

Commenter en anglais le texte suivant et le traduire de « How was she to think... » jusqu'à « ... fifteen minutes. ».

Cecilia who recently graduated from the University of Cambridge returns home to her family's estate. The scene is set in the mid-1930s.

On two occasions within half an hour, Cecilia stepped out of her bedroom, caught sight of herself in the gilt-frame mirror at the top of the stairs and, immediately dissatisfied, returned to her wardrobe to reconsider. Her first resort was a black crêpe de Chine dress which, according to the dressing-table mirror, bestowed by means of clever cutting a certain
 5 severity of form. Its air of invulnerability was heightened by the darkness of her eyes. Rather than offset the effect with a string of pearls, she reached in a moment's inspiration for a necklace of pure jet. [...]

But the public gaze of the stairway mirror as she hurried towards it revealed a woman on her way to a funeral, an austere, joyless woman moreover, whose black carapace had
 10 affinities with some form of matchbox-dwelling insect. A stag beetle! It was her future self, at eighty-five, in widow's weeds. She did not linger – she turned on her heel, which was also black, and returned to her room.

She was sceptical, because she knew the tricks the mind could play. At the same time, her mind was – in every sense – where she was to spend the evening, and she had to be at ease
 15 with herself. She stepped out of the black crêpe dress where it fell to the floor, and stood in her heels and underwear, surveying the possibilities on the wardrobe racks, mindful of the passing minutes. She hated the thought of appearing austere. Relaxed was how she wanted to feel, and, at the same time, self-contained. Above all, she wanted to look as though she had not given the matter a moment's thought, and that would take time. Downstairs the knot of
 20 impatience would be tightening in the kitchen, while the minutes she was planning to spend alone with her brother were running out. Soon her mother would appear and want to discuss the table placings, Paul Marshall would come down from his room and be in need of company, and then Robbie would be at the door. How was she to think straight?

She ran a hand along the few feet of personal history, her brief chronicle of taste. Here
 25 were the flapper dresses of her teenage years, ludicrous, limp, sexless things they looked now, and though one bore wine stains and another a burn hole from her first cigarette, she could not bring herself to turn them out. Here was a dress with the first timid hint of shoulder pads, and others followed more assertively, muscular older sisters throwing off the boyish years, rediscovering waistlines and curves, dropping their hemlines with self-sufficient disregard for
 30 the hopes of men. Her latest and best piece, bought to celebrate the end of finals, before she knew about her miserable third, was the figure-hugging dark green bias-cut backless evening gown with a halter neck. Too dressy to have its first outing at home. She ran her hand further back and brought out a moiré silk dress with a pleated bodice and scalloped hem – a safe choice since the pink was muted and musty enough for evening wear. The triple mirror
 35 thought so too. She changed her shoes, swapped her jet for the pearls, retouched her make-up, rearranged her hair, applied a little perfume to the base of her throat, more of which was now exposed, and was back out in the corridor in less than fifteen minutes.

Earlier in the day she had seen old Hardman going about the house with a wicker basket, replacing electric bulbs. Perhaps there was now a harsher light at the top of the stairs, for she had never had this difficulty with the mirror there before. Even as she approached from a distance of forty feet, she saw that it was not going to let her pass; the pink was in fact innocently pale, the waistline was too high, the dress flared like an eight-year-old's party frock. All it needed was rabbit buttons. As she drew nearer, an irregularity in the surface of the ancient glass foreshortened her image and she confronted the child of fifteen years before. She stopped and experimentally raised her hands to the side of her head and gripped her hair in bunches. This same mirror must have seen her descend the stairs like this on dozens of occasions, on her way to one more friend's afternoon birthday bash. It would not help her state of mind, to go down looking like, or believing she looked like, Shirley Temple¹.

More in resignation than irritation or panic, she returned to her room. There was no confusion in her mind: these too-vivid, untrustworthy impressions, her self-doubt, the intrusive visual clarity and eerie differences that had wrapped themselves around the familiar were no more than continuations, variations of how she had been seeing and feeling all day. Feeling, but preferring not to think. Besides, she knew what she had to do and she had known it all along. She owned only one outfit that she genuinely liked, and that was the one she should wear. She let the pink dress fall on top of the black and, stepping contemptuously through the pile, reached for the gown, her green backless post-finals gown. As she pulled it on she approved of the firm caress of the bias-cut through the silk of her petticoat, and she felt sleekly impregnable, slippery and secure; it was a mermaid who rose to meet her in her own full-length mirror. She left the pearls in place, changed back into the black high-heel shoes, once more retouched her hair and make-up, forwent another dab of scent and then, as she opened the door, gave out a shriek of terror. Inches from her was a face and a raised fist.

Ian McEwan (b. 1948), *Atonement*, 2001.

¹ Shirley TEMPLE (1928-2014) : American child actress, singer and dancer.