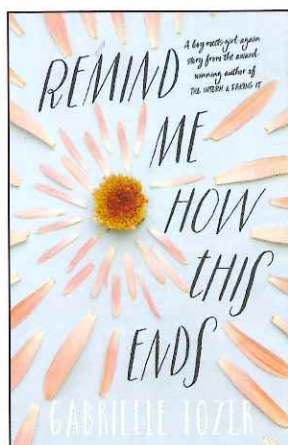


soul searching, reveals more of her selfishness and single-minded attention to her own needs.

She questions several friends and enemies, all of whom give insights into Avery's character, and Avery adds editor's notes after the responses, including those from teachers, tour operators and a range of classmates, all giving a differing perspective of her. Intertwined with the story are references to JFK and Jackie, highlighting the historic perspective of Avery's assignment.

The whole is a warm, funny, smart look at high school life in the USA, by the young author of **Pilgrims Don't Wear Pink** (2013) and the **Taming of the Drew** (2016) and reminded me of the wonderful stories by Australian author, Kaz Delaney. Both authors capture the language and behaviour of young adults perfectly, at once casting a critical eye over their pursuits but with a warmth that is heartfelt. A heavy dose of irony will have readers laugh out loud as they recognise people within their own cohort, but Avery's self-centredness becomes softened as even she realises that perhaps she could have behaved less critically towards some in her year group. The question behind all the interviews is whether she will get to the prom, and if so, with whom: readers will read to the end guessing what the outcome might be.

Fran Knight



**Remind Me How This Ends** (2017)  
Gabrielle Tozer, Angus & Robertson,  
337pp. 978 1 4607 5168 8 \$17.99  
978 1 46070 656 5 e-Book

Layla has never come to terms with her mother's death—and has not forgiven her father for dragging her away from Durnan because the town held too many memories of his dead wife. When her father does return to Durnan with a new partner Layla refuses to join them, couch-surfing

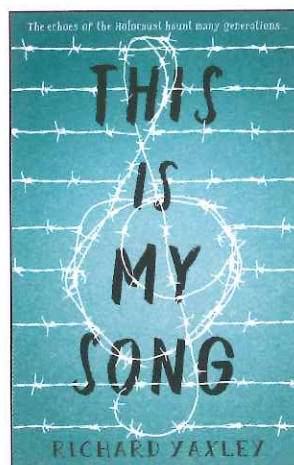
instead in Sydney throughout her high school years. She eventually follows her boyfriend Kurt back to Durnan, after a five year absence, but is unable to discuss her mother's death or visit her grave. She knows that Kurt is not good for her but is too conflicted to end the relationship and, anyway, she has no-one else to turn to. With no job and no real friends she feels broken.

Milo's life has been stuck on pause since Year 12 as he is unable to commit to university, as his girlfriend Sal did, or even to travel overseas on a gap year. His brother Trent accuses him of bludging off his parents, something that Trent is very comfortable doing, but Milo is not. His paralysis of indecision receives a jolt when childhood best friend, and old partner-in-crime Layla, walks into his father's bookstore, looking for a job. The alternating voices of Milo and Layla invite the reader to share their concerns; their texts reflect their growing closeness. Their amusing banter is superficial but helps them establish a new, comfortable rapport as their old relationship is resumed, then morphs into something else. The narrative reveals their confusion over the direction their lives should be taking and fills in the details about their past friendship and Layla's mother's death. Milo's incisive comments about the life-envy generated by Facebook's presentation of his friends' picture-perfect lives emphasises the dilemma of those left behind. The acutely-realised dialogue establishes friends and family members as credible characters: Kurt may be a drug-dealing loser but he is gentle with Layla and wants to help her; Trent is a bullish, loud and irritating brother but also an engaging and entertaining character; and Milo's Dad is a walking, talking Instagram feed for whom enough is never enough and who wants sons he can brag about. Layla's mother may be dead, but she is still a vivid presence in the book as Layla's return stirs up people's memories of her.

This is far from being a depressing novel about indecisive teenagers. It is an often very funny, heart-warming story of two individuals who are honest with themselves, if not always with each other. Their repartee is one of the joys of the book.

Recommended.

Helen Purdie



**This is My Song** (2016)  
Richard Yaxley, Scholastic Australia,  
244pp. 978 1 76027 614 0  
\$16.99 Pb

Music is the link between three generations in this novel. Knowing that he is dying, and haunted by survivor's guilt, musician Rafael Ullmann recounts, in an undelivered letter to his child, the hideous events of the 1940s that led to the murder of civilisation and the horrors of Terezin and Auschwitz. Unable any longer to deny the past, Rafael is racked by shame that he had hated his vain and foolish father with his obsession with the poet Rilke, and that he had betrayed his friend Michal in Auschwitz. Twelve year-old Annie Ullmann lives with her family in a near-mute and alone world on the Canadian prairies in the 1970s. She knows nothing about her parents' pasts and there are neither photos nor documents to inform her. She wonders, too, why her father always keeps his sleeves rolled down. He has refused to allow music in their house so Annie and her mother play Beethoven's Fifth Symphony on their illicit record player when he is absent. A wild goshawk becomes her companion and obsession and confers a feeling of safety and happiness when it is present. Three decades later, in Australia, Annie's son Joe Harper finds school and life slightly overwhelming: his divorced mother is permanently tired and his grandfather Ullmann, blank-eyed and silent since his arrival in Australia following the death of his wife, dies. The only career Joe has any enthusiasm for is writing the history of cows; the only subjects he enjoys are music and voice tuition. But his grandfather's death provides an unexpected legacy that completes the circle that began in Czechoslovakia. Rafael's formal English establishes his character effectively as he reveals his terrible secret to his descendants. His

descriptions of the ghetto in Terezin are all the more effective because his father cannot acknowledge reality and see that Terezin's highly-publicised cultural life is pure Nazi propaganda. Annie's story reflects her frustration with her narrow life but the language of the narrative is poetic, especially when describing the goshawk which represents the freedom she so desperately desires. Teenage Joe learns that music can express both love and sorrow. Most of the characters are intense and introspective, so Annie and Joe's friends provide the necessary contrast, and often comedy, as a counterpoint to their fervour. The most important message of the book comes from Rafael: You must not hate.

This is an unusual book, that requires some work from the reader, but it has a circularity that is very satisfying—and a mystery at its heart. Rainer Maria Rilke's poetry is used throughout, demonstrating that beauty can exist in even the worst of circumstances, and music is central to both characters and events. Anyone studying Nazism would appreciate the insights presented. All readers will be rewarded with a family story well-told.

Helen Purdie



**The Sun is Also a Star** (2016)  
Nicola Yoon, Corgi, 348pp.  
978 0 552 57424 2 \$19.99 Pb  
e-Book 978 1 44819 709 5

Natasha is a seventeen year-old Jamaican girl who has lived with her family in New York since she was a young child. She is desperate as *We are undocumented immigrants, and we're being deported tonight. Today is my last chance to try to convince someone—or fate—to help me find a way to stay in America.* Across town in the Korean community of Flushing, lives Daniel who is experiencing a different kind of pressure. His brother Charlie has just been suspended from Harvard University. His ambi-