Gillian Freeman

Gillian Freeman, the screenwriter and novelist who worked with Kenneth MacMillan on the scenario for his ballets Mayerling and Isadora, has died at the age of 89 following complications from dementia.

Born in London in 1929, Freeman graduated from the University of Reading in 1951 and worked as a copywriter, and then a schoolteacher, before publishing her first novel, The Liberty Man, in 1955. Further novels included The Leather Boys in 1961, which dealt explicitly with a homosexual relationship at a time when sex between gay men was a criminal offence (it was made into a feature film in 1964); The Alabaster Egg in 1970 and Nazi Lady: The Diaries of Elisabeth von Stahlenberg, 1933-1948 in 1978.

Freeman married the dance writer and critic Edward Thorpe in 1955, and the couple had two daughters, the actresses Harriet Thorpe and Matilda Thorpe. Edward Thorpe was a close friend of Kenneth MacMillan, and the choreographer asked Freeman to work with him on the complicated scenario of his three-act ballet Mayerling, first performed at Covent Garden in 1978. Following the success of Mayerling, the pair collaborated again on Isadora in 1981. She also wrote the libretto for Lynn Seymour’s ballet Intimate Letters in 1978, and was the author, along with Thorpe, of Ballet Genius: Twenty Great Dancers of the Twentieth Century.

Freeman is survived by her husband and daughters, and also by five grandchildren, including the dancer Jack Thorpe Baker.

JONATHAN GRAY

Gillian Freeman, born December 5, 1929; died February 23, 2019.