



## Beyond the Book

A podcast series on the business of writing and publishing

### Interview with Tanja Tuma

For podcast release  
Thursday, September 4, 2014

KENNEALLY: Books are a business. But while revenue and units are meaningful ways to measure the economic impact of the automobile business or the soap business or the doughnut business, books contribute an intangible benefit that makes them different. Whether it's high literature, pure entertainment, or thoughtful reflection on social and political events, books transmit a cultural dialogue that helps define a nation, a language, and a people. Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. My name is Christopher Kenneally for "Beyond the Book."

As Hachette and Amazon continue to battle over e-book pricing, the case is sometimes made that books are different. In the US, of course, books are treated no differently than cars or soap when it comes to sales and marketing. Across Europe, though, many nations have laws that control pricing, restrict e-commerce, or otherwise protect publishers and authors from unchecked free market forces. Our guest today has fought for such laws in her own country, and she argues that the e-book price war should end in compromise, and not unconditional surrender, for the good of all. Tanja Tuma, in Ljubljana, Slovenia, welcome to "Beyond the Book."

TUMA: Thank you for having me, Christopher.

KENNEALLY: We are very much looking to talking with you, Tanja. We'll tell our audience that Tanja Tuma has worked in publishing and bookselling for more than two decades. She is the owner and director of Založba Tuma, a publishing house in Ljubljana. And in June 2013, on CreateSpace and KDP, she self-published *Winds of Dalmatia*, the first in a trilogy of historical novels about the Balkans.

Tanja, you came to your attention recently with an essay, an open letter, you called it, published in *Publishing Perspectives*, and we'll link to that open letter on our website. It was interesting for a number of reasons, particularly for its perspective. There in Slovenia, you see things from the perspective of someone who is part of a community of 2.5 million speakers of Slovenian, very different, indeed, from our 300-million-person market in the United States. It's your contention, first of all, I think, that in such a small market, and perhaps even in other markets, bookstores, books, publishers, and authors are all really very important to the culture. Can you make your case for that?



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TUMA: Of course. Basically, Slovenia and Slovenians wouldn't have their own state today and wouldn't be, let's say, one of the states of the European Union without their language and their culture. So written word has been always very important for Slovenians. The book business, of course, is very tough, as you can imagine. We were striving within a group of publishers and booksellers, particularly, to make the book different, as you say, which was done by lobbying and actually succeeding in applying the law on fixed price of books.

KENNEALLY: For our audience in the US, where books are always very heavily discounted, I think it's worth pausing for a moment and explaining about this. Because it's not only in Slovenia where fixed prices for books are legislated, but other countries in Europe, most notably in Germany, as well. This was a law that you fought for and successfully won that battle. What it does is it sets the price for a book, whether it's a print book or an e-book, and no bookstore and no e-commerce site can sell the price for any different. Do I have that right?

TUMA: Yes, for six months after the publication, after the date of publication. Later on, the prices are free. So for six months, this is the case of Slovenia. In Germany, I think it's 18 months. In France, 12. These periods are different, and differ according to the culture within one country.

But in Slovenia, it's for six months. Why is it important? It is very important because the bookselling business has time to compete with other channels, like direct sales or e-commerce, etc. So this is an important period they have. They can really make the most of the new books. It is actually also the period in which usually the book either succeeds or fails, six months after the publication.

KENNEALLY: Tanja, I haven't had the chance to visit Slovenia yet. I look forward to doing that sometime. But I wonder about what the bookstore community is like there in Ljubljana. Is it really a place that attracts the intellectuals and even just the casual readers in a way that you feel is important?

TUMA: It does. Actually, Ljubljana is doing more and more. This year, we are applying – well, the Ljubljana community is applying to become one of the Cities of Literature within UNESCO Creative Cities. Two years or three years ago, we were the World Book Capital. Books are very important to Slovenians. Many, many other promotions are done.

But as a small community, our book prices tend to be quite high. We also have a VAT on books, which is not the case in America, and this VAT is 9.5%, which is a lot, and for the e-book, it's 22%, even more. The books are expensive, basically. So in Slovenia, there are several problems related to our market. That's why this law is so important.



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One of them is surely that, for example, Amazon offers cheap books, or even free and discounted books, for your readers in America. In Slovenia, we have the libraries. Our library system is really very, very effective. For example, out of 11 books borrowed in the library, there are only two being sold. You can see the relationship is quite tight. The publishing community, of course, reacted with trying to protect the sales, in a way, which doesn't mean that the prices will go up. Prices are competing, and the books are competing. So let's hope for the best of all effects.

**KENNEALLY:** Right. And that competition you're talking about there, Tanja Tuma, is one of a competition of the marketplace of ideas. If I understand your argument correctly, what you're suggesting is that by providing this kind of security in the marketplace, it allows a whole range of ideas, a whole range of styles and approaches to writing and publishing, to thrive and survive. If that weren't the case in such a market as you have there in Slovenia, publishers would just publish what was going to sell.

**TUMA:** Well, it wouldn't take for long. They are trying to publish what's going to sell, but also on the other hand, this mix calculation within the bookshops is very important. Because people who buy books, and who want to buy a certain book, usually are not so price-sensitive as we would have thought. For example, if it's an encyclopedia, the latest intellectual work by one of our philosophers, Slavoj Žižek, for example, they wouldn't ask for a price. They would buy the book. This security, this margin, offers really to our bookshops to be able to survive and to plan their business. Without this, when everybody's competing against anybody else with prices, it really means their decline.

Actually, you were speaking about Europe. I just wanted to point out that the European Union are 28 countries, and 12 of them have this law, sort of think that books are different, that books are more cultural goods than commercial goods.

**KENNEALLY:** Indeed. And as cultural goods, that they exist apart. They're within commerce, but they are, in a way, apart from commerce.

**TUMA:** Yeah.

**KENNEALLY:** We are speaking right now with Tanja Tuma, a publisher and author based in Ljubljana, Slovenia, who has an interesting perspective on the Hachette-Amazon e-book price war. That was wonderful context for your thoughts around all this. You look on to this battle, this slugfest, as I call it, and how do you feel about it? What do you think as a Slovenian, both as an author and a publisher, of what's going on? Does it make sense to you? Whether or not it makes any sense, what is it you would hope to see happen?



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TUMA: First, I was actually involved as an author. As a Kindle Direct Publishing author, I got the letter, like the rest of us. What really clashed with my ethics as a publisher was the fact that authors are asked to do anything in such a way. But not only by Amazon, also by Hachette. As I say in my open letter, I hate the fact that authors have to be in the crossfire. I think this is not right. I think companies should agree upon their commercial terms behind closed doors. We don't have to be privy of all that. Why should we?

But above all, authors should be left out. They should look after the freedom of their expression and their work. If they are not served rightly, I think they have the possibility to move, either to other publishers or to other platforms. This is really what annoyed me, being enlisted in one way or the other. I think it might annoy other authors, as well.

KENNEALLY: That's interesting. You're right. Because both sides, both Amazon and Hachette, have made rather forceful, sometimes even strident appeals for the partisanship, if you will, of authors, and you feel that that's, in a way, inappropriate, if not even somehow offensive to you as an author.

TUMA: And a publisher.

KENNEALLY: And as a publisher, as well. I guess what's interesting to me is the point you just made, and I want to ask you to expand upon, which is that the world today is one in which we don't necessarily need to choose between Amazon and Hachette as authors. Authors can go on their own.

TUMA: They can even maybe set up their own platform, but this is probably not very clever unless you're very, very famous. But yes, I think that as long as this quarrel or dispute or whatever you call it lasts, as long there is a space for innovative people, and authors usually are innovative people, to find their way, where they won't be hassled with one or the other. I don't know in which way. I think Amazon does a lot, actually, for the self-published authors. I had a very good experience with them.

But there will be a way. Especially those authors who are now – in one letter, these books are called hostages. Those authors will think twice about how they will continue.

KENNEALLY: I think that's also really an important point, that this battle is causing everybody in the business, whether you're in publishing or as an author, even as a reader, to think about the situation we find ourselves in. So your call, finally, is for peace, but peaceful coexistence.



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TUMA: I think both systems should coexist, and I think they need to find a common language. Because in Europe, or in other small language communities, certain protection to a book as an expression of culture, as an expression of language, is very, very important. America has 300 million people, but English is spoken all over the world. Far more people speak English than only 300 million. But if you think of a language – well, Germany are 100 million speakers. French, I think 80 million. These are still very large linguistic communities. But Slovenian, Slovakian, Czech, or even Dutch, for example, these are much smaller. If they don't protect their language and their written culture in a way, and bookshops are an important part of this written culture, what's going to happen?

KENNEALLY: It's a really important question, and we appreciate the chance to chat with you about it. Thank you so much for joining us on "Beyond the Book." Tanja Tuma is a publisher and author based in Ljubljana, Slovenia. She is the owner and director of a publishing company called Založba Tuma, and in 2013, she published her historical novel, *Winds of Dalmatia*, in English – a trilogy that will take readers throughout the Balkans. Tanja Tuma, thanks so much for joining us on "Beyond the Book."

TUMA: Thank you very much, Christopher, and all the best to you and your program.

KENNEALLY: "Beyond the Book" is produced by Copyright Clearance Center, a global rights-broker for the world's most sought-after materials, including millions of books and e-books, journals, newspapers, magazines, and blogs, as well as images, movies, and television shows. You can follow "Beyond the Book" on Twitter, find us on Facebook, and subscribe to the free podcast series on iTunes or at [beyondthebook.com](http://beyondthebook.com).

Our engineer and co-producer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. My name is Christopher Kenneally. For all of us at Copyright Clearance Center, thanks for listening to "Beyond the Book."

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