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PAPERBACKS

THE PATTERN IN THE CARPET
 Margaret Drabble
 Atlantic, £9.99



This is a charming, if meandering, account of Drabble's love of puzzles and games that developed as a result of years of suffering from depression. Working on a jigsaw, she tells us, helped give her a

few hours' rest from the pain of depression, and when her husband, biographer Michael Holroyd, was diagnosed with cancer, she took up the hobby again to assuage feelings of misery and panic that threatened to overwhelm her when she thought of life without him. The book is also something of an homage to an influential figure in Drabble's life: her Auntie Phyl, who introduced her to jigsaws. An unmarried schoolteacher whom one cannot help wonder may have developed her love of the puzzle as a way of getting through many hours alone. A touching and fond recollection.

NOCTURNES
 Kazuo Ishiguro
 Faber, £7.99



Each of the five stories revolves around music, but also on the relationship between music and love: love for our partners, families or even someone we do not know but whose voice we grew up listening to and feel we know intimately.

Ishiguro leads us through the experiences of Janeck, a cafe musician, whose encounter with an old crooner his mother loved becomes a moment of revelation; to unwitting foil Raymond, whose "failed life" makes his superior friends feel better about themselves; and to the self-centred student who considers writing songs to have the same value as the manual labour done in the cafe belonging to his sister and her husband. Ishiguro's classically elegant style is almost melancholy, yet it left me unconvinced of the more despairing stories here.

DUBAI: GILDED CAGE
 Syed Ali
 Yale, £14.99



Ali, a university professor based in New York, spent several months in Dubai in 2006, speaking to workers and expats about their impressions of the city, before the authorities asked him to leave. The resulting book is a

revelation of a place where people are happy not to have the vote, not to have citizenship and not to own property, as 90% of Dubai's population comes from outside the region. This population is not as transient as it might seem: some of Ali's interviewees have lived in Dubai for 30 years. The lack of a large public sector also means a struggling cultural or artistic centre: the main "cultural" activity is the Dubai Shopping Festival. Ali traces the history of this controversial "plastic" city that functions as a market economy and a market society, from its rise in the early 1990s to the global player it has become.

THE MADWOMAN ON A PILGRIMAGE
 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
 Hesperus Press, £7.99



Hesperus continues its rescue of small publications by past writers with this collection of three novellas written by the great Enlightenment author towards the end of his life. The first in the collection tells the story of a beautiful woman

spied in a wood by a wealthy landowner who falls in love with her and takes her home. But his son falls in love with her too, and father and son threaten to fall out. In the second novella, a young man, betrothed to one sister, finds himself falling in love with the other sister; and in the final story, an elderly nobleman buries his feelings for his young ward, whom he calls Aurora. All these stories have a fairy tale, other-worldly aspect to them, but they are twisted fairy tales, where thwarted love does real and lasting damage.

LESLEY MCDOWELL

