



# Women's Clothing and William Morris's Philosophy in *The Wood Beyond the World*

In Comparison with *News from Nowhere*

210165 Koumi Chigira

# Background

## William Morris

: Designer, poet, writer of 19th century

- Most previous studies only focus on clothing descriptions in ***News from Nowhere* (1891)**.
- However, few studies have analyzed the female characters' fashion in ***The Wood Beyond the World* (1894)**.

⇒ aspects that have been overlooked could be revealed by exploring Morris's philosophy from the perspective of clothing.



# The aim and method

## **Aim**

to explore Morris 's opinions about women's fashion *in The Wood Beyond the World*.

## **Method**

a comparative analysis of the female characters' clothing in *The Wood Beyond the World* and *News from Nowhere*.



# Statement about women's clothing

- **Women can select their fashion regardless of social status**
- **He opposes the fashion that is harmful to the female body.**

“The only way to protect **freedom of choice** is to resist the pressure of unnatural and ugly fashion”.

“**Female body should be covered gracefully**, not sewn into a sack or crammed into a box”

# Ex.) News from Nowhere (1891)

- Guest(Main character): **criticize for wearing corsets like women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century**
- Clara: **opposes the idea that women should wear clothing suitable for economic power**
- Ellen: **prefers simple and loose clothing** to the popular fashion of the 19th century like luxurious

# Fashion reform movement and Morris

- Concern about **female health** regarding the popular trend of corsets.
  - ⇒ The necessity of fashion reform is discussed
  - ⇒ The fashion reform movement became serious in **the 1880s**.  
(**corresponds with the period that Morris started to remark about women's clothing**)

The aims of the Rational Dress Society

- : the promotion of **the rational dress**
  - = healthy, comfortable, and attractive
  - (**similarity with Morris's idea**)

⇒ There is a possibility that the women's fashion reform movement influenced Morris's idea about clothing

# *The Wood Beyond the Word* (1894)

## **Story**

Walter was confused by a vision of three figures: the Lady, her Maid, and the Dwarf, then he strayed into “The Wood Beyond the World”. Walter falls in love with the Maid and overcomes many difficulties, they married as king and queen in a peaceful country.

# Clothing of the Lady and the Maid

## the Lady

- figure : display her power and high status
- clothing : gold、jewelry、luxurious

⇒ luxurious fashion as a symbol of her social status



## the Maid

- figure : courage, wisdom, cleverness
- clothing : barefoot、simple、  
⇒ decide her clothing by herself regardless of social status

The Lady is portrayed as a negative character  
⇒ contrasting description (luxurious ⇔ simple、attachment to social status ⇔ rejection) express that **simple clothing not associated with social status is ideal**

# Comparison

Common feature	<i>The Wood Beyond the World</i>	News from Nowhere
<b>freedom of choice</b>	the Maid : individual selection is emphasized  ⇔ the Lady : clothing as a symbol of social power	Clara : deny clothing associated with social status  Ellen : choose simple clothing
<b>simplicity</b>	the Maid : simple clothing (barefoot、expose her skin)  ⇔ the Lady : luxurious dress	Clara : barefoot、simple clothing Ellen : prefers simple clothing

# Conclusion

**Morris places importance on the following two points as ideal women's clothing**

- ① They have freedom of choice in clothing
- ② simple and comfortable clothing

**This value is reflected in *The Wood Beyond the World* and *News from Nowhere* in different forms.**