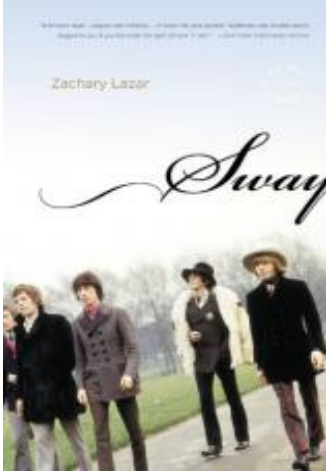


Sway

by Zachary Lazar



About the Book

Three dramatic and emblematic stories intertwine in Zachary Lazar's extraordinary new novel, **Sway** --- the early days of the Rolling Stones, including the romantic triangle of Brian Jones, Anita Pallenberg, and Keith Richards; the life of avant-garde filmmaker Kenneth Anger; and the community of Charles Manson and his followers. Lazar illuminates an hour in American history when rapture found its roots in idolatrous figures and led to unprovoked and inexplicable violence. Connecting all the stories in this novel is Bobby Beausoleil, a beautiful California boy who appeared in an Anger film and eventually joined the Manson "family." With great artistry, Lazar weaves scenes from these real lives together into a true but heightened reality, making superstars human, giving demons reality, and restoring mythic events to the scale of daily life.

Discussion Guide

1. From the Rolling Stones and Bobby Beausoleil to the eerie soundtracks of Kenneth Anger's films, music is central to **Sway**. What does music from the 60s signify to you? What does it signify to the novel's principal characters? Discuss the different implications music has for the Stones, Anger, and Beausoleil.
2. **Sway** follows three individual stories that eventually converge. Discuss the points of convergence and the events leading up to them. In what ways are the novel's characters and their experiences in the three separate stories similar? Do you think one storyline is the most representative of the 1960s?
3. How do you define masculinity and femininity? Discuss the manifestations of each in the novel, especially with regard to the Rolling Stones, Bobby Beausoleil, and Kenneth Anger. Discuss the role that gender plays in the characters' private lives and in their performances.
4. Both the group and the individual figure prominently in **Sway**, most notably with the Manson family commune and

loner Kenneth Anger. Compare the motivations and ideals of each. How does the author use them to critique both individuality and collectivity?

5. Anita Pallenberg can be considered a muse to the Rolling Stones in 1968 and 1969. In **Sway**, how did her forceful personality both inspire and mature them, despite her romantic inconsistency? How is her character further revealed during her late encounter with Kenneth Anger?

6. **The Sephiroth** appears at various points in the novel. Discuss its main tenants. Why is it important to the characters and how does it relate to the novel as a whole?

7. In many ways, the Rolling Stones' vacation in Marrakech is comparable to the extremes of Kenneth Anger's films. How does this trip alter the lives of the band members, particularly Brian Jones? What role does hallucination play in both their lives and their art?

8. Lucifer is normally thought of as a symbol of evil and darkness. How is he transformed in **Sway** into a bearer of light? What are some of the many, perhaps conflicting permutations of Lucifer in the novel? Discuss the role Lucifer plays in *Sympathy for the Devil* and **An Invocation of My Demon Brother**.

9. The 1960s have been mythologized and idealized as stories have been passed from one generation to another. Identify some of these generalizations. Discuss your own preconceptions of the era. How were they reinforced or transformed by **Sway**?

10. All of the characters in the novel succumb to the sway of someone or something. Why are they swept up? In what ways are they influenced and what are some of the consequences of their actions *under the influence*? Do you think their impressionability is a comment on the decade as a whole?

Author Bio

Zachary Lazar graduated from Brown University in 1990. He has been a Fellow at The Provincetown Fine Arts Works Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and has received the James Michener/Copernicus Society Prize from the Iowa Writer's Workshop. Lazar grew up in Colorado and now teaches at Hofstra University. **Sway** is his second novel.

Critical Praise

"One hypnotic tone poem... It is not the now-historic acts of violence that make **Sway** so riveting, but its vivid character portraits and decadent, muzzy atmosphere, all rendered with the heightened sensory awareness associated with drugs and paranoia. The near miniaturist precision with which he describes Keith Richards's attempts to master his guitar, Brian Jones's acid trips and Anger's obsessive desire for Beausoleil bring this large-scale tableau into stunning relief."

Sway

by Zachary Lazar

Publication Date: February 10, 2009

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Back Bay Books

ISBN-10: 0316113115

ISBN-13: 9780316113113