In 2003 Sue Woolfe published a wonderful novel called *The Secret Cure*. *The Mystery of the Cleaning Lady* is about writing this novel, and Woolfe’s investigations into neuroscience when she got stuck. Not prepared to accept mystical notions of creative inspiration, she thought that understanding creativity from a scientific point of view might help overcome her writer’s block. She came to respect the chaotic nature of the creative process, realising that she was not the only artist who couldn’t follow a rational plan for her work no matter how hard she tried. Characters and themes seem to emerge out of a process called ‘loose construing’, and, she finds, ‘creativity, for me at least, seems of necessity to be subversive.’ Woolfe doesn’t write a novel consciously to express an idea: indeed, she might not know the theme of her book until it’s nearly finished. However, she will then discover that theme accords with her own deepest convictions.

Reading a book like this is very sobering for a critic. My review of *The Secret Cure* was favourable, but I now see it was also pretty patronising. The criticisms I made seem impertinent and irrelevant to the mysterious subterranean forces Woolfe reveals here.