

DOC TALK

Refuge in a bookstore; a legacy of hate; roots of conflict

Watching 'Hello, Bookstore,' 'Hitler's Mein Kampf: Prelude to the Holocaust,' and 'The Long Breakup'

By **Peter Keough** Globe correspondent, Updated June 30, 2022, 12:18 p.m.



Matthew Tannenbaum in A.B. Zax's "Hello, Bookstore." GREENWICH ENTERTAINMENT

How long will we have access to that last refuge of civilization, the local independent bookstore? After the onslaught of online shopping and the seeming coup de grace of the pandemic, the future of this humble, beloved institution looks grim.

One such establishment is featured in A.B. Zax's sunny, subtle "Hello, Bookstore" (2022).

Septuagenarian Matthew Tannenbaum has run The Bookstore in Lenox since 1976. As

the film begins in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak, he's taking book orders from his dedicated clientele from behind a closed door, and making in a week what he used to make in a day. He admits he's no businessman, but he can see this will not end well. Ultimately, he sets up a GoFundMe for the shop. The campaign's success became the topic of a 2020 [article](#) by Globe writer Thomas Farragher, who is seen interviewing Tannenbaum in the film.

Why did patrons rally so passionately behind Tannenbaum and The Bookstore? The appeal of the place is palpable, with its stacks of fussily arranged books, its worn, comfy chairs, its walls layered with book-related cartoons and other ephemera, and its wine bar named "Get Lit." Even the film's soundtrack of Renaissance lute pieces and other classical numbers evokes a cozy bibliophilic ambiance. All that's lacking is a bookstore cat.



Matthew Tannenbaum in A.B. Zax's "Hello, Bookstore." GREENWICH ENTERTAINMENT

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But Tannenbaum is the real star, a shy, reserved polymath who started out as a hippie working in Manhattan at the revered, now-defunct [Gotham Book Mart](#). There, he discovered his passion for books, and when the opportunity to buy his own small-town emporium arrived (by way of [Alice May Brock](#) of Arlo Guthrie's Alice's Restaurant fame, as he explains in one of his many namedropping anecdotes), he didn't hesitate.

Zax's film unfolds like a series of afternoons browsing the premises with the shaggy-haired Tannenbaum, who will dip into a favorite book now and then and read a passage. His taste is eclectic, from Willa Cather to Maurice Sendak, and the selections are always impeccably chosen (stick around for the list of those books at the end of the film).

This story has a happy ending (so far), and Tannenbaum likens himself to George Bailey, the distraught small-town banker played by James Stewart (better casting for Tannenbaum might be Alan Alda) saved by his clients in Frank Capra's "[It's a Wonderful Life](#)" (1946). "People can make a difference in a terrible time," Tannenbaum says in the film. "And I didn't count on that."

"Hello, Bookstore" can be streamed on Amazon, Apple TV, Google, Vudu, and YouTube and is available on DVD (\$9.99)

Go to greenwichtertainment.com/film/hello-bookstore.

Legacy of hate

Sometimes the worst books can have the greatest impact on the world generations after they were written. Turgid, repugnant, a hodge-podge of secondhand pseudo-science and racist rantings, Adolf Hitler's "[Mein Kampf](#)" (1925) nonetheless has provided a guide to power for white supremacists and strongman dictatorships to the present day.

In their documentary "Hitler's Mein Kampf: Prelude to the Holocaust" (2021), local documentarians and scholars John and Susan Michalczyk show how nearly a century after its publication, Hitler's screed has inspired such outbreaks of antisemitic violence as the "Unite the Right" [rally in Charlottesville, Va.](#), in 2017 and the [massacre](#) of 11

congregants at a Pittsburgh synagogue in 2018

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Drawing on archival footage and interviews with scholars, the film traces the development of Hitler's poisonous vision from his days as a failed artist in pre-World War I Vienna to his leadership of the fledgling Nazi party in the 1920s. After he led a failed coup to overthrow the German Weimar government in Munich in 1923 (the so-called "[Beer Hall Putsch](#)"), he was convicted of high treason. Though sentenced to a lenient five years in the minimum security prison at Landsberg am Lech, he was released after only eight months. During that time, he was allowed the resources to start writing "Mein Kampf." The rest is the nightmare of history from which we have yet to awaken.

"Hitler's Mein Kampf: Prelude to the Holocaust" can be streamed at APT Worldwide.

Go to www.aptw.org/program/hitler-s-mein-kampf-prelude-to-the-holocaust.

Roots of conflict

When the filmmaker and Forbes magazine correspondent Katya Soldak was a little girl growing up in Kharkiv — in what was then the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic — she wrote a poem glorifying Lenin. She was an ardent communist and a proud member of the party's Young Pioneers group; she loved the Russian language, its literature and culture, and thought of herself as more Russian than Ukrainian.



A still of Young Pioneers from "The Long Breakup." COURTESY KATYA SOLDAK

As she explores in her film “The Long Breakup” (2020), that youthful idealism started to change after the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991 and Ukraine became a sovereign country trying to disentangle itself from the clutches of its former Russian rulers. As an adult, Soldak relocated to New York and as a journalist there regarded the situation back home with more objectivity and better information. Her change of heart culminated with the pro-democracy demonstrations of 2014 that ousted [Putin puppet Viktor Yanukovych](#) as president. The rejoicing of this moment turned to anguish when Russia took over the Ukrainian region of Crimea and parts of its eastern Donbas area followed by fighting between Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed separatists. Well before the massive Russian invasion of the country last February (which took place after the film was made), Soldak knew she was Ukrainian, an identity that though sometimes ambiguous was indelible and precious — and was mortally threatened by the country she once embraced as her own.

SORDAN'S FILM DOES NOT DEAL WITH THE CATAclysmic EVENTS OF THE past few months, but it sheds light on the background and context of the current conflict. She examines her growing awareness of her national allegiance and patriotism, as well as that of her family and friends — some of whom remain loyal to the false stability offered by the Moscow regime. In doing so, she adds to our understanding of recent events and of a history involving decades of bloodshed and bitterness.

“The Long Breakup” screens on July 8 at 7 p.m. at the Regent Movie Theatre. The filmmaker will participate in a Q&A after the screening. All proceeds will benefit [Cash for Refugees](#).

Go to regenttheatre.com/details/the_long_breakup.

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