GILLIAN FREEMAN, who has died aged 89, was a novelist gifted with an uncanny ability to get inside the skin of characters from very different social backgrounds to her own, as well as a flair for precise observation of detail and motive.

These talents were exploited to notable effect by the maverick publisher Anthony Blond, who commissioned her best-known work, The Leather Boys (1961), with a directive to present a “Romeo and Romeo in the South London suburbs”.

Published under the jokey pseudonym Eliot George, the book, concerning unhappy teenage husband Reggie, torn between his wife Dot and gay biker Pete, was turned by Sidney Furie into a controversial film in 1964 (for which Gillian Freeman wrote the screenplay), starring Dudley Sutton and Colin Campbell as the bikers, and Rita Tushingham as Reggie’s unloved wife. The film is now regarded as a gay classic; yet Gillian Freeman herself was a happily married mother of two.

As she was also Jewish, an even bigger leap of imagination was required for Nazi Lady: The Diary of Elisabeth von Stahlenberg, published by Blond & Briggs in 1978, the first edition featuring a cover photograph of Hitler at Berchtesgaden with a woman purporting to be the author of the diaries – an innkeeper’s daughter from Bavaria married to a film director at Goebbels’s Ministry of Propaganda.

Among other gems, “Elisabeth” records being propositioned at a party: “I pushed him off, and he said ‘Don’t reject me, dear Frau von Stahlenberg. Your beautiful body maddens me’.

“I couldn’t believe my ears. He said, ‘I want to make love to you. Now. Tonight!’ Of course I’ve heard all the stories.

“I said, ‘Dr Goebbels, I can’t, I am happily married.’”

In his memoir, Jew Made in England (2004), Blond recalled showing the text to the historian and Tory politician Alan Clark, who declared it to be “indisputably genuine … a contemporary document of the highest importance to social historians of the epoch”. The American publishers, meanwhile, offered to double their advance if “Elisabeth” would tour the US.

Not long after publication, however, the Evening Standard blew Gillian Freeman’s cover, though that did not prevent the publishers Canongate including an extract from the diaries in The Secret Annexe (2005), an anthology of war diarists edited by Irene and Alan Taylor.

Gillian Freeman was born in north London on December 5 1929 and educated at Francis Holland School and Lynton House, Maidenhead. She read English Supplement critic describing it as “altogether an astonishing novel for a young woman to have written”.

Gillian Freeman’s other novels include The Leader (1965), a disturbing “what if” story about a lowly London bank clerk who uses his charisma and oratorical gifts to recruit followers to his new Britain First party, beginning a seemingly inexorable rise to power as a fascist leader.

The Alabaster Egg (1970) was a historical novel whose title refers to a gift from the gay King Ludwig II to his lover that later finds its way into the possession of a young Jewish woman in Nazi Germany. An Easter Egg Hunt (1981), set in a girls’ boarding school during the First World War, was an Angela Brazil-style mystery tale of a young girl who disappears from her school on Easter Sunday. His Mistress’s Voice (1999) counterpoised the frivolity of the London theatre world of Victorian England with the position of Jews through the life of a Polish-born Jewish cantor caught up in a liaison with a leading actress.

Her last novel, But Nobody Lives in Bloomsbury (2006), a recreation of the world of the Bloomsbury group, prompted the Independent on Sunday’s critic to observe that “bringing such overpowering characters to life on the page without merely reiterating the caricatures that they have become is something of which Freeman should be very proud.”

In addition to her novels, Gillian Freeman wrote several screenplays, including Day After the Fair (1986), about a Victorian woman who finds escape from her loveless marriage in a romantic correspondence
with the distant lover of her illiterate maid, and Robert Altman's suspense drama *That Cold Day in the Park* (1969). She contributed dialogue sequences to *The Girl on a Motorcycle* (1968).

She also wrote scenarios for ballets, most notably for Sir Kenneth MacMillan's hugely successful *Mayerling*, recounting the events leading up to the violent deaths of Rudolf, Crown Prince of Austria, and his mistress, Mary Vetsera, which premiered in London in 1978 before entering the repertoires of ballet companies around the world.

Her nonfiction works include *The Undergrowth of Literature* (1967), a study of pornography; *The Schoolgirl Ethic: The Life and Work of Angela Brazil* (1976), and *Ballet Genius: Twenty Great Dancers of the Twentieth Century* (1988), the last of those written with her husband, the novelist and ballet critic Edward Thorpe, whom she married in 1955.

He survives her with two daughters, the actresses Harriet and Matilda Thorpe.

*Gillian Freeman, born December 5 1929, died February 23 2019*

Language and Literature at the University of Reading, graduating in 1951, and afterwards worked as a copywriter, schoolteacher, reporter and literary secretary to the novelist Louis Golding before embarking on her own literary career.

Her first novel, *The Liberty Man*, published by Longmans in 1955, concerned a naval rating who becomes involved in a brief, sensual affair with a middle-class schoolteacher. It won unanimously favourable reviews, the *Times Literary*...