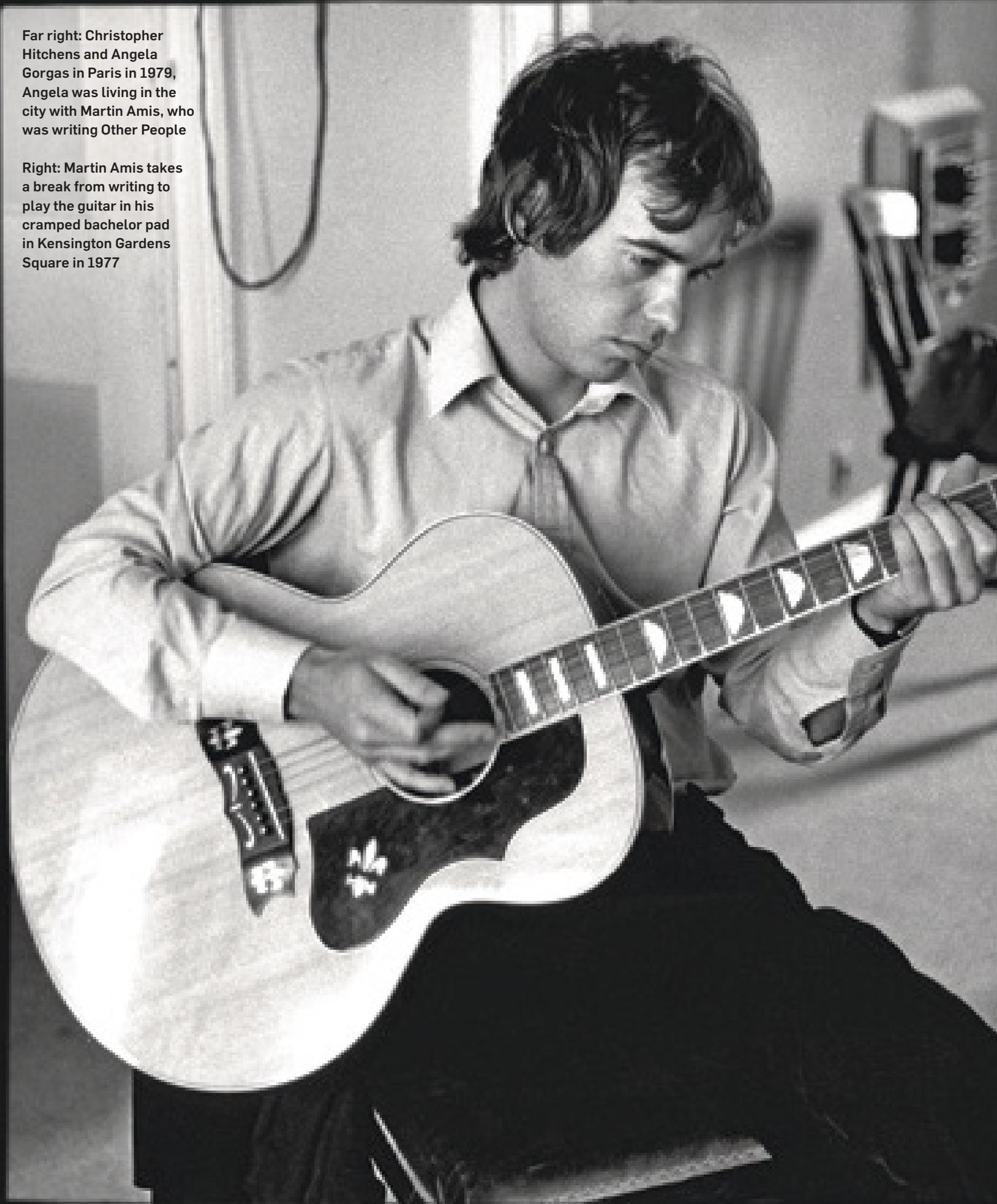


Far right: Christopher Hitchens and Angela Gargas in Paris in 1979, Angela was living in the city with Martin Amis, who was writing *Other People*

Right: Martin Amis takes a break from writing to play the guitar in his cramped bachelor pad in Kensington Gardens Square in 1977





# BOYS AND GIRLS, ROMANCE AND BRO'MANCE

Martin Amis and Christopher Hitchens discuss love, friendship and each other, while their fellow writer, Candia McWilliam, sums them both up

**T**hey face the camera with the steady, unflinching gaze of the chosen; clever, beautiful and rich, most of them, down from Oxford and apparently with a life of unbroken promise ahead of them. Yet Martin Amis, baby-faced, brooding, and his friend, the writer and polemicist Christopher Hitchens, each claim to have harboured a suspicion that they would “not only fail, but go under”. Neither did of course, but the years have seen a terrible harvesting of some of their friends.

Amschel Rothschild, the beautiful, gamin boy with the face like an El Greco portrait (pictured on page 41), hung himself in 1996 aged 41. Adam Shand Kydd was found dead in Phnom Penn in 2004, possibly from a drug overdose. Tobias Rodgers, the antiquarian bookseller and notorious giver of parties to which “the famous, the brilliant, the difficult and the unknown” were routinely invited, died in 1997. “He was helpless and somehow unhelpable,” his obituary noted. The writer Candia McWilliam, photographed at 21 (overleaf), all long ►►►



**Candia McWilliam at the peak of her beauty in 1977. She became a successful novelist and winner of several literary accolades including the Betty Trask Award**

limbs and limpid eyes, is now blind, suffering a condition called blepharospasm which means she is unable to lift her eyelids.

There have been marriages, divorces, trysts and partings. The photographer Angela Gorgas first met Amis in 1977 when she and McWilliam shared Amschel Rothschild's house in London's Maida Vale. Her images, capturing the spirit of those times, appear on these pages. Gorgas and Amis became engaged a year later, splitting up in 1981. "I won't talk about why we broke up..." she announces. I wasn't going to ask. Amis's relationship history littered with beautiful girls; mostly clever, well-bred types who could hold their own and to whom he couldn't or wouldn't commit. Kingsley, an epic philanderer, encouraged his sons' promiscuity. When Martin was not quite 16, Kingsley marched him and his brother,

Philip, to a shop north of Piccadilly and bought them each a gross of condoms.

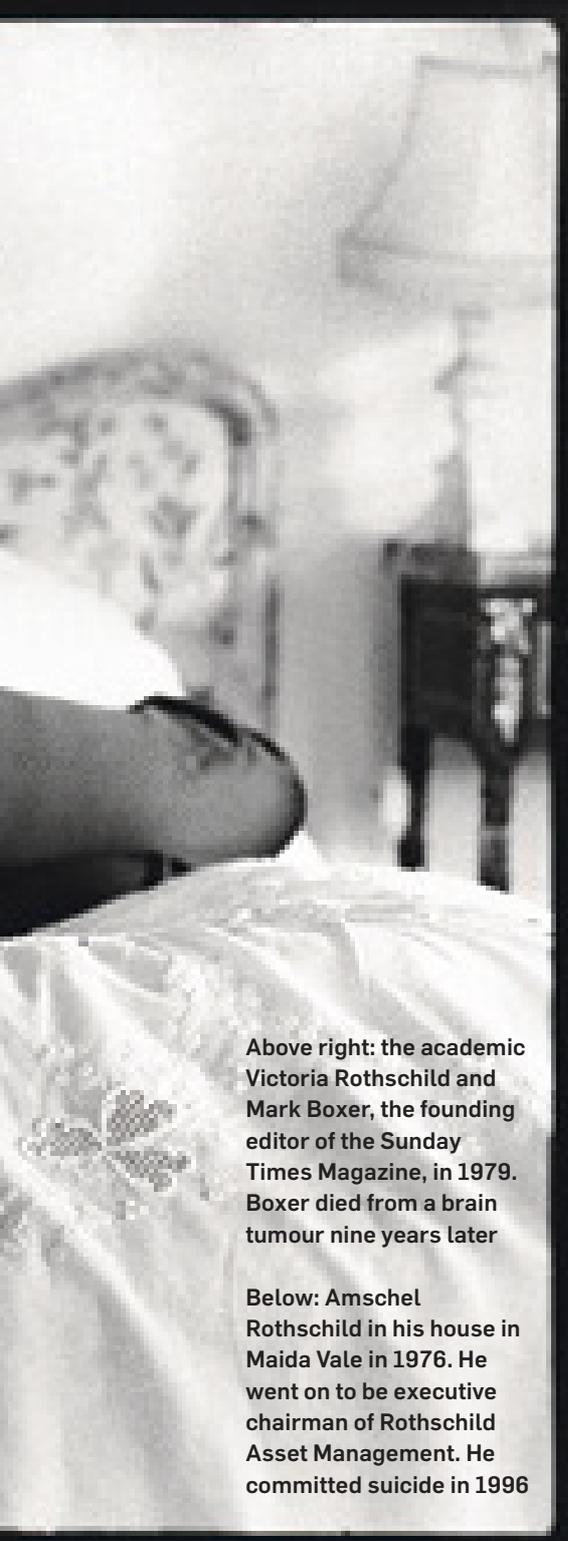
Kingsley liked his son's first novel, *The Rachel Papers*, but couldn't get on with his second, *Dead Babies*: "Breaking the rules, bugging about with the reader..." he complained. Martin claims to recall the exact point at which his father threw *Money*, his most critically acclaimed work, across the room. Yet he says "It wasn't personal, he didn't like anybody else's novels either..." still re-reading Kingsley's books "because it's like being in the company of someone at their very, very best". A better son perhaps, than Kingsley was a father.

#### **Martin Amis**

Everyone is subconsciously petrified as they emerge into adulthood, wondering what they've got, physically and emotionally. I had a

bad patch with girls in the early 1970s, which I never understood at the time, but what I learnt from it was that if it starts to go wrong, it's like a fever you carry round with you and it becomes self-fulfilling. A lot of Philip Larkin's poetry is about this conviction of unattractiveness; it's as if all women can tell you feel unattractive and then everything you say is somehow slightly off.

Everyone is insecure. The most secure people you know are insecure. It's almost a component of sanity but it was Tina Brown who got me out of the cycle. I'd been writing some rather louche columns under the pseudonym of Bruno Holbrook, while seedily attending parties. I revealed to Tina, whom I'd just met, that I was Bruno; she was so keen on the columns, and so publicly affectionate, she cleansed me of all the Larkin self-gloom.



Above right: the academic Victoria Rothschild and Mark Boxer, the founding editor of the *Sunday Times Magazine*, in 1979. Boxer died from a brain tumour nine years later

Below: Amschel Rothschild in his house in Maida Vale in 1976. He went on to be executive chairman of Rothschild Asset Management. He committed suicide in 1996



The Hutch was handsome and charismatic and still is, but I think in the early 1970s, marginally less successful with women than I was. He doesn't like me saying this, but I don't think he really evolved until 1989 when the Berlin wall came down. He's a bit ideological and when he stopped having to raise his scarred fists to defend the ideals of Trotsky, he really came alive as a writer. We've had disagreements, but never any interruption of warm feeling. He was my first love, as it were, that's for sure.

Amschel's place, where Angela lived, was close to being a kind of salon and all sorts of

and caused a great deal of tension between fathers and sons. My father was tremendously permissive and I think that's part of the reason we were close. There wasn't any rivalry in that way at all. I minded a lot when he refused to read my books — the first time, it was like a physical blow; he'd identified me as tricky and postmodern and didn't make any concessions for me. I was very pleased when he read *Time's Arrow* though, and the pleasure that gave me did make me feel I had been missing out.

What kills us all is in the end, is the death of people we know. It becomes this terrible

## THERE WERE NO WOMEN AT OUR LUNCHEES. NOT THAT WE TALKED PUSSY, OR NOT MUCH. BUT IT WAS A CHAPS THING

odd types would show up there. Otherwise we'd pitch up in people's flats and we spent a tremendous amount of time eating out, probably because nobody cooked. Christopher and I once worked out we spent a third of our salaries in restaurants. Angela was known as Angela Gorgeous, we were slightly on and off towards the end and didn't take the plunge which I think had a lot to do with time of life. Tina [Brown] accused me of never having had my heart broken and there's something in that. But then you reach a point when you really do want to get married — you want a child — and that feeling didn't come on me forcefully until my mid thirties. Christopher used to call this panic in women "the cusp of hell"...

It was decided in the 1960s that there would be sex before marriage. This was terrible news for those who had gone before

weight, it builds up and we can't take it. I've lost some very good friends over the past ten years; my sister, Sally, died in 2000, which I suppose was alcohol-related and that was awful. I remember reading somewhere you can count on one hand the great American writers who didn't die of alcoholism. With Kingsley, it was ominously connected to greed and to satiety. "You can't write all day," he used to say. "And that leaves a dangerous amount of time left for drinking..."

### Christopher Hitchens

I met Martin properly in 1973 when he threw his own book party for *The Rachel Papers*. Clive James was there in denim hipsters and despite my own truly dreadful attire I got off with Mart's sister, Sally; I took her to The Cadogan Hotel, possibly secretly wishing





Left: Martha Mlinaric, the wife of the designer David Mlinaric, with Sir Frederick Ashton (centre), a former director of the Royal Ballet, and the photographer David Ball after yet another long lunch in 1977

Below: Kingsley Amis, the Booker prize-winning author and Martin's father, and Pat Kavanagh, Martin's literary agent from 1972-1995, in 1978

it could be Mart. Kingsley was there and I was very struck by what an amazing relationship they had. They talked about women, they exchanged literary gossip and filthy jokes. Later, I shared drunken evenings at Kingsley's house and ached with envy because I'd have loved that kind of relationship with my own father. But towards the end of Kingsley's life, he stopped being funny and Mart had a very hard time of it.

Mart asked me to do some reviews for the Times Literary Supplement and that's how I became involved in the permanent floating crap game that was the Friday lunch. We met in a terrible wine bar underneath Blackfriars station, then at Bertorelli's in Charlotte Street for a bit, then some bistro in Fleet Street, finally settling down in a Turkish Cypriot kebab joint on Theobalds Road.

You can't conspire to be a member of a set, you only realise later that there probably was such a thing. James Fenton was always there,

talking pussy. Or not much. But it was a chaps thing. There was this gradual realisation that Thatcherism was coming and the liberal allegiances that almost all of us held were subject to diminishing returns. Clive became less and less left-wing and Martin oscillated.

By 1980, Martin was in tax exile, having made a lot of money writing the script for Saturn 3, considered by good critics to be the worst film ever. I moved into his sock — where you lived was your sock; your rug was your hair. There were a lot of word games of that kind. What if you changed the word "heart" to "dick" in any well-known song or phrase? Bury my dick at wounded knee. Dickbreak hotel... They may seem infantile, but they built muscle and they were part of the reason why, when we got together, nobody could leave.

Mart's girlfriends were always good-looking. If I closed my eyes, I could list the order of battle — Victoria Rothschild is on the list, and Angela Gorgas was an absolute vision. Mart

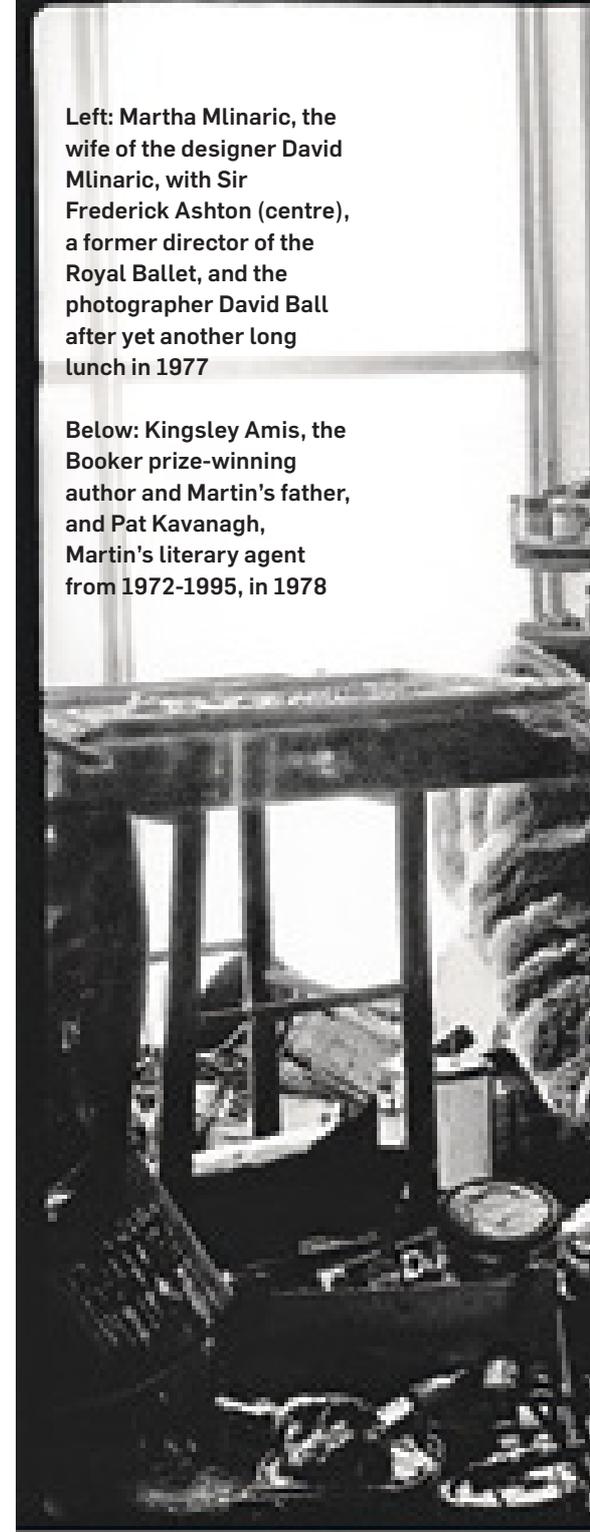
## 'TINA BROWN ACCUSED ME OF NEVER HAVING HAD MY HEART BROKEN. AND THERE'S SOMETHING IN THAT'

Ian McEwan, Julian Barnes, neither as well known then as they are now; Clive James and the Observer literary editor Terry Kilmartin, very often Kingsley would come and Mark Boxer, who was Martin's only rival in terms of sexual charisma and who I think was probably bisexual. Not something you could ever level at Mart. In retrospect I see that the success of these lunches depended entirely on him. Clive James loved them, but he'd always ring to see if Mart was coming and if he wasn't, Clive probably wouldn't come either.

Without anything being said, there were no women at our lunches. Not that we were

made jokes about his short stature before anyone else could. It didn't make any difference. Going to a party with him was pretty much a waste of time because the best I'd end up doing was holding his coat. The effect he had on men as well as women was considerable.

I was appalled to see how many in Angela's pictures are now dead. Mark Boxer, Pat Kavanagh [the literary agent, who married Julian Barnes] looking her absolute best, Adam [Shand Kydd], even more epicine than I remember him. Mart and I are nearing 60, more of my rug has survived than his, and there's been more expansionism in the middle.

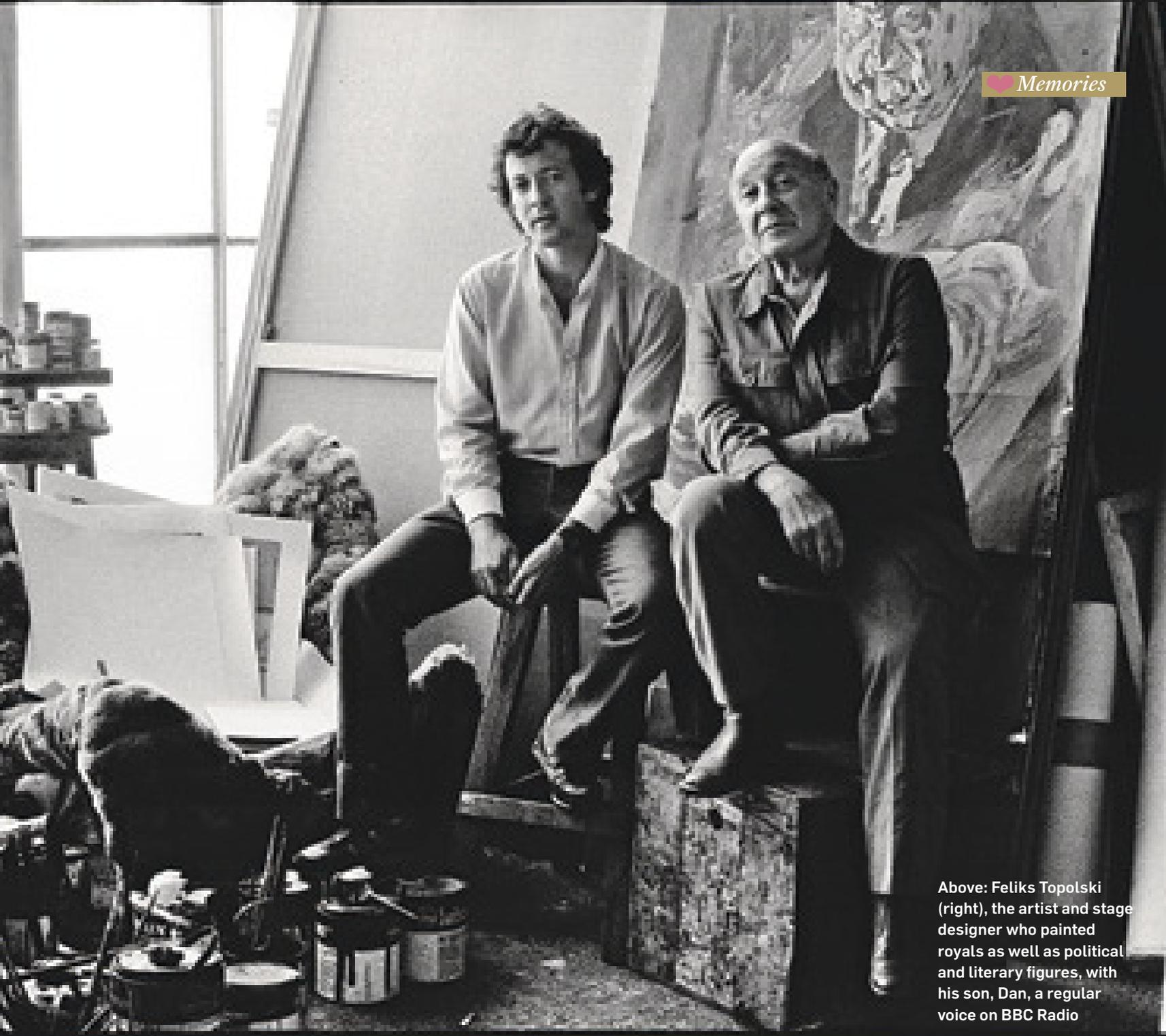


We know everything about the other and we communicate with very few words, sometimes just gestures. We've fought, but never about anything that has made any difference. He is my most dear and indispensable friend.

### Candia McWilliam

I think I was pretty extraneous to that group of friends, in that I wasn't closely involved with any of them, though I was devoted to pretty much all of them. I always felt different — I was Scottish and provincial and they were all urban and confident and secure in who they were, or perhaps pretending to be and then growing into it, who's to know?

My mother died when I was nine — she may have killed herself, I just don't know, but I learnt habits of suppression that I think made me very difficult to be around. I had to build a



Above: Feliks Topolski (right), the artist and stage designer who painted royals as well as political and literary figures, with his son, Dan, a regular voice on BBC Radio



protective umbrella out of my own bones and skin. I never regarded my looks as a valuable commodity, rather I was conscious that I was in the company of something that didn't always do me favours and might even do me harm.

Angela and I shared Amschel Rothschild's house: masses of books, very little furniture, white walls and grey carpet. Ammy lived very modestly. He liked half an avocado with mayonnaise for lunch, and Angela and I lived on loaves of Greek bread with butter and Marmite. I was permanently worried about money. I'd won Vogue's talent contest when I was 15 and I had no idea what was involved; I soon realised you needed a tough character and a private income and I had neither. I had one pair of jeans, my school jersey and an old fox fur I'd found in the Liberty sale. My job was to write captions and stick down the copy with

cow gum. I spent a lot of time vomiting. I was terrified. I wanted the world to crack and show me this ordeal was over.

I've wondered a lot about this group of friends and while I don't see many, either due to subtraction through death or just because life is complicated, I realise the conversation hasn't stopped. Christopher and Martin's work constantly exhilarates me and re-implants me in their world; I love watching the squash game of their friendship as it has enacted itself through their written words and I still feel delighted by the weather of their thought ■

**Interviews by Caroline Scott**

*Martin Amis and Friends: Photographs by Angela Gorgas is at the National Portrait Gallery, St Martin's Place, London WC2 until July 5, 2009. Entrance is free. Visit [www.npg.org.uk](http://www.npg.org.uk) or tel: 020 7306 0055*