

Book Review

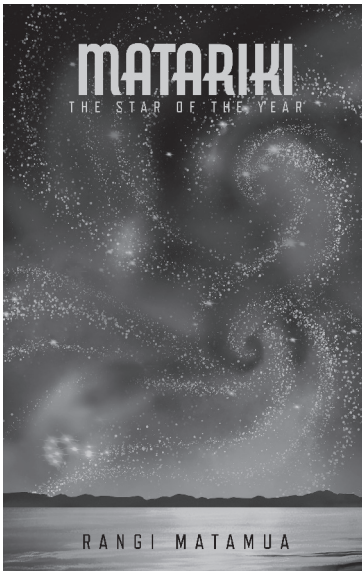
Matariki: The Star of the Year.

By Rangi Matamua. (2017). Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand: Huia.

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Dr Rangi Matamua (Tūhoe) is an associate professor at the University of Waikato, with research interests in Māori astronomy and star lore, Māori culture, and Māori language development, research and revitalisation. He has travelled extensively throughout Aotearoa, both researching and presenting the ideas that have been condensed into this slim volume. Based largely on the manuscript of his tūpuna Te Kōkau and Rāwiri Te Kōkau, written in the late 1800s, Dr Matamua offers a short but comprehensive study of Matariki (the Pleiades star cluster).

A brief introduction outlines the importance of astronomy to early Māori. Tohunga kōkōrangī (Māori astronomy experts) would observe and learn the names, movements and meanings of hundreds of stars and constellations, then use this knowledge to inform daily activities. The appearance of certain stars would tell Māori communities to begin a harvest or

that a new season had started, while observation of a star's clarity, colour and position relative to the horizon or other celestial bodies could predict favourable hunting or travelling conditions, or impending trouble such as war parties or death. Matamua recognises that much of this knowledge, as with other Māori knowledge and customs, was marginalised by colonisation, before a revival of Matariki celebrations in particular and Māori astronomy in general began in the early 1990s.

Each chapter expands an important theme: Pleiades' meaning and importance throughout the world and particularly Polynesia, where the similarities to Māori views of Matariki are noted; Māori lore and spiritual beliefs around Matariki and her children; maramataka Māori (the Māori lunar calendar) and Matariki's place. The latter chapters

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explore the rising and setting of Matariki and the ways these are read; ceremonies and celebrations; and finishes with a brief commentary on the revival and future of Matariki.

Colour photographs from Erica Sinclair (Te Whānau-ā-Apanui) and intricate illustrations by Te Haunui Tuna (Tūhoe) are scattered liberally throughout the book, providing both light relief from the text and further information in visual form. Matariki's whanau, including her husband Rehua and eight children, as depicted by Tuna on page 25 is a particularly stunning representation.

A number of misconceptions are addressed in *Matariki*, in particular, the timing of Matariki celebrations in May or June. Māori followed a 354-day lunar calendar that does not align to the 365-day Gregorian calendar, meaning that Matariki can begin any time from mid-June to mid-July — a table on page 58 helpfully predicts the setting and rising dates of Matariki from 2017 to 2050. The suggestion that the Māori New Year begins with the new moon after the first sighting of Matariki is also challenged; the new moon, *whiro*, is symbolic of darkness, illness, and trouble. Matariki's role as a predictor for the year's harvest, weather, and tribal fortunes make it unlikely that these signs would be read at such an ominous time.

Matamua brings a wealth of knowledge to this task. The extensive end-notes and bibliography point to many years of research, while also offering further reading to anyone interested. Many of the books and articles date back to the late 1800s and early 1900s, and the discerning reader will recognise both historical and contemporary writers: Elsdon Best, Sir Apirana Ngata, Hirini Moko Mead, and Libby Hakaraia, to name but a few.

Matariki, to the best of my knowledge, was not written for therapists, but reading with a therapeutic eye provides a number of insights. The information presented about the star cluster and its purpose and meanings is supplemented by knowledge of *te reo*, *mātauranga Māori*, and *te ao Māori*. Accessible to any reader, much of that knowledge is easily transferable to the therapy room. I was particularly enamoured with the *whakatauki* liberally scattered throughout the book (and others are helpfully collected, translated, and explained on pages 95-99). “Matariki, huarahi ki te oranga tangata; Matariki, pathway to the wellbeing of man” (p. 26) could prompt any number of explorations with a patient. Matariki's role in guiding the dead (see pp. 62-67) may assist the grieving client, and her invitation to celebrate life — “... when Matariki gathers in the sky, it calls people to gather on earth” (p. 72) — might recall those who are depressed.

A search of the Auckland Libraries catalogue reveals that the majority of current publications on Matariki are children's books, so this *Matariki: The Star of the Year* offers adult readers an engaging and accessible introduction to the many roles and meanings of Matariki for Māori.

My only critique of the book concerns Dr Matamua's brief final section on the future of Matariki. He recommends that Matariki practices be repositioned “at the heart of Māori spirituality” (p. 90) and underpinned by Māori language and culture, but offers no further thoughts on how this might be achieved. I hope that this is further explored in the larger book he is currently working on.

Matariki: The Star of the Year is also published in *te reo* as *Matariki: Te Whetū Tapu o te Tau*.

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