MEMLIN: Bathsheba c. 1485

GOSSAERT: Amphitrite 1516

Total height 7 units

Total height 8 units
To understand why people of any period look as they do in their clothes, one must first understand what they look like, or thought they ought to look like, under their clothes. If we look at our ancestors of five centuries ago, we receive a considerable shock, as human anatomy seems to have altered far faster than the laws of evolution would allow under normal conditions. Between us and the fifteenth century lie five hundred years of an artistic tradition for depicting the human body, particularly the unclad human body, which is based on the Italian Renaissance idea of human anatomy, which in its turn is dependent on the ideals evolved in Greece in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.

Since the Renaissance, most artists have accepted these ideals of muscular, broad-shouldered men and full-breasted women with discernible waistlines and short, full hips: only minor alterations were imposed on these ideals by the whims of passing fashions. In addition, most post-Renaissance depictions of nude females have had an erotic purpose, no matter how intellectualized the artist may have made them by presenting them as classical heroines or allegorical figures, and we today can recognize that purpose. However, a survey of visual sources in fifteenth-century northern Europe presents us with a different concept of the human body, particularly of the female body, a concept so different that it is difficult to believe the evidence of documentary sources that this, to us, alien female form was actually considered highly desirable.

Although few of us would be able to give the mathematical proportions worked out for areas of the body in relation to each other by classical or classicizing (Renaissance) artists, most of us would instinctively recognize a marked departure from them. If we use the length of the human head as a measurement, we would expect to see men whose total height equals about eight head lengths, legs four heads, shoulders about two and a half heads wide and pelvises almost one and a half heads wide. Women would likewise have legs half their total height, with the use this time of the space between the breasts as a secondary measurement; this should also be the distance from the lower breast to the

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navel and from the navel to the thighs. Instead, we tend to find men whose height corresponds more or less to those canons, except that the legs gradually seem to take up more of the height, until in Memline’s ‘Martyrdom of St Sebastian’ in the Louvre (c. 1490)\textsuperscript{1} the saint’s legs are actually four and a half times the length of the head. The shoulders of well-bred men are never more than one and three quarter heads wide until the very end of the century; the pelvis is usually slightly narrower than one and a half heads wide: in other words, it conforms better to modern standards. In addition, the bones within male and female bodies are usually depicted as very fine, with just enough flesh covering them to stop them from looking like near-skeletons, and this helps the artist greatly in his portrayal of slender, ethereal creatures. Virtually the only men who have heavy muscles are coarse, ill-bred louts, like the shaggy scowling executioner in the ‘Martyrdom of St Denis’ of 1416 by Henri Bellechose and his sadistically cheerful counterpart in the mid-century ‘Retable of St George’\textsuperscript{2} (Public executioners, though essential figures, were nonetheless social outcasts, expected to live outside the towns they served, and as such could clearly not be expected to possess any refinements of person or personality.)

Women present a more radical departure from the classical format, in that their legs often seem to be less than half their total height. The distortion of the female body is aided by the elongation of the space between the lower breasts and the navel to twice the classical norm, as well as the placing of the breasts themselves very high up on the rib cage, towards the arm socket, and the omission of a definite waistline, in favour of a long swelling stomach: as Kenneth Clark said, ‘By some strange interaction of flesh and spirit this long curve of the stomach has become the means by which the body has achieved the ogival rhythm of late Gothic architecture.’\textsuperscript{3}

Almost the only literary description of male beauty occurs in a poem written by the French poetess, Christine de Pisan, ‘Le livre du dit de Poissy’. In it, Christine describes a journey she made in April 1400 with some friends to see her daughter in the convent at Poissy, and on the journey the travellers entertained themselves with discussions about love. One of the young women tells of the knight she fell in love with seven years previously and with whom she had two happy years before he left for, and failed to return from, a campaign to help the King of Hungary against the Turks. This paragon was not yet twenty-four years old, tall and straight, with broad shoulders, long powerful arms and long straight hands, low hips and strong lean legs (with no veins!). His face sounds, by our standards, somewhat effeminate—he had hardly begun to shave his small round chin, his lips were red but not too full and his mouth small (‘n’ot pas jusqu’aux oreilles bouche grande’); his nose was straight, with a long point; and his eyes, which did most damage to the lady’s heart, were well-spaced, brown,
laughing and gentle under long arched eyebrows and brownish curly hair. Otherwise, a man's moral qualities were of far greater importance in making him attractive, or so most writers would have the reader believe.

Descriptions of ideal women are much more common, and tend to follow a somewhat monotonous pattern. Christine's heroines are usually blonde with well-spaced grey eyes; the Poissy poem mentions a girl with this conventional beauty with, in addition, little ears and 'grossete' mouth, a white, round bosom, long thin arms, long fingers, long thin body, low hips, hollow back, round soft stomach, thin legs and little feet. This picture is from the very beginning of the century, but the late fourteenth century poet, Eustache Deschamps, produced several poems which give a clearer picture of the type of ideal female beauty which evolved c. 1380 and which was to dominate the north of Europe throughout the fifteenth century. A compilation of the attractions of his heroines gives a standard of a young girl, aged about fifteen, with skin as white as the fleur-de-lis and rosy dimpled cheeks, fair hair, like fine gold, high forehead, little eyebrows, grey or green eyes, straight nose, round chin, red lips and compact white teeth. All this is set on top of high-set bosom, long arms, slender back, narrow waist, 'bon cul de Paris' and little round feet. An ugly woman is described as being as fat and round as an apple and as dark as an owl; the dislike of dark colouring is repeated in a poem where he declares himself to be ugly, partly because he is short and fat, partly because he has black hair and could be mistaken for a Moor (his nickname was 'Morel', the Moor).

With this information as a starting point we can now consider how closely the visual evidence matches the literary ideal. Male nudes are less widespread in art than female nudes and tend to be restricted to figures of Adam, the Souls at the Last Judgement, Christ and various Christian martyrs; Christ's emaciated body is perhaps an unreliable source of visual information, as its appearance may be influenced by the artist's desire to convey asceticism and physical suffering, but Adam and the Souls are much more likely to be representative of the ideal form as, respectively, the founder of the human race and the mass of humanity. Female nudes are somewhat more widely represented, as Eve, the Souls at the Last Judgement, and in occasional scenes of voyeurism, of Susanna and the Elders, of David and Bathsheba, both of which have the sanction of Scriptural authority to make them respectable subjects for depiction, and the more overt scenes of ladies in their baths being spied on by young men. Even 'respectable' painters like Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden seem to have produced paintings of this type, although they are now lost. One final word of warning is required. Perhaps nowhere is it easier to be misled by the minutely detailed and almost photographic technique employed
15. The God of Love brings his children to the aged poet Guillaume de Machaut, who leans eagerly but somewhat arthritically out of his study to welcome them. Both the God and Machaut wear draped clothing over the half-tailored sleeves of c. 1370.

by Van Eyck and his successors than in the depiction of human beings. This technique can persuade us that what we see in a painting is a completely objective view of reality, simply recorded by the painter and presented for our enjoyment. In fact, in the depiction of human beings, clad or not, few artists can escape completely from the aesthetic ideals of their time, to present us
with recognizably living people. Holbein managed it in his portraits, but Goya, while knowing one thing about anatomy, is confused into expressing another by transferring the effect of the high-waisted dress of his ‘Clothed Maja’ on to the body of his ‘Naked Maja’. Instead, most artists conform more or less closely to purely contemporary canons, presenting us with a highly subjective view of reality. Thus, faced with the depiction of the young (probably teenage) Giovanna Arnolfini (illus. 59) in what is presumably meant to record a ‘perfect marriage’, Van Eyck presents us with a lady whose demureness and passiveness match those of his young, idealized Virgins: when he portrayed his own wife (illus. 64) we can see behind the bland insipidity imposed by the contemporary fashion for eyebrow-less (and hence, expressionless) female faces, to a not-so-young, but very determined woman.

Let us now turn to a more detailed examination of the visual evidence. The female ideal of high-set bosom and protruding stomach seems to have become important c. 1380, when the most serious problems in dressmaking had been solved, those problems being the cutting of garments to fit tightly without wrinkling and the setting of sleeves into curved armholes. The two phenomena must be connected, as must the curious stance of curved spine with head thrust forward which appears very clearly in early fifteenth-century figures of Eve.

From the 1370s comes a scene (illus. 15) of the God of Love presenting his children to the poet Guillaume de Machaut: Love’s son wears a hip-length doublet which fits badly around the top of his arm, as do the dresses of the two girls. Both sexes have lumpy chests, which make them look like badly stuffed teddy
bears, and the girls in their wide-necked dresses stand as upright as their brother. Their hair is plaits at the sides of their heads, but it does not hide their faces.

By about 1380 things were beginning to change: the Très Belles Heures de Notre Dame, begun c. 1380 for Jean, duc de Berry, contains some scenes where human anatomy seems to have altered considerably, mainly because of the external demands of a new type of dress. The men have longer toes, slightly flatter chests and shorter doublets, all of which are minor alterations beside those which have taken place in the women (illus. 16): female heads jut forward under deep-brimmed hoods which conceal the face completely from the side, and the spine has developed a curve as the stomach is thrust forward, the shoulder blades out and the bust tucked in. The cause of this sudden deformity would appear to be the newest and ultimately favourite weapon in the female wardrobe—the plunging neckline. Now the previously wide neckline has also lowered to reveal for the first time to a startled male population, the female bosom with a minimum of covering. The poet Eustache Deschamps denounced this fashion, as it drove many men to think about rape; older women sewed two bags into the front of their undershirts, into which they put their sagging breasts before lacing themselves up tightly, and each verse ends with a cry which reflects how torturous the whole process must have seemed ‘Dame, aiez pité de tettine!’ Even at the end of his life (c. 1406) Deschamps was still denouncing wide necklines, which, he said, married women used to make other men want them.

The wearing of such open necklines must have caused women considerable discomfort, possibly more mental than physical; after all, clothes may actually be positioned quite securely on the body (and the tightness of the bodices in illustration 16 would presumably have ensured that) but strangeness of attire can make the wearer feel awkward and uncomfortable. Doubtless women feared that the new wide and low necklines would reveal even more than they were intended to, and consequently adopted a stance which would minimize the danger. The thrust-back shoulder blades would have given two extra points over which to stretch and catch the neckline, while this action of itself would inevitably cause the bust to look smaller as the chest appeared concave between the points of the shoulders. Hunched shoulders lead easily to a curved spine, which tends to lead to the protruding of the pelvis. Add to this the likelihood of most women of childbearing age being pregnant every year, with the effect of constant pregnancies on their figures, and we have a possible explanation of the basis in reality from which evolved the fifteenth-century ideal female figure: aesthetic ideals have always been hampered by the resistance of reality.

All women seem to have been expected to display a pronounced ‘pregnant’ stomach, regardless of their marital
status. The girls who represent the zodiacal sign Virgo in calendar miniatures, such as in the Duke of Berry’s *Belles Heures* (by 1409) and his *Très Riches Heures* (by 1416) and the virgin-martyr St Catherine in the former manuscript, seen almost nude on folios 17 and 17v, all conform to the type described by Deschamps and Christine de Pisan, even to their blonde and somewhat insipid prettiness. The desirability of that type is shown by two scenes in the *Belles Heures* involving temptresses: on f. 186 two girls lounge elegantly before the hermit-saint Jerome, causing the saint to turn from the church before which he kneels and from his prayers, and on f. 191 a beautiful woman sent to seduce a Christian youth crawls languidly over him as he bites off his tongue and spits it in her bland face (illus. 39). Similarly, no-one could have understood Adam’s willingness to be led astray by Eve, had she not been worth the threatened punishment, and the Eve in illustration 17 stands before God, head thrust forward, spine curved, with long hips and a somewhat pregnant stomach over short legs. How little her figure differs from that of a woman on the point of giving birth can be seen by comparing it to that of Pamphila in labour of c. 1412, and how completely female one artist felt the whole outline to be, together with its swaying hips and drapery, can be seen in the *Livre des merveilles du monde*, which John the Fearless of Burgundy gave to Jean de Berry in 1413 as a New Year’s present. This book told of the adventures of Marco Polo, his father and his uncle; in Chaldea they came across men dressed as women, and women dressed as men. The painter simply transplanted female heads on to the trousered, pot-bellied figures with upright bearing he usually reserved for Oriental males in the manuscript, and bearded male heads on to sway-backed bodies with swollen stomachs in long, close-fitting dresses (illus. 18).

This form continues unchanged into the 1430s; the virgin saints in the Van Eyck brothers’ ‘Altarpiece of the Adoration of the Lamb’ in Ghent, finished in 1432, lurch out from behind some foliage, and Jan van Eyck’s Giovanna Arnolfini in 1434 shows the swollen stomach exaggerated by the fur-lined skirt of her gown which she holds in loose folds over her body. Much nonsense was talked about this lady and what she and her husband had possibly been doing six months before they eventually got round to marriage, by art historians in the nineteenth century, who were too blind to make use of the rest of the evidence under their noses. Eve in the Ghent ‘Altarpiece’ shows very clearly what her companions would have looked like without their best dresses and what Giovanna Arnolfini looked like two years later under her elaborate green gown (illus. 59).

During this period men have fairly solid, if slender, torsos, and rather too elegantly slim legs, as in the *Très Riches Heures* Adam (illus. 17). On the whole, fashion for men from c. 1400 allowed them to cover their legs to mid-calf or floor level, and the
pronounced vertical folds on their slightly high-waisted gowns would help to create an illusion of length of leg without the use of very long toes on their shoes, as had been the fashion c. 1390 and as was to become the fashion again in the 1450s and 1460s. The neck was elongated in both sexes by the simple expedient of moving the hair line up the back of the head and shaving the head to half way up. Otherwise, male anatomy is not remarkable in this period.

Around 1440 it is possible to detect a slight change in the stance, and hence the outline, of women. The neck is no longer thrust forward quite so abruptly and the shoulders are sometimes drawn back instead of being hunched forward. The bashful upward glance of Giovanna Arnolfini is replaced by a more direct gaze as the head is thrown back, although the spinal column does not achieve an unbroken diagonal. Van der Weyden’s ‘Triptych of the Last Judgement’ at Beaune, 20 painted between 1443 and 1451, contains men with emaciated arms and legs, and women so slender, apart from their vast middles, that all are helpless as they fall into the pit of Hell and drag others with them as they attempt to grab hold of anything to prevent their descent: their matchstick bodies are quite without power. Fairly untypically, not one of the Resurrected wears anything to indicate his or her rank on earth: all the more poignantly, they go to Heaven or Hell without any comfort or protection from familiar objects. The lack of devils to torment the Damned adds to the horror of their

17. LEFT: The Limbourg brothers depicted the Garden of Eden as a walled garden set round an extremely large Gothic fountain, and entered by a Gothic gateway. After Eve has yielded to the persuasiveness of a golden-haired serpent resembling herself, she and Adam are driven forth by a flaming red and gold angel into a barren landscape of hills and sea.

18. ABOVE: The inhabitants of Chaldea as Marco Polo encountered them and as they were depicted by one Parisian illustrator, who had never seen trousered women in his life.
being sucked, completely defenceless, into eternal torment through their own inner evil. On the other hand, this same slightness of form makes the Blessed seem ascetic and ethereal enough to be fitting inhabitants of the Heavenly Kingdom. The original psychological impact of this depiction, where only the impassive St Michael, weigher of souls, is splendidly clad, must have been beyond our “enlightened” comprehension. However, this diminishing of the bulk of the male body and its apparent lengthening must not be confused with an actual lengthening of it from its eight head-lengths formula. There is a useful contemporary parallel in the scene of the presentation of Jean Wauquelin’s *Les chroniques de Hainaut* to the Duke of Burgundy, after 1446 (illus. 74), where men’s gowns are beginning to rise to just above knee level to expose what were probably meant to be elegantly slender legs, which were artificially lengthened by the wearing of shoes or boots with pointed toes. Now that women’s anatomy is slightly less bizarre, the urge to distort seems to have turned its attention to men.

Netherlandish artists seem to have fallen prey more readily to this obsession for underfed male bodies than French artists did, as witness the scene of the trial of the duc d’Alençon in Vendôme, painted in or shortly after 1458 by Jean Fouquet (illus. 91), and the many scenes painted in the 1460s by the Master of René of Anjou. The trial scene is figured with men who conform to the fashion for short gowns and long pointed toes, but remain fairly solid and stocky in spite of the visual trickery of fashion. The Master of René of Anjou produces even stockier figures, who stomp their way very determinedly and prosaically across the landscape, quite at odds with the elegant world of myth which they inhabit. However, there is an advantage to be gained from these figures in that they bring the world of myth and allegory nearer to reality than any over-refined ideal characters could have done.

The Netherlanders continued to play with altered human anatomy, particularly in manuscript painting, which seems to have demanded more and less realism at the same time than did many panel paintings: more in that most manuscript pictures involved complex scenes set indoors or out-of-doors where even the most elaborately hatted lady could be reduced to a manageable size against her surroundings, and her attire depicted as it was every day, which a portrait painter, in mainly half-length portraits, could not always do; less in that manuscript paintings often served the purpose of enlivening otherwise fairly dull romances and histories, into which it would have been legitimate to introduce exaggeration towards the fashionable ideal in the depiction of their heroic characters. Most secular manuscripts are fundamentally nothing more than very costly, very classy strip cartoon books, and the rationale of the illustrators of such phenomena does not seem to have altered much in five centuries.

The vastly underrated and under-employed Master of
Wavrin was the most economical of the manuscript illustrators, producing pen and wash drawings which caught the essence of the fashions of the 1460s, without getting trapped into the over-elaboration of many of the works produced by a favourite illustrator of the Burgundian court, Loyset Liédet. Liédet too manages, underneath the superficial glamour of his work, to convey the aims of the fashion-conscious in these years, with ladies of too-high foreheads and men of too-long and too-slender legs and feet.

In panel painting these exaggerations in male anatomy can be matched with Dieric Bouts’ ‘Damned’ in Lille, (possibly of 1468) where, against a sky lit to an eerie green and gold sunset by the fires of Hell, the pale bodies of the lost are flung to an eternal night of torment by grinning black and red devils, who, long before the development of the concept, clearly derive considerable job satisfaction from their tasks. Commissioned from the same painter in 1468 and delivered by 1473 is the scene of ‘The Ordeal by Fire’ from the ‘Justice of the Emperor Otto’ panels (illus. 115). There, elegant men, of impossibly slender and elongated limbs stand around the Emperor’s throne; if the Emperor himself were to stand up, his head would go through the roof. (The abnormally wide shoulders of the men do not derive, as yet, from any change in the ideal of the body underneath.) The attenuation of the legs could be aided by the spiky forms of Northern armour, as in Memlinc’s St Michael in the ‘Danzig Altarpiece’ (by 1473), where the armour-clad warrior saint stands on a small rock, over whose edge the long-pointed toes hang down.

Had the attenuation of only the lower half of the male body continued a few years longer, artists would have been in danger of producing figures whose ability to hold themselves upright would have been in grave doubt. Generally, in the 1470s there was a tendency in male dress away from the top-heavy bulk of pleated and padded shoulders and sleeves, to a smoother, narrower vertical line, from which most of the bulk of the old gowns disappeared. The initial result of the loss of the wide-shouldered look was to produce some very tall figures indeed, as in Engelbert of Nassau’s copy of Quintus Curtius’s Historia Alexandri Magni (illus. 110) and in a drawing of a presentation scene now in Washington DC. It is perhaps significant that both of these works are Netherlandish, in view of the remarks made above about the greater realism of French art at this date, and Memlinc’s almost mannerist elongation of vertical forms, particularly in his ‘St Sebastian’ of c. 1480. Left to his own devices to produce the face of a holy or historical person, Memlinc would usually fall back on his preferred facial type with its long thin nose, as witness countless Madonnas and saints. Apparently, before painting Martin van Nieuwenhove’s real face (illus. 131), Memlinc ‘blocked in’ his head in accordance with his own ideal, complete with long thin nose.
After this brief period (perhaps less than ten years) of extreme attenuation in dress and skeleton, first the outer, clothed appearance and then the actual structure of the male body change rapidly. From c. 1480 onwards, gown lapels grow wider and sleeves grow bulkier and looser, until men’s gowns seem to be several sizes too large for them. Martin van Nieuwenhove is perhaps thought of as having a Gothic type of body beneath his clothes, but one cannot be so sure of the appearance, a few years later, of the so-called ‘Charles VIII’ (illus. 144) where the gown sleeves twist in a confusing tangle round his arms, while the gown is in danger of slipping off because of its size and uncontrolled bulk.

The effect of this outward squareness on the concept of the body underneath can be gauged by comparing these men with the Resurrected in the ‘Last Judgment Triptych’ by the Master of the Joseph Sequence (formerly called the Master of the Abbey of Affligem), painted sometime during the married life (1496–1506) of Philip the Fair and Joanna the Mad (illus. 19). There the men are much more heavily built than Van der Weyden’s or Bouts’ Resurrected, and even Philip, who appears in a wing of the altarpiece, seems, under his cloak and armour, to be a little more solid than he might have appeared ten or fifteen years earlier. (Joanna and the women will be considered later.) By the time Jan Gossaert came to paint ‘Neptune and Amphitrite’ in 1516, the classical canon of more heavily built, muscular men was quite acceptable to artists who had visited Italy to see for themselves the messages of Italian Renaissance art. Memlinc and his followers had known of Italian ideas only at second hand, and the results of their attempts to introduce them into their own work are usually fairly horrendous, as swags of plant life and patti intervene unhappily across the tops of classical columns in otherwise Northern surroundings, inhabited by northerners clad in Gothic taste (e.g. Memlinc’s ‘Resurrection’ in the Louvre, where a Gothic Christ steps forth from the tomb under an Italianate framework very similar to that beneath which a donor kneels before the Virgin, in Vienna).

In twenty years the ideal male figure had changed from Gothic to classicalizing, but the corresponding change in the female ideal took longer to effect. Memlinc painted ‘Bathsheba’, emerging from her bath, c. 1480 (illus. 20); although she still conforms to the Gothic ideal, the stomach is slightly less pronounced and the rib cage, where it joins the stomach, gives a hint of acceptance of the waist’s natural level. This is matched by the way in which her attendant’s dress seems to continue, unbroken by the line of a high-set belt, towards the natural waistline. Both women correspond to Memlinc’s long-nosed ideal. (King David was not the only person who enjoyed looking at naked ladies: J. Huizinga in The Waning of the Middle Ages cites several examples of processions which featured nude women under the guise of
classical goddesses, who were clearly the highlight of these events. How naked these ladies really were is open to conjecture, not so much because of their modesty as because of the relative inclemency of Northern weather.)

Women became as emaciated as men in the 1470s, but whereas men began to 'square off' in the 1480s, women remained confined in very close-fitting clothes into the 1490s and early 1500s. In her portraits from the 1470s Maria Portinari seems flat-chested (illus. 111), as do the donatrices of the 'St Hippolytus Triptych' (illus. 124) and the 'Donne Triptych' (illus. 123), as well as the female saints in the latter. The nude Eve in the Vienna triptych has almost no bosom at all. Both portraits of Barbara van Vlaenderbergh (see p. 190) reinforce the impression, as though women's clothes were flattening what little bust fashion had previously allowed them. Certainly, neither Memlinc's Eve nor Bathsheba could be described as a large lady compared with even Van Eyck's Eve.

The compression of the female torso continued into the 1490s: good comparisons of the bulk of men and the slenderness of women can be seen, in France, in the portraits of Pierre de Bourbon and his wife Anne de Beaujeu, c. 1493 (illus. 141 and 142) and, in Flanders, of Jan de Sedano and his wife (illus. 133 and 134). The replacement of the spiky V-neck by a squarer neck in the later 90s undoubtedly helped the change in women's dress, but very few women looked as square as men even by 1510: Joanna the Mad retains the Gothic stomach but also acquires a bust again, and the resurrected women in her altarpiece are also more Gothic than the men. The donatrices in David's 'Baptism of Christ Triptych' (c. 1507) look heavier and more matronly than the women of the 1490s, but it is not until nearer 1525 that women suddenly become very busty, as in Bernard van Orley's depiction of the women of the Hanetons family, who have at last matched their menfolk in bulkiness of body and attire. (Gossaert's 'Amphitrite' of 1516 is also more 'classical' in build, although her breasts are still rather high-set.) This very sudden filling-out of the female body leads one to suspect that the very flat chests in the 1470s, 1480s and 1490s were no more natural than their almost overnight growth in the 1520s.

What prompted all these changes, and why were there varying speeds of their adoption by men and women? We have seen that the most likely explanation for the curious female form of hunched shoulders and protruding stomach was the adoption of a new and uncomfortable form of dress; that this ideal remained in favour for so long, despite its patent unnaturalness, is an indication that it matched some already prevailing aesthetic notion in other areas of art and design, not necessarily, as Kenneth Clark seems to imply (see p. 40), that it was created by that aesthetic mood. The form was not simply an acceptance of the destructive effect of several pregnancies on a woman's figure,
20. Bathsheba steps from her bath into slippers and a linen robe offered by her servant, but not before King David has glimpsed her and decided to send her husband, Uriah the Hittite, to his death. King David was painted in the sixteenth century, but the subject must have been intelligible to most contemporary viewers without this addition, as it was one of the few chances for an artist to paint 'respectable' scenes of naked ladies. Bathsheba's bathrobe is gathered at the back into a straight collar and her servant's underdress has a gathered and probably detachable hem.
as nothing in the nude, apart from the stomach, was allowed to sag or grow fat at the same time. That it was not prompted by a desire even to suggest fecundity is shown by its uses on countless virgin saints. It seems to have been accepted because it bore some relation to Gothic ideals of attenuation from a solid base, and doubtless women who were pregnant nearly every year were grateful for the camouflage which fashion provided as their figures sagged behind tightly laced bodices (compare Deschamps' remarks on older women and tight lacing on p. 44).

If one considers the female body as being basically pear-shaped or, more politely, an isosceles triangle resting on its base (the hips) with the head as its apex, one has to consider the male body as a similar triangle, reversed, with its base being the shoulders and the hips its apex, which can even be extended to the toes. Today's popular concept of Gothic architecture probably owes more to the ideas of Victorian designers of local churches and to the cinema than to appreciation of original buildings, but the cinema in particular has the merit that it, like a good cartoonist, has caught the essence of Gothic's love of the ambiguously defined outline, with its clusters of pointed turrets, of varying sizes, peppering towering castles set on jagged
outcrops of rock. Perhaps only vampires ever inhabited such castles, but these fantasy buildings, although Gothick rather than Gothic, help to explain what was done to that most unyielding of building materials, the human body, in an attempt to Gothickize everything.

The unambiguous verticals and horizontals and consequent right angles of classical and classicizing architecture were totally opposed to indigenous Northern taste in the fifteenth century, and it was only by gradual exposure to Italian ideals that the North could assimilate them. Men changed from wearing highly Gothic dress in the late 1460s to much squarer, more horizontal dress in one generation, but women's dress shows the continuing effect of Gothic elongation for the whole of the transition period in male dress. It is not difficult to find an explanation for this: as diplomats, traders, sailors or soldiers, men travelled further and more freely than women and were generally more receptive to new ideas because of their greater freedom. Although a few women were highly educated and noted patronesses of the arts, such as Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy from 1468, most were appallingly under-educated by today's standards, and were deliberately kept so by their families. When the Duke of Brittany enquired about his prospective daughter-in-law, Isabella Stewart of Scotland, he was delighted that she was not particularly bright, remarking that all a wife need know was the difference between her husband's shirt and his doublet; Isabella's more intellectual sister Margaret, Dauphine of France, infuriated her husband by sitting up all night writing poetry and discussing it with her friends. Satirists felt a dull wife was as much a curse as a clever one—what was a woman supposed to be, one may ask? Presumably women outside court circles had little contact with their foreign counterparts, and their enforced ignorance of matters outside their own concerns, with the conservatism this was likely to entail, is reason enough for their slowness to accept the new impulses from the South which were affecting the attitudes of their menfolk. This slowness in its turn forced their dress, and the ideal controlling it, to continue in the Gothic trend longer than did men's. When another type of female ideal was finally accepted by women, a complete generation of men had grown up viewing themselves and their buildings as increasingly rectangular or square shapes.

The final acceptance by women of all that this new approach to dress entailed meant that the Gothic mood had lost its hold on the imagination of northern Europe, and motifs from Gothic architecture and dress would be used only to evoke strangely splendid moments from the past, as in the 'Antwerp Adoration of the Magi', where clothes with slashed edges and Gothic ruins add to the mannerism of the whole scene. Thus, an entire view of people and objects changed, and 'Gothic' was on the way to becoming 'Gothick'. 