

# Obituary

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THEODOR GEORGE HENRY STREHLOW

T. G. H. STREHLOW, Emeritus Professor of the University of Adelaide and a scholar of international reputation in Australian linguistics and anthropology, died on 3 October 1978. Ted Strehlow, as he was known to his friends, was a member of the AHRC since 1956 and a Foundation Fellow of the Academy. The circumstances of his life were romantic. He was born and grew up at Hermannsburg Mission in Central Australia where his father, who also had scholarly achievements, was the respected pastor. Strehlow had the priceless advantage of learning an Aranda dialect as one of his mother tongues. He later served (1936-42) as a Commonwealth Government patrol officer and Deputy Director of Native Affairs in the Northern Territory. His close cultural bonds with the Aranda led to his being permitted to witness and to record in film their secret ceremonies, dances and songs.

Because of archaisms and various devices designed to obscure the language to non-initiates, much study and inside knowledge is required in order to understand the Aranda myths. Presumably the material that Strehlow has preserved for posterity is irreplaceable, and it is to be hoped that more of his unpublished material will be made available through the efforts of the Strehlow Research Foundation, which was formed in Adelaide towards the end of his life. He contributed more specifically to linguistics with his *Aranda Phonetics and Grammar* (1944). His anthropological publications also rest on a strong philological base, and include *Aranda Traditions* (1947), and the massive *Songs of Central Australia* (1971). Strehlow also wrote a moving literary work, *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* (1969). This recounts, as through the eyes of the young Theodor Strehlow, the heroic journey of his sick and suffering father from Hermannsburg Mission to Horseshoe Bend on the Fincke River, where death ended the older Strehlow's terrible sufferings. I loved to hear Strehlow talk of his other experiences in Central Australia. The romantic nature of these was perhaps missed by many listeners because of his dry and matter-of-fact manner of speech, and a certain humility which may have been connected with his deep religious faith.

Strehlow was educated at Immanuel College, Adelaide, and then at the University of Adelaide. After war service in 1945 as instructor at the LHQ School of Civil Affairs, he lectured on English literature at the University of Adelaide and then had two years at the Australian National University as a Research Fellow. In 1954 he returned to the University of Adelaide as Reader in Australian Linguistics, and later became Professor. In his latter years his wife Kathy assisted him in his researches and she is now actively concerned with the work of the Strehlow Research Foundation.

In this obituary I may have left out some pertinent details because I am writing this while abroad and without ready access to some of the relevant books and papers. Perhaps this obituary might have been more appropriately written by someone who was expert in linguistics and anthropology, but I write as a friend and former colleague at the University of Adelaide who has been proud to have known and to have looked up to one of Australia's great scholars.

*J. J. C. Smart*