



NON-FICTION Fiona Capp

PICK OF THE WEEK

VIRGINIA WOOLF

Alexandra Harris
 Thames & Hudson, \$29.95



DEFYING the trend in contemporary biography towards wordiness and excessive detail, this concise account of Virginia Woolf's life and work nicely demonstrates the strengths of a more streamlined approach. Written as a "first port of call" for those new to Woolf, it achieves its aim of stirring the reader's appetite for, and understanding of, the writer's work — surely the primary job of any literary biography. As Woolf showed in

her fiction, moments of importance often come when least expected. Particularly useful is Alexandra Harris's critical survey of other biographies in which she examines how Woolf has been caricatured as a delicate, tragic aesthete or, alternatively, politicised, feminised, romanticised, castigated and vindicated depending on the biographer's bent. Harris's own emphasis is on Woolf's extraordinary energy — despite her illness — and how her work is, contrary to the impression cast by the shadow of her suicide, a celebration of life.

BLACK DOG DAZE: PUBLIC LIFE, PRIVATE DEMONS

Andrew Robb
 Melbourne University Press, \$34.99



WHEN a 12-year-old boy watches old men collecting their morning papers, wishing he was in their shoes, something's not quite right. It took 40 years before Liberal politician Andrew Robb was able to tackle his problem head on. In 2009, Malcolm Turnbull was about to self-destruct. The Liberal Party backroom boys approached Robb about leading the party to the next election. Robb was eager

but worried. For years, he'd been visited by "the little Black Dog" every morning and it was getting worse. The good news, according to his doctor, was his depression was "fixable". But not, as it turned out, in time to take up the leadership. *Black Dog Daze* provides valuable insight into one man's experience of depression and how he managed to tame it. Robb is no stylist but his plain speaking has appeal. If that leadership offer were put to him now, he says, he wouldn't hesitate. Tony Abbott had better watch out.



SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY: COCO CHANEL, NAZI AGENT

HAL VAUGHAN

Chatto & Windus, \$32.95



THE big question this book fails to sufficiently address is why the scandal over Coco Chanel's wartime activities as a spy for the Nazis didn't wreck her reputation and international image as the epitome of chic. Drawing on intelligence documents, Hal Vaughan provides ample evidence of Chanel's espionage work with her lover, the urbane German intelligence agent Baron von Dincklage.

Intervention by Winston Churchill, along with the influence of powerful friends such as the Duke of Westminster, a former lover, appears to have shielded her from prosecution after the liberation of France. She fled to Switzerland, where she lived for nine years, much of that time with von Dincklage. Chanel emerges as a woman without scruples prepared to do whatever it took to keep her man. Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised she got away with it. Even in wartime, if you are rich and well connected, all things are possible.

TOO MUCH LUCK: THE MINING BOOM AND AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE

Paul Cleary

Black Inc, 24.95



A LOT of big holes are being dug way out west and a small number of multinationals are hauling in bucketloads of money. But what does it mean for the rest of us and, more importantly, for our children's future? So "ore-struck" are our state and federal leaders, Paul Cleary says, that they are locking Australia into a feast-to-famine cycle. John Howard "pissed up against the wall"

nearly all of the resources revenue that swelled his government's coffers. The present government is also failing to future-proof the economy. Cleary is emphatic about what has to be done. Changes need to be made to saving, taxation and regulation. A resources revenue fund must be established as a safety net. More thought should be given to the impact on indigenous communities and the ecological consequences. This is a rousing and valuable wake-up call that every Australian should read.