

In Publishing, One Medium Looms Large

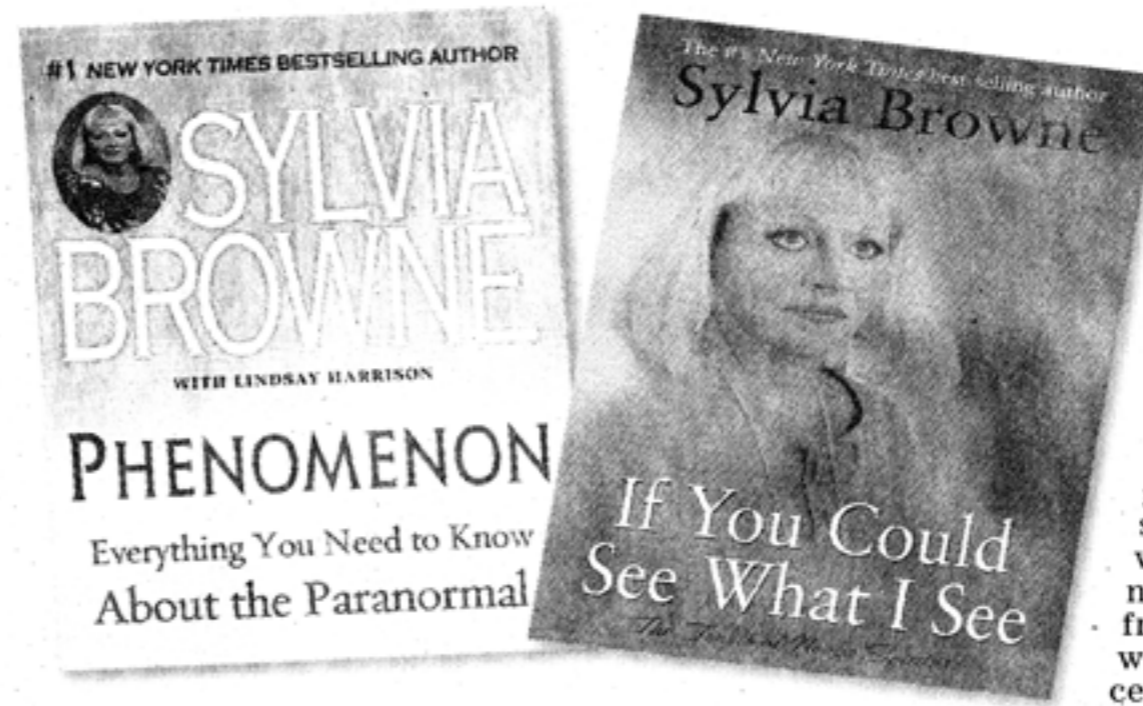
By JEFFREY A. TRACHTENBERG

SYLVIA BROWNE didn't need to be a psychic to anticipate that her new book, "If You Could See What I See," would hit the New York Times advice best-seller list soon after it was released earlier this year. Many of the 13 hardcover titles she has published since 1998 quickly became best-sellers.

Ms. Browne is as close as publishing gets to a sure thing. Her popularity is so high, two rival houses are content to share her work. Pearson PLC's Dutton imprint and Hay House Inc., an independent publisher of self-help and inspirational books, each issue a new hardcover title from her annually. This year, Hay House is publishing two. There are now 300,000 hardcover copies of "If You Could See What I See," her latest title, in print. Jules Herbert, a buyer at Barnes & Noble Inc., the country's largest book retailer, describes Ms. Browne as the chain's "leading psychic author."

Ms. Browne claims to be a medium and clairvoyant. She says she can communicate with the dead and can describe past and future events in people's lives. She also works to solve crimes and find missing people. "If You Could See What I See" is a continuation of her autobiography and an introduction to some of her spiritual beliefs.

"I have psychic intuitions about people I meet," says Ms. Browne, who lives in San Jose, Calif. "If a question is asked of me, the answer comes. But I'm not an ambulance-chaser. I've



been doing this for 52 years."

Ms. Browne, 69 years old, is one of a number of writers of the supernatural doing well these days in publishing circles. There's also Allison DuBois, whose life has served as the basis for the NBC hit TV show "Medium." CBS Corp.'s Fireside imprint says there are 125,000 hardcover copies in print of her 2005 memoir, "Don't Kiss Them Good-Bye." A nonfiction book, "We Are Their Heaven," is being published in early May. In the anxious wake of

Author and self-professed psychic Sylvia Browne has some seven million hardcovers and paperbacks in print.

9/11, "People take comfort from these books," Mark Gompertz, Fireside's publisher, says.

Robert Thompson, a professor of media and popular culture at Syracuse University, argues that debates over issues such as evolution and global warming demonstrate a willingness by some people to shy away from rational explanations of the world around them. "People are ceasing to believe those things for which we have empirical evidence.

That creates a vacuum into which psychics can flow," he says.

Mr. Herbert, the buyer at Barnes & Noble, first started buying the genre in 1995. He says some people are simply intrigued by psychic phenomena. "They're fascinated by life's mysteries and feel that organized religion doesn't offer all the answers," he says.

Psychics such as Ms. Browne have their detractors. *Please Turn to Page B2, Column 3*

Publishing Future Looks Bright for Clairvoyant

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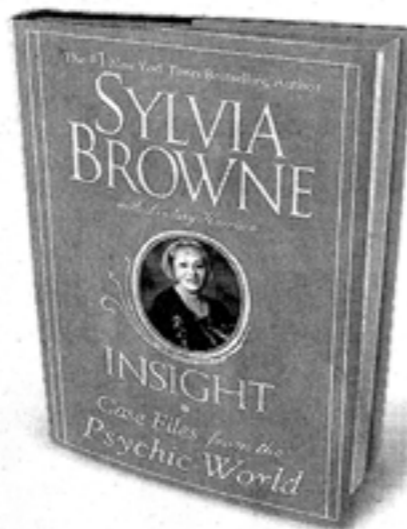
tors. James Randi, who describes himself as an "investigator and demystifier of paranormal and pseudoscientific claims," says "there's no evidence that Ms. DuBois or Ms. Browne can do or has ever done anything of a psychic nature." Ray Hyman, a professor emeritus of psychology at the University of Oregon who has researched psychics, labels Ms. Browne "a fraud." The secret to being a good psychic, he says, is to tell people what they want to hear. "She charges so much that they are going to make her right no matter what," says Professor Hyman. "They want her to look like a guru. Otherwise they're fools."

Ms. Browne doesn't care what her critics say. "There are always going to be detractors," she says. Still, she has had some legal problems. Back in June 1992, she and a former husband were charged with six counts of grand theft and investment fraud in California relating to a failed gold mine. Ms. Browne says her former spouse "didn't fill out the securities papers, and I had to pay the IRS. I never spent time in jail. It was his deal. It's guilt by association because we were married." Reached by phone, Dal Brown, her former husband, agreed, saying, "It was my problem, not hers."

The issue didn't prevent Ms. Browne from landing a regular appearance on television that helps her sell her books.

Easy to Predict

Psychic author Sylvia Browne's books sell enough copies to satisfy two publishing houses.



Every Wednesday, she appears on the Montel Williams syndicated TV talk show. Mr. Williams describes Ms. Browne as "warm and entertaining, an excellent guest," although he personally doesn't believe in psychics. "We're in a time of incredible national depression," he adds. "People are looking for answers and something different."

Hay House Hardcover

TITLE	PUB DATE	IN PRINT
'Adventures of a Psychic'*	1998	620,000
'Contacting Your Spirit Guide'	2002	275,000
'Sylvia Browne's Book of Angels'	2003	170,000
'Sylvia Browne's Lessons for Life'	2004	270,000
'Secrets and Mysteries of the World'	2005	225,000
'If You Could See What I See'	2006	300,000

Dutton Hardcover

TITLE	PUB DATE	IN PRINT
'The Other Side and Back'	1999	340,000
'Life on the Other Side'	2000	360,000
'Blessings From the Other Side'	2000	250,000
'Past Lives, Future Healing'	2001	250,000
'Sylvia Browne's Book of Dreams'	2002	210,000
'Visits From the Afterlife'	2003	185,000
'Prophecy'	2004	210,000
'Phenomenon'	2005	195,000
'Insight'	2006	Available in July

*Paperback only

Source: the publishers

Those insights come at a price. On her Web site, Ms. Browne says she charges \$700 for an individual phone reading. Seekers who don't have that much can talk to her son Chris, who also claims to be a psychic and charges \$400. Ms. Browne says she has a five-year waiting list for such calls. She also says that, because of the expense involved, she only

allows people to make one phone call. "If you called my office and asked for a second reading, they'd say no," she says.

Ms. Browne also has a lucrative lecture series that she takes across the country. She recently returned from a Caribbean cruise with 450 fans, says Reid Tracy, the chief executive of Hay House, whose company books Ms. Browne's seminars. Next week, she is speaking in New York City at the Javits Center. An estimated 3,000 listeners are expected. The most expensive tickets, priced at \$75, are already sold out. She does 29 such speaking engagements annually, drawing an estimated 75,000 listeners.

Although logic would suggest that Ms. Browne's market would be oversaturated now with her books, that doesn't appear to be the case. "I appeal to people as a human being," she says. "Things have happened to me. A husband got me all involved with legalities. I had death in the family. I've had divorce. People relate to me rather than the holier-than-thou types who say 'send me money and I'll save your soul.'"

Mr. Herbert of Barnes & Noble says that some people are simply intrigued by psychic phenomena. "They're fascinated by life's mysteries and feel that organized religion doesn't offer all the answers," he says.

For her part, Ms. Browne takes a down-to-earth approach. "You are only as good as your last reading," she says.