

Out of their heads

A novel tackles the Rolling Stones, Manson murders and Kenneth Anger

BY MICHAEL GILTZ

The year 1969 was bleak. The Rolling Stones stood by helplessly as their founder Brian Jones drowned in a swimming pool and a fan was killed at Altamont. The lunatic Charles Manson urged his followers to slaughter "piggies" chosen at random. And experimental filmmaker Kenneth Anger tapped into dark forces with strange, subterranean experimental works.

Novelist Zachary Lazar tackles that era with his slim but ambitious second novel, "Sway." Everyone here is under the sway of something: Mick Jagger and Keith Richards are under the sway of music and their hypnotic power on others, Brian Jones is under the sway of drugs, devilishly handsome hippie Bobby Beausoleil is under the sway of his own beauty and ultimately Manson, while Anger is under the sway of the magnetic, dismissive young men he worships both physically and cinematically. They all

cross paths as both Beausoleil and the Stones appear in Anger's landmark "Invocation of My Demon Brother."

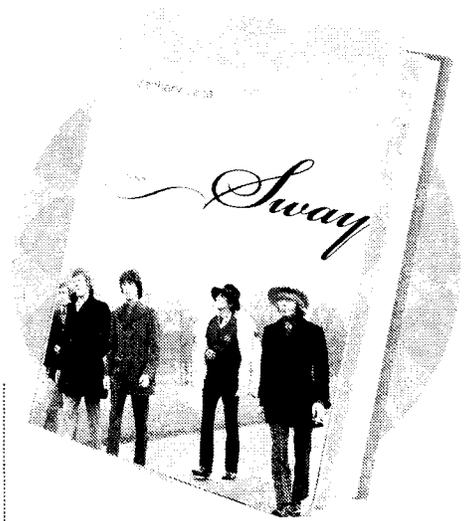
Lazar — whose first novel, "Aaron, Approximately," was set in the '70s and '80s — might easily have fallen under the sway of a rush of adjectives. Surely if any milieu encourages words to come tumbling out in a mad psychedelic haze it is the '60s world of rock 'n' roll.

But Lazar opts for coolness, a reserve that pays dividends at some points, such as the pathetic death of Jones, who seemingly drowned in

the midst of partygoers at his home either through indifference or disdain.

Yet Lazar's invocation never quite completes the spell he's hoping for. Mick Jagger and Keith Richards are too present in our mind to come alive yet as characters in a work of fiction (though Lazar does nail the needy flirtatiousness of a star). It doesn't help when

SWAY
By Zachary Lazar
Little, Brown,
\$23.99



magnetic figures like Marianne Faithfull come across as ciphers — that makes us trust Lazar less. Only the unfamiliar tale of Anger and his work comes fully alive, presumably because we know so little about it.

Ironically, a high point of the book undermines it. Lazar does a wonderful job of showing the Stones work through early versions of the sinuous classic "Sympathy for the Devil." But talking about the song simply sends you to the song. Unfortunately for Lazar, those drums, the "woo-woo" background vocals, that screechy, frightening guitar work and Jagger's dismissive, conspiratorial vocals capture the danger and magnetism of the '60s far more incisively than "Sway" can ever hope to do. ♦

N.Y. D.V. 1/17/08