Mr Soft

*1967: How I Got There and Why I Never Left*, Robyn Hitchcock (hbck, 224pp, Constable)

It's hard to know who on earth this book is written for. Hitchcock is a cult singer-songwriter who since the demise of The Soft Boys in 1981 has become the archetypal psychedelic troubadour, constantly gigging and producing a stream of intriguing albums on indie labels. Although this is billed as a memoir, it isn't, it's a weird hybrid of private school story, musical exploration and nostalgia, all pretty much set within the year of the title. Think Jennings meets Bob Dylan and appears in Lindsay Anderson's film *If...* and you pretty much have it.

Except it's not as entertaining as any of those and certainly not as surreal or anarchic as *If....* Hitchcock seems to have no regrets about being sent to Winchester College, indeed seems to have thrived under its oppressive regime. He spends a lot of time trying to teach the reader the slang that the school used for things and to persuade us how exciting sneaking out at night was, not to mention listening to new music on the dormitory record player. Sometimes, they even snuck the record player out to the cellar or basement and listened there; sometimes they went up St Catherine's Hill and did the same.

I am as nostalgic as anyone about my past but try to rationalise it; and I have certainly changed my musical taste as I got older, apparently unlike Hitchcock. He is still mooning about Syd Barrett and Pink Floyd, early Bob Dylan and The Beatles, the music that his bunch of schoolboy groovers idolised and illicitly enjoyed. Fair enough when you're a teenager but surely he might have moved on? I mean there were much more exciting and musically inventive bands both at the time and since, you'd have thought Hitchcock might have found a few more things to listen to?

There's a real sense of naivety and acceptance throughout this short book. No sense of rebellion or discontent, little sense of adventure or individuality. The book is slight, not very well written or edited, and quite frankly, dull. It sheds little light on Hitchcock's music or personality, offers no critical insight into his own or his heroes' music, and tells us nothing new about the 1960s. It had me running to find my copy of The Soft Boys' *Underwater Moonlight* LP just to check I had got the right guy.

Rupert Loydell

(400 words)