

# LANGFUS, Anna Regina

Father: SZTERNFINKIEL, Mosze (merchant, grain trade agent)

Mother: SZTERNFINKIEL, Maria (Marjem), nee WAJNBERG

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## **Basic Information**

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**1920-01-02** birth, Lublin

**1966-05-12** death, Gonesse near Paris, France

**Maiden name** SZTERNFINKIEL, Anna Regina

**Known also as:** JANCZEWSKA, Maria (fake 'Aryan' name)

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## **Spouses/Children**

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**1938** Mariage to RAJS, Jakub (Lublin)

**1948** Mariage to LANGFUS, Aron (Paris); daughter: Maria (b. 1948)

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## **Address before World War II**

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18 Lubartowska Street, Lublin

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## **Education before World War II**

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**1929 – 1937** Unia Lubelska State Middle School, Lublin

**1938 – 1939** Ecole Supérieure de Textiles (Textile Academy), Verviers, Belgium

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## **Events – World War II**

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**III.1941** Lublin: displaced together with parents and husband (employed as Judenrat office worker) into the newly opened ghetto at 1 Cyrulicza Street

**1942** moves to Warsaw; stays at the Warsaw ghetto; father dies in Lublin; escapes from the Warsaw ghetto – living under the fake 'Aryan' name of Maria Janczewska; collaboration with AK (courier)

**1942 – 1943** hiding with husband and friends from Lublin (the Cygielman brothers, see the history of Nimrod Ariav) in a rented flat in Warsaw, Sienna Street; later with 8 other people (including the future husband Aron Langfus) in a bunker near to Warsaw; mother dies in the Warsaw ghetto (May 1943)

**1944** in hiding with husband by Pols (Legionow); later in a forest North of Warsaw

**XI.1944** arrested together with husband by Gestapo, imprisoned in Nowy Dwor Mazowiecki, tortured

**XII.1944** husband murdered in the Gestapo prison in Nowy Dwor Mazowiecki

**1944/1945** transferred to prison in Płońsk; liberated by the Soviet Army

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## Events – After World War II

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- 1945** registered at the Jewish Committee in Lublin (office worker, address 10 Staszica Street); encounter with the only surviving cousin Felicja Słusznna and her future husband Aron Langfus; from June 1945 – student at the Drama College
- 1945-1946** settles the inheritance right concerning tenement-houses at 18 Lubartowska Street, 16 Lubartowska Street, 10/5 Staszica Street and 2 Browarna Street, sells the reclaimed property
- May 1946** obtains a transit visa to France, leaves Poland
- 1946-1947** stays with relatives in Versailles; works as a maths teacher in a Jewish orphanage in Rueil-Malmaison near Paris; relationship with Aron Langfus, who followed her to Paris
- 1948** marries Aron Langfus, gives birth to daughter Maria
- 1950-1951** attends a course in drama
- 1956** releases the debut play *Les lépreux* (*The Lepers*; Paris, Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui), one of the first plays referring to the situation of Jews in Poland under the Nazi occupation as well as Polish-Jewish relations; judged controversial because of its realism and melodramatic character
- from 1957** cooperation with magazines (e.g. runs a theatre and film review section in a Jewish monthly "L'Arche" )
- 1959** receives French citizenship
- 1960** novel *Le Sel et le soufre* (*The Whole Land Brimstone*; Ed. Gallimard), a transposition of her war experience, one of the first autobiographical fiction writings on Holocaust experience; 1961 – Charles' Veillon Award for the best French novel)
- 1961** moves to Sarcelles near Paris; animator activity – literary club at the local library
- 1962** novel *Les Bagages de sable* (*The Lost Shore*, Ed. Gallimard) published and awarded with the **Goncourt Prize** (most important French literary recognition); using a modern romance as groundwork, the book presents the suffering of a Holocaust survivor, unable to come back to the world
- 1963** visits Israel as one of the official representatives of the Jewish French social groups, meeting the delegation of the Lublin Homeland Association in Israel; publishes *Le Sel et le soufre* in Hebrew
- 1965** novel *Saute, Barbara* (*Jump, Barbara*, Ed. Gallimard; – film version entitled *Pour un sourire*, 1970 ); another book presenting the inability of Holocaust survivors to let go of the past
- April 1966** Grenoble, France: last public appearance for the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising
- 1966-05-12** dies in a hospital in Gonesse near Paris, as a consequence of heart failure

## SOURCE TEXTS

- ***Screams cannot be printed.* Fragments of Anna Langfus' speech pronounced at Women's International Zionist Organization WIZO conference in March 1963, published by Ellen S. Fine in “Les Nouveaux Cahiers”, no 115, 1993.**

It is a strange enterprise: to entrust the rational order of words with the surrounding confusion, and to my mind, there is no greater confusion than war. But the fact that such an overwhelming amount of suffering and crime would lead to the creation of something as sophisticated as a book, the attribute of civilisation itself, made me feel uneasy. Where are then the shouts reaching my ears, the wounds and the blood, where is the fear and the despair in the eyes of the victims, where is the ever present death? A literary critic, animated with poetic sensations, might even write: this novel, this poem is a scream. Certainly not. Screams cannot be printed. There are no screams in the book. There are words.

I am of the opinion that the more horrifying the reality, the more abnormal the situation, the greater the distance needed to allow for its comprehension in the entirety of its truth. Otherwise only the documents, of whatever quality, the diaries would be able to reach us [...] preserving the imprint of the most immediate reality. But a novel? It would be reasonable if one kept in mind the fact that a novel is a work of literary art, literature being nothing more than a plane of confrontation between the writer and the outside world. If then the world in question is a world filled with the misery and suffering of the whole population, the writer, striving for attaining his objective, has to put his own self aside. Modesty is what counts. The writer's only ambition can be to reconstruct a small portion of the reality that extends beyond his reach. The author's task is not to exaggerate the facts he is relating, but to find an unostentatious space for them, between the lines, to let them live. He has to restrain his own sentiments, his own indignation, his own resentment. There is a separate language that belongs to the horror, and for it to be uttered, the human voice will always be too impotent. Most often, the screams can only be expressed by means of silence. [...]

To verbalize the terror of the Jewish fate during the war, I had to create a literary work. It was a difficult step.

• Anna Langfus, *The Lost Shore*, fragment

*Tu arriveras seule sur cette plage perdue  
Où une étoile descendra sur tes bagages de sable*

ANDRÉ BRETON

The staircase was wide, the steps red-carpeted. Nineteen steps to the first landing . . . The banister rail was cool and smooth. My hand was reaching well forward for it, as far forward as my body, following reluctantly in its wake, would allow. On the landing, I was brought up sharp by the soft dark gleam of three doors, so tight-fitting that it would have taken a magic formula to open them. Another nineteen steps, and the same red carpet led to the second landing. The banister rail was only slightly longer. It lengthened considerably afterwards, and there was an ever-increasing distance between the hand clutching it and my body, which grew heavier and heavier, as though each step was adding to my weight. Shortly before I reached the fourth landing, I stopped and stood aside for a woman who was on her way down. She was slim and dressed in black; her face was smooth and pale as a pebble. Her eyes were barely distinguishable, just a pair of dark orifices. She had the easy, assured gait of someone who knew where she was going, and how to get there. I squeezed against the wall, and as she went by I suddenly felt like saying: "How death becomes you, Madame."

No red carpet now. Red carpets seldom have the strength to reach the upper stories of a house. On the sixth landing, the doors had less of a gleam and were less tight-fitting. A key was sufficient to open them, like the one which I was holding and which seemed to be guiding my hand and turning in the lock of its own accord—all I had to do was give it its head. I shut the door after me and said: "Here I am."

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THE LOST SHORE

And they were there, all three of them, sitting—in the dim light—on the two chairs and on my bed. The faces they turned towards me were drained of all expression, masks devised for an eternal wait. But they were not to be trusted, these faces. They changed quickly, terribly quickly, so quickly that sometimes I had a job to recognise them. There they sat, all three of them, and since they just went on and on staring at me I repeated: "Here I am." I laid down my handbag and took off my shoes, then I went and opened the window. The outdoor heat filled the room instantly. I felt as though I was moving about in the thick of a dense, scalding dough.

"Another day put paid to," I said. "One fewer for me to face."

Sweat was making my stockings stick to me, and I removed them as though peeling off my skin. "I want people to damned well leave me alone! Do you hear? I want them to leave me alone!"

"But it's you who go running after them," said my father.

He lowered his eyes, as though ashamed.

"And even if that's true," I said, "who is to blame? Do you bother your heads about me?"

"Why, you know very well . . ."

But I was in full spate: "I don't know anything, anything at all. And I don't want to know anything. You turned your backs on me. We could have stayed together, had you wished. But you turned your backs on me, shamefully, scurvily."

Jan jerked his head in my direction.

"We are together."

I didn't recognise his voice, it was so severe. It was

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THE LOST SHORE

then I noticed he was wearing his thick polo-neck sweater. He must have been terribly hot. As I had nothing else to give him, I said gently, almost in a murmur: "Of course we are together."

My father was growing restless.

"We must pull through," he kept saying, "we must pull through."

"Don't work yourself into a state," said Mamma. "You can see for yourself she gives no cause for it."

"If you were in my shoes," I told her, "you might think differently."

I switched on the light and saw my mother blink several times, like someone who, after getting used to the brightness of a lamp, suddenly realises what is being revealed to her, and cannot stand the sight of it. I switched off and announced: "I'm going to sleep." Notwithstanding the stifling heat, I buried myself under the blanket. "I'm going to sleep," I repeated. Speaking with his old familiar voice, my father said: "When you were small, we could never get you to go to sleep in a darkened room. I remember how . . ." "Papa, I beg you, I want to sleep. I'm so tired." And Jan said, with that severity which was so unfamiliar to me: "Do let us sleep, Father."

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Next morning, the same stifling heat pressed round me, though seemingly hardened by the light of day: the heat that parches one's throat and sets one's heart racing. I got up, a longstanding custom.

Once in the open, I allowed my legs to conduct me through the streets of which I had long since lost all

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**Lubartowska 18 (today 24), the Szternfinkiel family house (on the left).  
Lublin before World War I.**



**Anna as a student (1938, Vervies, Belgium).**



**In France, 1947.**



**Anna and Aron Langfus with the daughter Maria in the '50s., France.**

**Au Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui :**

# "LES LÉPREUX"

**C**ETTE pièce (la première pièce d'Anna Langfus) est un témoignage. Direct. Impressionnant.

L'action de passe en 1941, dans la Pologne occupée. Un appartement, une nuit, quelques heures à se surprendre jour après jour le bruit des pas sur le plancher de l'immeuble.

et la femme (arrangement) au « aryenne ». Il s'aperçoit du jus jusqu'aux et fait lutter qu'il ne gué- lépre.

deau un peu dans la dis- ent pas ce son public en elant ce qu'il pas oublier.

ouleversante): ra et Carmen Marion. Mise éeff. Décors : usique: Jean

qu'un nombre tions. Ne per- pour aller au hui (salle de ), 101. boule- ré 87-93)... et 'en perdre en

**LECLERC.**



Une scène des « Lépreux » jouée par Sacha Pitoëff (à genoux) et sa compagnie.

**Française**  
**ii" présente**  
**toëff dans**  
**LÉPREUX**  
**na Langfus**

emple, le mélodrame toujours évité, l'adresse (c'est une première assez grande pour que s touchés. Du moins, r moi.

lle juive se terre dans t de Léna, une chré- femme de Sam. Elle terreur d'une perqui- effets de cette claustra- nt sans doute mieux ns un roman. Sacha i cependant créer, avec rande simplicité, une renante, d'un vé- mi-teinte très suffisant, e le sobre décor d'An- ce.

le sera massacrée, sur tion du père de Léna, est un personnage des- u grossièrement. Seuls l'ava

A review of Anna Langfus' first play in French press.



Prix Goncourt winner. 1962.