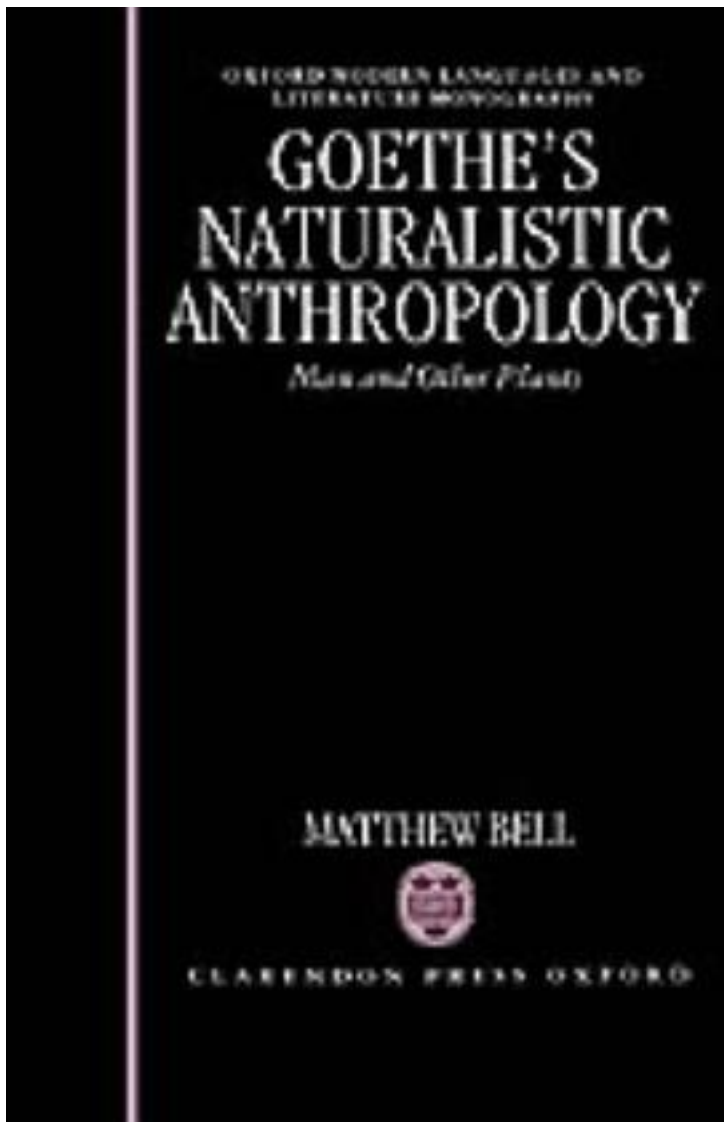


Goethe's Naturalistic Anthropology



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For many readers in the English-speaking world, Goethe is somehow separate from the European intellectual and literary tradition. In this unique and wide-ranging study, Matthew Bell aims to correct this view by showing how Goethe portrayed human beings as part of a natural continuum, very much in the spirit of the Enlightenment. Dr Bell's fresh readings of Goethe's major and lesser-known texts are set against the background of the science and philosophy of the age, and the writer's debts to other thinkers are analysed. The development of Goethe as a writer and thinker is traced from his sentimental epistolary novel Werther - read in the context of the rise of psychological theory in the Enlightenment - to the emergence of his own theory of 'empirical psychology' in the great roman a clef of 1809, Die Wahlverwandtschaften. In a major new interpretation of Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, Matthew Bell follows the ideal of organic growth from the novel's origins in Enlightenment optimism to its revision in an atmosphere of post-revolutionary scepticism. Placing Goethe in an anthropological context, Goethe's Naturalistic Anthropology demonstrates that eighteenth-century anthropological thought provides an essential, hitherto overlooked context for the understanding of Goethe's literary enterprise from Werther to Die Wahlverwandtschaften.

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