality is finding economic reasons to see these country towns become economically a lot bigger than they are is quite difficult, but of course if you want to stay in those places and, in particular, if you want your children to stay in those places you need to see economic expansion and development and that's often not happening although, as she points out, we should be very careful about the pull of sad songs. The reality is that most medium-sized towns are not

doing too badly and Grattan work that we've done this year actually shows that income growth in most of these places is not looking too bad at all.

MADELEINE MORRIS: In the book she quotes John Daley of the Grattan Institute.

JOHN DALEY: And Danielle Wood of the Grattan Institute.

MADELEINE MORRIS: And Danielle Wood of the Grattan Institute as well, so a little bit of self-interest their. Your news wasn't great about country towns, but she is valiantly making the case for not only how governments can help country towns, but how country towns can help themselves which I think is a really valuable point.

JOHN DALEY: I think that's right. Also this point about the pull of sad songs and that we can either say, "Very sad song, this country town is not growing economically that fast and it has lower incomes and it has people with lower levels of education" or we can say, "This country town is still growing, people are still living there, some people are moving there. Although there are fewer people with tertiary education, there are plenty of people who've got vocational education and actually most of them are employed, they have incredibly high levels of social capital and, by and large, they're happier than people who live in the cities".

MADELEINE MORRIS: But also how immobile they are typically in their strata of society. I cried at the point where she talked about the daughter of the single mum who became a doctor and just how incredibly difficult it was for that girl to become a doctor. I think she does a beautiful job of personalising actually all of the big policy ideas through beautiful personal stories of people actually living in her little country town. It's a really, really great read.

JOHN DALEY: It is and, as you say, we haven't got time to talk about it, but she spends a lot of time worrying about the issue of how migrants are seen in regional areas. Particularly she has a lovely example about there are two local doctors and they're both Muslim and everyone says, "They're fantastic doctors and they're really great blokes, but Muslims in general? They're a real problem". That distinction of when there aren't enough of a particular group, then you wind up with a problem, although she has a lovely counterexample of I think it's Young that has a mosque, a very successful Islamic community and no-one who's in the slightest bit worried about Muslims, and this issue about how do we get to that critical mass so that enough people know people from different backgrounds that they are no longer afraid? I think that's a really important issue.

MADELEINE MORRIS: We're going to have to move on because we have just been chat, chat, chatting.

JOHN DALEY: Mary Beard, *Women and Power*. You should talk about this.

MADELEINE MORRIS: This was the first book on the reading list which I read, it feels like three years ago but it was actually three weeks ago now. This is a great read. It's a very digestible read by a brilliant writer and I'm sure that most of you are aware of Mary Beard's work. She is a classicist and the point of this, it's called a manifesto but it's not really a manifesto actually, it's pretty much just stories about how women have been structurally disempowered by speaking forever. She goes back to *The Odyssey* and she talks about how Penelope is actually forbidden from speaking by her own son. She gives all of these examples from the classics about how women never spoke and the actual language used around

someone who speaks in public only ever pertained to a man. I found this book really interesting because I read it at the time of the Four Corners report on the ABC. Who watched that? Okay. What were you doing?

JOHN DALEY: Not enough of you!

MADELEINE MORRIS: Not enough of you. But it was very interesting because Michelle Guthrie, who is our former Managing Director, spoke on that. Did you watch it John? No, okay. It's got to be said, Michelle Guthrie is not an impressive speaker and I was watching that with this book in mind thinking is it just because all of us have been taught that if you're going to speak in public you need to speak like a man and she doesn't speak like a man, so therefore I'm not listening to what she's saying and I'm judging her on what she actually says rather than the content of what she says; I'm imposing an external expectation of how she should say it, rather than what she's saying. So for me that really brought this book into a very contemporary context. She writes beautifully, it doesn't drag. You can knock it over in an evening really.

JOHN DALEY: Yes. It is an easy read, although it does make a series of really powerful points. I think what it's doing is pointing out a lot of our archetypes, which are often subconscious, have these assumptions embedded into them and because they're archetypes we adopt them as our assumptions.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Yes.

JOHN DALEY: She points out you can take all of the women who have power in the kind of classical canon, Clytemnestra, Medusa, Media, and basically any woman who actually wields real power winds up abusing it really quickly. That's the image that we have. She points out the only thing on which women are legitimately allowed to talk is either about "women's issues", things that are particular to women's sectional issues, or things where women have been victims, but they should not speak about "men's things", like budgets, energy, transport and other serious topics. I think that's a really important point to make. So you obviously read this in the shadow of that Four Corners report. I read it a little while ago and I came back to it literally a few days ago in the shadow of Julie Banks.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Oh, absolutely!

JOHN DALEY: Now that is a photograph that is going to be used for decades of her standing up, resigning from the party and all of these men leaving.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Not allowed to speak. If you read Mary Beard's book, which you should, that is all you'll be able to think about. When I came back to this to read a couple of pages again all I could think of was Scott Morrison, if you're going to read one of these books this is probably the one that you actually really, really need to read. We don't need to go into the Liberal Party's problem with women, which has become all too apparent, but this is a really great, sort of, bookend to the whole #MeToo movement I think. We've learnt a lot about the very modern incarnations of sexism and misogyny and she does a brilliant job of explaining how it has always been thus, and in showing us how it has always been thus maybe we can actually do something about it.

JOHN DALEY: That takes us to Behrouz Boochani's book *No Friend but the Mountains.* I'll be honest: this is not a very comfortable read. In a sense, it's an easy read, it's beautifully written, as are all the

books on the list. It's not like it takes you a long time to get from the top of the page to the bottom of the page and it's not like you ever sit there and think, "Where's my pen?", but it is a pretty harrowing read. It's the autobiography of Behrouz Boochani, who is still currently on Manus Island, who was in Iran, went to Indonesia, came on a boat that got turned back and then on another boat that didn't get turned back and wound up on Manus Island. It'd be fair to say, both of those boat trips were pretty harrowing and then, of course, it turns out that his life on Manus is even more harrowing. For me, this is a book that people are going to be reading in 50 years' time at the same time that they're reading *The Gulag Archipelago* for, unfortunately, the same reasons. It's pretty horrific that that is happening, as it were, on our watch. It has a beautiful, quite stunning introduction written by Richard Flanagan essentially making that case, that this is *The Gulag Archipelago* for our time and, worse, for our country. For that reason, I'm afraid we are all going to have to read it.

MADELEINE MORRIS: It is a devastating book. The description that he gives of his boat journey before it was intercepted and before he was taken to Manus Island is one of the most terrible things that I have ever read. Every single person should read it, including every single person who thinks that offshore detention is a good idea because it goes back to, I think, *Factfulness* in a way. Hans gives the big numbers of why things are getting better and this is the very personalised experience of someone who is from the developing world, which is what Hans Rosling talks about, and the reasons why it is still very difficult to live there in certain cases and the most searing reasons and examples of why he had to leave.

It also ties back I think to democracy because it gives a very good reason for why we should do our damnedest to hold on to liberal democracy. He comes from a theocracy and has come to what is a democracy, but he also talks about the substrata of people which, in our case, are the asylum seekers. For me, what is most extraordinary out of all of this is this is a book which has been written on WhatsApp and via text message and translated from Farsi. The extraordinary achievement of that and it's filled with the most beautiful poetry. He refers to characters from his Kurdish poetical history and there are certain characters in his book who he gives Kurdish names to. We learn about why they have these names and, in the process, we get to have a much deeper understanding of where he's coming from and not just where he is now, which is equally important for making him a human I think. So I know I said that Scott Morrison should read the Mary Beard book, but I think out of all of them and as a former Minister for Immigration, he should probably read this book.

JOHN DALEY: One of the points that it makes is by describing the conditions in Manus Island in enormous detail through the eyes of someone who is actually there day in, day out, there's obviously the fact that, with enormous respect to a former Prime Minister, it is not a very hospitable climate. It's just really hot a lot of the time. Then they're living in incredibly crowded conditions with very, very few of the things that Hans Rosling would describe as the things that mark a level four existence. But then, and this is the point that really I found incredibly disturbing, this is the part that's the indictment, there's a whole series of things that essentially just make people's lives on that island infinitely more miserable than they might be otherwise.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Just for the sake of it.

JOHN DALEY: They ban any form of game. So the prisoners are not allowed to play anything that is a game, they're not allowed to play cards, they're not allowed to play chess, they're not allowed to pick

up pebbles from the ground and play games with them. When you remember that play is actually an incredibly basic human emotion, not just activity but emotion, that's pretty horrific. We are going to take all of the people on Manus Island and we're going to forbid them from playing. He's a political scientist by trade and he talks about what he calls the kyriarchal system, essentially the power structures on Manus Island from the Rhinos, as he calls the Australian guards, the Papus, the Papua New Guinean guards who are a status lower than the Australian guards, and then, of course, there are the asylum seekers themselves who are very much on a lower status, and the way that those three levels of power interact with each other. This is not a book you are going to forget. There are lots of books, unfortunately, that we do forget and this is not going to be one of them.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Can I move onto our last book which is another book that you are absolutely not going to forget. This is *Flames* by Robbie Arnott, who we're very delighted is in the audience. He has flown up especially from Hobart today to be with us tonight. I think after all of the heavy reading, Scott Morrison deserves a bit of a break and what a joyous break this is. I'm going to just read to you the first paragraph if I can, it gets you from the beginning:

> *Our mother returned to us two days after we spread her ashes over Notley Fern Gorge. She was definitely our mother - but, at the same time, she was not our mother at all. Since her dispersal among the fronds of Notley she had changed. Now her skin was carpeted by spongy verdant moss and thin tendrils of common filmy fern. Six large fronds of tree fern had sprouted from her back and extended past her waist in a layered peacock tail of vegetation. And her hair had been replaced by cascading fronds of lawn-coloured maidenhair - perhaps the most delicate fern of all. This kind of thing wasn't uncommon in our family.*

So, as you can gather from that, it's a magic realism book which is also a ripping good yarn. I haven't finished this one either sadly, Robbie, I'm halfway through it, but so far we've come across the most incredible character, a young boy who is the son of this woman now growing maidenhair for hair who comes back. The women in his family come back for a couple of days after they die and he doesn't want that to happen to his sister, so he starts to build her a coffin. His sister's alive, but he starts to build her a coffin.

JOHN DALEY: Well, he tries to and the problem is the coffin maker, who's published the definitive work on coffin making in Tasmania, says that he doesn't want to help him because he's an ignoramus. So you get the correspondence between the two until the coffin maker admits that he has a long-standing difference of opinion with the Australian Tax Office and, consequently, he is prepared to help him for a small fee.

MADELEINE MORRIS: So we get that and then we get the tuna hunter who does what all tuna hunters do and befriends a seal pup and the two of them go hunting tuna together for many, many years. It is the most exquisite book and I can't speak to the end of it. Have you finished this one, John?

JOHN DALEY: I have, but we shouldn't speak to the end of this book.

MADELEINE MORRIS: We won't speak to the end of it, no, of course we can't. It's set in Tasmania and is continuing what has become a rich seam lately of magic realism in Australian literature, which is absolutely stunning.

JOHN DALEY: If you think about Peter Carey and *Oscar and Lucinda*, if you think about *Eucalyptus* by Murray Bail, these are books where the wonder of where your imagination can take you is one of the points of the whole exercise. There's a kind of joy and love to this. It's been a pretty tough year for most people in politics, at the risk of a little chronocentrism. I can see that a lot of people in politics this year over Christmas will need something which is just really good fun, despite the fact that it starts with a ghost who comes back for a few days and then almost dies again in a second way, and then proceeds on to somebody who wants to make a coffin. Despite that somewhat macabre and slightly death-focused subject matter, it is nevertheless a joyous, riotous novel that I hope will leave everyone who reads it with a smile on their face.

MADELEINE MORRIS: It's from a first-time writer and for that reason alone you should all buy it. This is the one that you need to buy for your family and friends. Buy this one for that person who you think needs a bit of schooling and then buy this one for your mum, buy this one for your sister and give it to them, because it is an astounding work from a really beautiful, incredibly gifted new voice in Australian literature, so we should all make sure to support Robbie. Now, you have the also-rans.

JOHN DALEY: No, they're not the also-rans. I don't think that people who fail to get into politics are also-rans. Some of them are wise. This is for the wonks, so the people who have chosen not to go into politics but who, nevertheless, spend a lot of their time in policy. I might add that, not surprisingly, therefore this is the list that is fought over particularly hard by Grattan Institute staff. We've got a couple of things for wonks. We have Nicholas Gruen's *The irredeemable in pursuit of the insatiable*, which is an essay he wrote for Inside Story which talks about the way we have this dichotomy these days between you've either got free market or you've got government intervention and Nicholas points out that there is a middle Aristotelian ground here, albeit it's rather more complicated, and talks about how do we work through that middle ground and come to better solutions. We have a book by Bri Lee called *Eggshell Skull*. She was a judge's associate and she tells a fantastic fly-on-the-wall story about how our judicial system and how our criminal system particularly as it applies to crimes of sexual violence really works in practice. That's not something that many of us experience, but the reality is there are plenty of people who do and understanding how that world works and, more to the point, how we could do a lot better is important. It's tied to her own personal story of her coming to terms with what happened to her in the past and how working through this motivates her to make really tough decisions about talking about her past and acting on it.

Then we have a piece by Jeff Borland and Michael Coelli called *Are robots taking our jobs?* There are any number of books this year about how robots are going to take your jobs and this is one of the extremely few articles that says before we get too excited about this, why don't we look at the numbers a little Hans Rosling-like. It goes through the numbers and says if the robots are taking our jobs they're not doing a very good job of it. It also does a lovely job of going through the now very long history of people saying the robots are going to take our jobs and, as a consequence, no-one's going to have any work, pointing out that we have a good 250 years of experience of this and so far the luddites were wrong.

MADELEINE MORRIS: As a journalist, I like the sound of that book. It sounds like a good one, I'll get that one.

JOHN DALEY: It's an article that's very accessible. Then we have Paul Tucker talking about *Unelected Power: the quest for legitimacy in central banking and the regulatory state.*

MADELEINE MORRIS: That sounds like a page-turner!

JOHN DALEY: Well, it is for wonks. What could be more exciting than central banking? It's about the way that central banks have too much power and he's a bit uncomfortable about that. Then we have Peter Mares' *All Work, No Stay*. This was a piece he wrote for SBS and slightly it's there for the wonks who love beautiful data presentation, because it projects a whole series of pieces of data and analyses about migration in Australia. It corrects a lot of misconceptions on the way through and, in particular, talks about the way that temporary migrants are a growing feature of Australia's migrants who are here in fact often for quite a long time and we need to understand how that works. Finally, we have Bryan Caplan's *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System is a Waste of Time and Money*. That's not necessarily on the recommended reading list for every Vice-Chancellor, apart from those who have strong stomachs, but it's essentially arguing that a lot of education is basically just signalling rather than anything that improves anybody's capabilities. I don't know whether I agree with every line in that book by any stretch of the imagination, but it's a powerful case and one of the purposes of this list is to give you a taste of where we think some intellectual currents are going. I think it is fair to say that some people are probably not getting that much out of higher education other than pure signalling, so it asks that difficult question about where are the lines here and how much is too much of a good thing.

MADELEINE MORRIS: That's a very fulsome list. Can I congratulate you and all the Grattan staff on making your way through all of those, because that is a monumental achievement.

JOHN DALEY: Thank you very much. Can I just do a couple of quick thankyous? Firstly, to those at Grattan Institute who help put all of this together. In the first instance, that's all of the Grattan Institute staff I think, literally everybody, but in particular those who worked hardest to put it together and did all of the hard-core administration, not least of which is getting John to make up his mind, so in particular to Carmela Chivers, Owain Emslie and James Ha. We've already welcomed Robbie Arnott, thank you for your book which, as you can see, I certainly enjoyed and I hope that lots of other people here enjoy it too. Thanks to the other authors without whom there would be no list, Hans Rosling, Yascha Mounk, Gabrielle Chan, Behrouz Boochani and Mary Beard. Thank you to Sarah Slade and the State Library staff, we're looking forward to the 2019 series of *Policy Pitch* events. Thank you to everybody here in the audience; it's been great having you here. Before I finish, there are two things that I have to do. Firstly, say there will be drinks and nibbles straight after this event if you come upstairs. If the drinks and the nibbles are not sufficient attraction, the books will be on sale and Readings will be happy to help you.

Finally, thank you to Madeleine Morris. This is the biggest thing we ask anyone from outside Grattan to do. Inside Grattan, of course, the staff are paid up to work in the salt mines, but to ask someone to read six books and come and talk to them is a huge ask. Thank you. For any people here who weren't already convinced about Madeleine's extraordinary intellectual breadth and ability to get across incredibly

complex stuff and then synthesise it back, which is exactly what journalists have to do, I think you've demonstrated your craft extraordinarily tonight. It's been such a pleasure talking and thank you very much, we really appreciate it.

MADELEINE MORRIS: Thank you for getting me to read them, it's been lovely. Thank you.

JOHN DALEY: Thank you all very much for coming and we look forward to seeing you at lots of Grattan events next year. A quick thanks to all of our sponsors and to all those who donate every year to Grattan; without you, none of this would happen. Thank you very much and a very happy summer reading to you all.

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