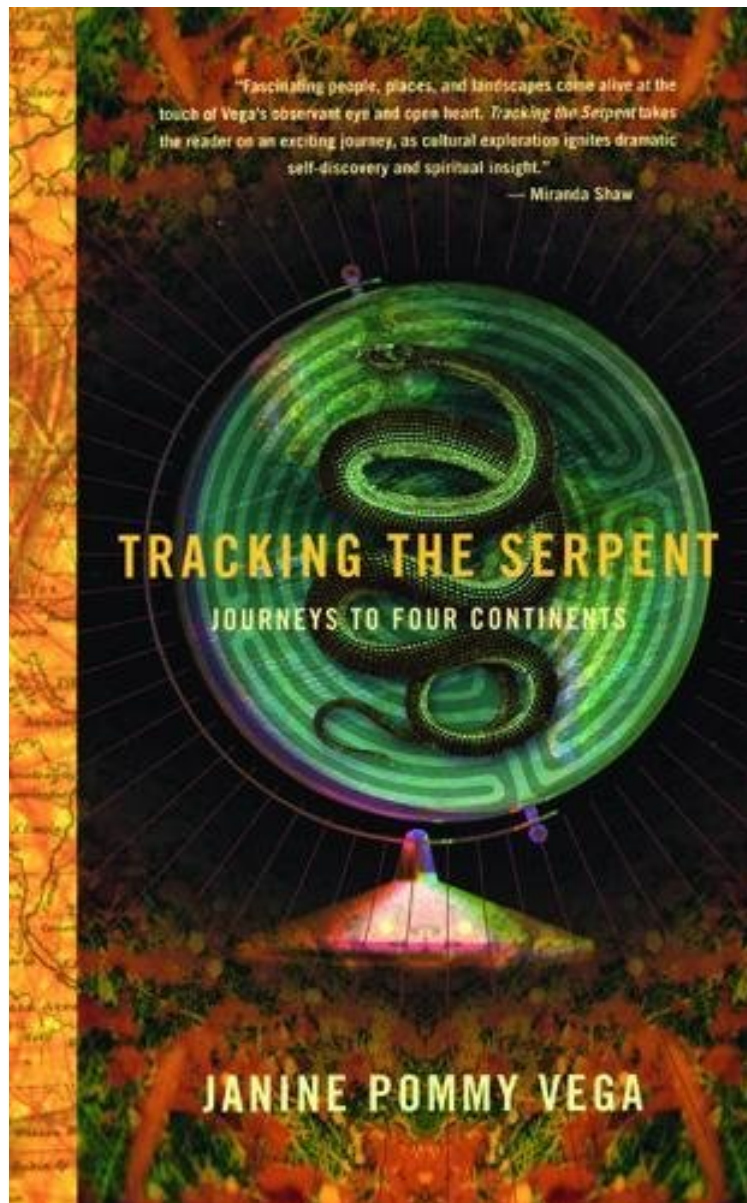


(Mobile book) Tracking the Serpent: Journeys into Four Continents

## Tracking the Serpent: Journeys into Four Continents

Janine Pommy Vega

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**Janine Pommy Vega : Tracking the Serpent: Journeys into Four Continents** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Tracking the Serpent: Journeys into Four Continents:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Booked to TravelBy CustomerI had been reading about the Beats and came across this author. Reading her travel memories--Tracking the Serpent--I found most of them interested me: one woman's view of traveling alone thru cultures terrain that were rough and challenging to her, as they would be for

me. I liked her descriptions, her thoughts, her adventures. They would not have been my choices but I appreciate that they were her choices and so do not criticize her, as one reviewer did, for not going deep enough with her reflections. Another reviewer called her memories self centered and indulgent--I wonder if that reviewer would make this comment about other memoirs, especially the writings of the male Beat generation? Read this book thru to the end and so much falls in place. One reviewer reflected that this book is an allegory, and I do believe it is. That is where one finds the depth of this book. It is also an historical document, first published in 1997. At 16, Pommy-Vega ran away to NYC to find the Beats and to become a poet. She lived as a hermit in 1970's on an island on the Peruvian-Bolivian border. Later she married Fernando Vega, an artist in France and so had that life experience. What I found really touching, in researching her life, was that she became a beloved member of a small town--Woodstock-- and gave workshops on writing thru the PEN and Incisions/Arts program in schools and prisons. She was married to another poet for eleven years at the time of her death. I came away from reading about her life, sensing that she lived a complete life of the times--her times. This book reflects her adventures while traveling and her memories. I dog-eared and wrote in my copy. I now lend it to women traveling on their own adventures. So far this book has traveled the SouthWest US and South America. I hope to keep it traveling....

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.  
Really deserves an open-minded read  
By Verita  
The author, an established poet, was a member of the Beats and active as a poet and teacher until her death in December 2010. I can see from the other reviews that people take exception to the amount of sex and/or thinking about sex in the book, but you can make that complaint about just about any of the writings of any of the Beats. They were obsessed with sex, yes. But they didn't reduce everyone they met to mere sexual possibility, usually it was just included along with every other part of the character -- they certainly did not leave it out. The Beat movement arose in response to the repressive 50s. Yes, this focus on sex can be annoying, in person and on the page, but don't let it blind you to Janine Pommy Vega's genuine search for life's meaning and for the divine on earth. She meant her search and she lived it her whole life, a life of teaching, questing and poetry. Part of this amazing life -- come on, how many of us office workers would not love a life of poetry, travel and teaching? -- is captured in this amazing, if imperfect book. Books are like people -- some of the most fascinating are flawed. This book is certainly worth a read, and does not deserve the 2 1/2 star rating it had when I posted this review. Open your minds, people.

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful.  
A Powerful Poetic search for the essence of woman  
By A Customer  
'Tracking the Serpent' is far more than a travelogue of a remarkable woman's journeys through four continents. Janine Pommy Vega is a poet. As her fellow poet of the beat Gregory Corso noted, "With Poetry one line, in prose a steady mind. Vega learned from poetry how to use details, with prose, to keep track of time." From the moment the first seeds of travel were planted in her soul, as a child in Union City, New Jersey, Vega knew "each journey would show aspects of power I would learn to accept as my own." As a teenager Vega abandon her home and family in New Jersey for the cafes and smoky bars of the beat generation becoming a part of the movement with Alan Ginsberg, Greg Corso, Peter Orlovsky, Jack Kerouac, Herbert Huncke and Bill Burroughs. Staying with Else Cowan, a friend of Alan's, Vega absorbed the intellectual atmosphere, an education that no graduate school could offer today. In Manhattan she met the painter Fernando Vega and together they traveled to Israel, then Paris and Ibiza. Lost in love, the power of this experience overcame all obstacles. Fernando's death in Ibiza made Vega a widow at twenty three. This loss was devastating, but it resulted in her first major contribution, 'Poems for Fernando,' also published by City Lights. Vega has now published over fifteen books of poetry. Vega had found her voice with her first book of poems. Now what she began to search for was her own power, her strength of spirit as a woman. Her powerful sexuality led her to the sites of female power worship throughout Europe while recovering from a serious car crash. This lyric spirit took in the whole experience which kindled a fire of words and phrases, poetry and prose. Vega, a dedicated wordsmith, has forged a complex tale of wandering beauty posing questions about the self along the way that few philosophers would hazard. What may seem a mere memoir on the surface is actually a powerful journey of discovery of woman's fierce sexuality as Vega descends into the Peruvian teeming with the humid life force of the jungle. The dolphin, the rivers, the rain and mud in a penal colony are capped by a shaman's yage journey. Finally, disassociating herself from the jungle, Vega notes "I thought back to my night with the ayahuasca, remembering how my shadow had detached itself from some trees, and attached to others. There was a sweet almost dispassionate quality in the shadow weaving through the leaves. Like the face of a mother with a wolfish grin, there was nothing personal in it. It simply moved." An inveterate hiker, Vega who has climbed all of the highest peaks of her native Catskills around Woodstock set off for the Cordillera Blanca in Peru. Despite an ailing heart and guerrillas of the Sinderio Luminoso she crossed Peru's highest range discovering the pristine beauty of the earth mother, Pachamama and her own courage as a woman. In the final chapter Vega sets off through the Annapurna range of the Himalayas again seeking all the time the essence of female power in a spiritual world that recognizes the fusion of masculinity and femininity, the yoni and lingam. In these journeys, and throughout the book, Vega is not just struggling with herself. This is not a memoir, a self indulgence, a petty tale of my discovery of myself, but an allegorical chain of parables about the nature of woman and the female deity within all beings. Only a poet can reveal as much about her inner self and make it a metaphor for all women. This is a book of discovery that reaches beyond feminism, a spiritual journey that transcends travel literature and reaches beyond memoirs to the fundamental questions about the role of feminine power. Vega is a risk taker

whether in the Himalayas or at her desk. She reveals far more of herself than most authors would ever consider doing. With a strong and powerful voice, the lyric license of a poet, she reveals a spiritual experience that transcends feminism and reaches for the heart. This is an amazing book by an amazing woman which should be read and savored by all.

These are the true-life adventures of a woman who ranges over four continents, endeavoring to go beyond the limits of ordinary life. Recovering from an accident, she goes to Glastonbury, where she finds energy portrayed in ancient earthworks as a snake coiled in concentric circles around a hill. To walk this spiral is called threading the maze, which means both to ascend and to go deep within. This becomes a guiding emblem of her pilgrimages to sites of female spiritual and temporal power, from the Irish countryside to the Amazon jungle to the high mountain cultures of Nepal. "Fascinating people, places, and landscapes come alive at the touch of Vega's observant eye and open heart. Tracking the Serpent takes the reader on an exciting journey, as cultural exploration ignites dramatic self-discovery and spiritual insight." Miranda Shaw "With poetry one line, in prose a steady mind. Vega learned from poetry how to use details, with prose, to keep track of time. I really respect this book." Gregory Corso "In these remarkable accounts, full of color and suspense, Vega carries us along on the strength of her own urgency to places few of us will ever see for ourselves. An informative guide and a brave one, she never ceases to question her own assumptions. For the armchair traveler, these are splendid excursions." Hettie Jones Janine Pommy Vega, Beat Generation writer, performer, and musician, is the author of twelve books. For many years she has worked with Poets in the Schools, and she is a member of PENs Prison Writing Committee.

From Kirkus s In this loosely unified collection, poet Vega visits not four but three continents and produces a rambling but brave-hearted account of her exploits. Pursuing evidence of a neolithic earth goddess, she alights in the English countryside, where she treks to ancient towers and earthworks and engages in a brief, romantic fling with an eager innkeeper whose wife similarly espouses open marriage. Following sidetrips to Ireland and a quick visit to Chartres, the reader is whisked to the Peruvian , where Vega visits a former convict she encountered while on a prison visit years before, who now lives in a bug-infested backwater. Our adventurer learns, among other things, how to ward off mosquitoes while relieving herself, engages in an intense affair with a handsome exdrug trafficker, and tops off her trip in fine, hallucinogenic style by consuming the local yage. Two years later, returning to Peru, she keeps to the high ground, trekking through the Andes with a group of guides (her sexual advances rebuffed), avoiding Shining Path guerillas, and severely testing her stamina. Yet this romp is nothing compared to her next journey, to Nepal. After arriving in Kathmandu, Vega hires a guide for a treacherous climb through the Himalayas. Twice plunging ahead of her sullenly uncooperative companion, she finds herself on perilous outcroppings. Determined to avoid a group of obnoxious tourists, she crosses a 17,000-foot pass during a snowstorm. Cropping up at odd intervals are discussions about female energy, Vega's sexual intensity and evaluations of her consorts' talents, and other arcana that are treated with such brevity (there's a one-sentence account of a miscarriage in a bathroom) that the reader can't care. While Vega's is a likable voice, her narrative never rises above the self-indulgent, unfocused standard that seems to have become the norm for the recent outpouring of travel adventures. -- Copyright 1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. From the Back Cover These are the true-life adventures of a woman who ranges over four continents, endeavoring to go beyond the limits of ordinary life. Recovering from an accident, she goes to Glastonbury, where she finds energy portrayed in ancient earthworks as a snake coiled in concentric circles around a hill. To walk this spiral is called threading the maze, which means both to ascend and to go deep within. This becomes a guiding emblem of her pilgrimages to sites of female spiritual and temporal power, from the Irish countryside to the jungle to the high mountain cultures of Nepal.