Elisabeth Mann Borgese
1919-2003

Elisabeth Mann Borgese was most certainly a mover and shaker. She made homes in at least five countries, and her influence in developing concern and knowledge about the oceans was worldwide. She showed her independence early. When her author father Thomas Mann left Munich for exile in Switzerland in 1933, she defiantly returned (briefly) for high school. Then at 20 she met Antonio Guiseppe Borgese, an exile from Mussolini’s Italy and a Dante scholar, “and convinced him fairly quickly that he should marry me”. He was 56. They soon had two daughters, Angelica and Dominica.

They moved to the University of Chicago and, after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, co-founded the Committee for a World Constitution. They worked on this intensively for three years (1946-8), and drafted a constitution urging a world body far more powerful than the United Nations. “We advocated,” she told interviewer Cindy Weeks, “that the elements of life — namely water,
the atmosphere, energy and minerals should be the common heritage of mankind. We based our whole world council on regions, not directly on states. Our draft convention was quite advanced.”

They moved to Italy during the McCarthy witch-hunt. Borgese died in 1952 and she worked on publications for the Ford Foundation and wrote short stories. She also wrote, after 20 years of thought, *The Ascent of Women* (1964), an ambitious study, ranging through sociology, biology and linguistics.

In 1967 Malta’s ambassador Arvid Pardo made a seminal speech at the UN, focusing on the oceans as “the common heritage of mankind”. The oceans took over her life and she saw them as “a great laboratory for the making of a new world order”. She began organizing Pacem in Maribus conferences, and later founded the International Ocean Institute in Malta and the International Centre for Ocean Development from her base at Dalhousie University, to teach fisheries officials, diplomats, industrialists, civil servants, scientists, lawyers the elements of ocean management. To influence the UN Law of the Sea Conference (1972-82) she joined the Austrian delegation, which led the landlocked group; and wrote the magnificent book *The Drama of the Oceans*, which warns particularly of pollution killing the chain of sea-life.

She had other interests. She saw animals as part of an “intellectual and spiritual continuum” and taught dogs to type and, more rewarding, to play piano pieces by Mozart and Bach. She was an avid skier into old age, and died at 83 on a trip to the Swiss Alps.