



**AEGEAN TALES**

two novels by

**PAN BOUYOUCAS**

translated by Sheila Fischman

**Aegean**

**Tales**

**Pan Bouyoucas**

Translated by  
Sheila Fischman



*Cormorant Books*

French text copyright © 2002 by Les éditions Les Allusifs, Montreal.  
All rights reserved.

First published in French as *L'Autre* and *Anna Pourquoi*  
by Les éditions Les Allusifs, Montreal.

English language translation copyright © Sheila Fischman, 2008.

This edition copyright © Cormorant Books Inc, 2008.  
This is a first edition.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior written consent of the publisher or a licence from The Canadian Copyright Licensing Agency (Access Copyright). For an Access Copyright licence, visit [www.accesscopyright.ca](http://www.accesscopyright.ca) or call toll free 1.800.893.5777.



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts  
du Canada



The publisher gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council for its publishing program. We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP) for our publishing activities.

Printed and bound in Canada

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Bouyoucas, Pan  
[Autre. English]

Aegean tales / Pan Bouyoucas ; translated by Sheila Fischman.

Translation of: *L'autre* and *Anna, pourquoi*.

ISBN 978-1-897151-20-4

i. Fischman, Sheila ii. Bouyoucas, Pan. Anna, pourquoi. English.  
iii. Title. iv. Title: Autre. English.

PS8553.089A8513 2008 C843 .54 C2008-903727-8

Cover design and image: Angel Guerra/Archetype

Author photo: Mary-Reine Mattera

Text design: Tannice Goddard/Soul Oasis Networking

Printer: Marquis Book Printing

CORMORANT BOOKS INC.

215 SPADINA AVENUE, STUDIO 230, TORONTO, ON CANADA M5T 2C7

[www.cormorantbooks.com](http://www.cormorantbooks.com)

*For my grandmother, Anna,  
her love, her generosity, her stories.*

PREVIEW NOT FOR RESALE

THE OTHER

PREVIEW NOT FOR RESALE



IT WAS BEFORE the arrival of television. In every village, at every gathering, each person had his share of stories to tell. Stories that often seemed more like fantastic tales or epics. But no one ever called the storyteller a liar. If he embellished, they knew it was to entertain his listeners, not to deceive them.

Young Thomas was only interested in the stories brought home by sailors. And there were plenty who had sailed the seven seas in Panteli, a small fishing village on the east coast of the Greek island of Leros.

“The world is beautiful, big, inexhaustible,” they said.

They would take Thomas to a couple of ports, then add: “We know how much you want to go to sea, but you can’t until you’re sixteen — not even as a cabin boy.”

Every morning, when the sun was stretching out across the horizon, before it started to climb above the world, Thomas would count the days until his sixteenth birthday and moan.

When the moon emerged like a sigh of love where the sea and the sky embrace, he sat down in front of his map of the world. He kept it above his bed the way others might keep an icon. He studied it, then chose a port where, waiting for sleep, he would drop anchor.

On the eve of his sixteenth birthday, he looked at his map of the world for the longest time before he chose a destination. It was no longer a matter of fantasies scented with the odour of tar and the fragrance of sea spray. His dream was on the verge of becoming reality.

“Naples,” he said at last.

The year was 1943. Summer was drawing to an end. The extravagant dreams of Benito Mussolini had brought Italy to the brink of the abyss. Count Galeazzo Ciano, Il Duce’s minister of foreign affairs, was engineering a plot to overthrow him.

Leros was under Italian occupation. Like Count Ciano and a considerable portion of humankind, Thomas was hoping for Il Duce’s fall. But not in his wildest dreams could he have imagined that the occurrence of such an event so far from his island would, like a pebble cast into the sea, create rings that would spread to him and make him keel over.

OVER THE COURSE of history, the deep and numerous bays of Leros, where entire fleets could hide, had stirred the greed of many strategists. Mussolini was the most recent.

“I’ll make the island of Artemis, goddess of the moon, my Aegean capital,” he had said a few years earlier when he was studying the map of his new Roman empire.

Il Duce was very keen on mythology. Little did he know, however, that nearly all the officers he intended to send to Leros were anti-fascists. He realized that only when Count Ciano, who was also his son-in-law, had him arrested. A few hours afterwards, his officers handed over the island to the British.

Their betrayal put his friend Hitler into such a rage that he ordered his Luftwaffe to convert the island of Artemis into a lunar landscape.

The Luftwaffe bombed Leros over a period of forty-four days. On the forty-fifth, not a single shot was fired when the Führer's troops stepped ashore.

As soon as they landed, the Germans barred the men of Leros between the ages of fifteen and fifty-five from leaving. They were needed to build fortifications meant to make the island unassailable. In later years, some people were convinced that *The Guns of Navarone*, a 1961 movie starring Gregory Peck and Anthony Quinn, was inspired by the awesome cannons the Germans set up on Mount Pitiki, which looks down on the village of Panteli.

Cannons that stopped the Allies' advance.

So the Royal Air Force bombarded the island again. At night, the shrill cry of alarm sirens once again tore the inhabitants of Panteli from their beds. While rockets and bombs lit up the sky, and floodlights searched the darkness, and terrified dogs howled and howled, they ran to hide in the grottoes at the foot of Mount Pitiki. They didn't emerge until dawn, when sky and earth had stopped spitting fire in each other's face, to see what was left of their houses, their fishing boats, and their vegetable gardens.

Of all that, Thomas kept only one image.

His bladder was threatening to burst, and he was one of the first to leave the shelter. The sky bore no trace of the bombers that had streaked across it all night long. Looking at it now, so limpid and serene, Thomas could have sworn that the nightmare he and his people had just lived through had been only a bad dream.

He felt as if he were still dreaming when he looked down on the row of majestic eucalyptus trees, three or four storeys high, where he intended to hide and relieve himself. Soldiers were hanging from their branches like so many Christmas-tree ornaments.

They were Royal Air Force paratroopers, still attached to the harnesses of their parachutes, the silk canopies rippling gently with every breath of wind.

Thomas took a step in their direction to greet them.

They appeared to be asleep.

He grabbed hold of the boot of the soldier hanging closest to his head so he could shake him.

“He won’t wake up, idiot,” said someone behind him. “They were all strangled by their harnesses.”

Thomas’s bladder couldn’t hold out. Ashamed, he ran and hid. And so he did not see the German soldiers force some of the men, including his father, at gunpoint to climb the trees and bring down the corpses of the British paratroopers.

IN THE END, though, the British managed to take back the island. The German prisoners were rounded up at Lakki, the naval base the Italians had built on the west coast of the island.

In Lakki, there lived a woman whom the new legionnaires of Il Duce had named La Bionda di Faro; she was a peroxide blonde and her brothel was located near the lighthouse. She would tell how the Germans, as they were boarding their ships, had shouted to the people who'd come to boo them: "We were here for only a year and a half, but the memory of our stay will be alive until you breathe your last!"

When Thomas heard this very Germanic boast, he shrugged. The Germans had left, nothing else mattered. At last, he would be able to go to sea.

"Go with my blessing," said his mother. "Leros is now nothing but a graveyard."