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NSW PREMIER NATHAN REES ANNOUNCES 2009 NSW LITERARY AWARDS WINNERS

Vietnamese-Australian Nam Le is a dual winner in the 2009 NSW Premier's Literary Awards, announced by NSW Premier and Minister for the Arts Nathan Rees tonight.

Nam Le has won both the 2009 Book of the Year Award (\$10,000) and the UTS Glenda Adams Award for New Writing (\$5,000) for his collection of short stories, *The Boat*.

"This is a truly outstanding achievement," Mr Rees said. "These awards are highly competitive and this year's entries were particularly strong with more than 640 entries in 13 categories.

"I congratulate Nam Le and all winners and know their awards are highly deserved."

Mr Rees said it was a particular honour to announce this year's winners as part of the thirtieth anniversary celebration of the NSW Premier's Literary Awards.

"Since they were first awarded in 1979, the Premier's Literary Awards have recognised and rewarded the very best Australian writers," Mr Rees said. "The total prize pool is \$320,000, making them the richest set of State Government literary awards in the country," he said.

The Premier said issues of multiculturalism and identity feature strongly among this year's winners.

"Nam Le's *The Boat*, is a collection of stories that cross national and cultural borders and allow the reader to experience the world from a wide range of viewpoints and voices," Mr Rees said. "It has been praised by local and international critics as one of the most astonishing literary debuts in recent memory."

"These awards mark the first major Australian awards for *The Boat* which has won major critical acclaim and the prestigious Dylan Thomas Prize, which is awarded to the best published writer in English under the age of 30 from anywhere in the world.

"Chloe Hooper's *The Tall Man: death and life on Palm Island*, won the Douglas Stewart Prize for Non-Fiction (\$40,000) for its incisive account of the death in police custody of Aboriginal man Cameron Doomadgee," the Premier said.

The winner of the \$40,000 Christina Stead Prize for Fiction is *The Good Parents* by Joan London, who was singled out by the judges for her "ability to completely inhabit each of her various characters". They also praised the novel's "nuanced detail ... stately rhythms, elegantly structured sentences and restrained lyricism".

Louis Nowra, Rachel Perkins and Beck Cole were awarded the Script Writing Award (\$30,000) for their documentary series, *First Australians*, which explores what it means to be Australian for both Aborigines and non-Aborigines.

The Community Relations Commission Award (\$15,000) was presented to Eric Richards for *Destination Australia: Migration to Australia since 1901*. "Written by a 'ten pound Pom', this book examines the main waves of immigration and how government policies have shaped modern Australia," the Premier said.

Mr Rees said that as someone who is passionate about promoting reading among children and young people, he took great pleasure in naming *The Word Spy*, by Ursula Dubosarsky and Tohby Riddle (illustrator), winner of the \$30,000 Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature.

"This wonderful book explains the use and history of words in a way that is as enjoyable as it is informative. While it was written for primary-aged children it will appeal to all ages," he said.

"This, her fifth NSW Premier's Literary Award, means Ursula Dubosarsky has now won more NSW Premier's Literary Awards than any other writer in the awards' 30 year history, Mr Rees said.

Premier Rees said it was a great honour to name Katharine Brisbane AM the recipient of the 2009 Special Award (\$20,000), in recognition of her strong commitment to Australian theatre and publishing.

"In reaching their decision, the judges said her contribution to Australia's artistic life cannot be underestimated. As co-founder of Currency Press she has been the primary – and at times the only – publisher of original work of Australian playwrights, performers and composers. Today she remains a highly dedicated arts advocate."

Mr Rees said the diverse range of Australian publishers – small and large – represented among the winners reflects the depth of the Australian publishing industry.

"This just goes to show local authors and publishers are punching well above their weight.

"I must also thank the judges for their fine work. There were so many outstanding entrants that selecting a shortlist – let alone the final winners – must have been a very difficult task.

"Once again, I congratulate the winners on their success and thank them for their highly valuable contribution to the cultural life of NSW."

The full list of winners and details about each winning author, including excerpts from judges' comments, is attached. Alternatively, go to www.pla.nsw.gov.au

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