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Land-shapes in Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach*

Abstract I: Questo articolo analizza la rilevanza materiale e metaforica dei ciottoli in *On Chesil Beach* (2007) di Ian McEwan, concentrandosi in particolare sul ruolo della ghiaia di cui si compone Chesil Beach nella costruzione narrativa e simbolica del romanzo. Attraverso un approccio geoletterario, con specifico riferimento alla geografia tattile e sensoriale, l'articolo interpreta la ghiaia come una presenza materiale attiva, mostrando come i ciottoli evochino tanto l'immobilità quanto la frattura. L'opera di McEwan attribuisce all'ambientazione una funzione centrale: la disastrosa notte di nozze di Edward e Florence è inseparabile dallo spazio liminale di Chesil Beach, con la sua distesa apparentemente infinita di ciottoli. Il narratore osserva che "the matter lay between them, as solid as a geographical feature", stabilendo un rapporto diretto tra la materialità della spiaggia e le barriere emotive e comunicative che separano i protagonisti. Un ruolo fondamentale è svolto dalla dimensione temporale, in cui si intrecciano il tempo geologico, l'eredità culturale vittoriana e i cambiamenti degli anni Sessanta.

Abstract II: This article examines the material and metaphorical significance of the pebbles in Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach* (2007), focusing specifically on the role of the shingle that forms Chesil Beach in the novel's narrative and symbolic construction. Drawing on a geoliterary perspective, especially on haptic and sensory geography, the article interprets the shingle as an active material presence, showing how the pebbles evoke immobility as well as fracture. McEwan's novel assigns a central function to setting: Edward and Florence's disastrous wedding night is inseparable from the liminal space of Chesil Beach, with its apparently endless expanse of pebbles. The narrator observes that "the matter lay between them, as solid as a geographical feature", establishing a direct connection between the materiality of the beach and the emotional and communicative barriers separating the protagonists. A fundamental role is played by the temporal dimension, in which geological time, the cultural legacy of the Victorian age, and the social and cultural shifts of the Sixties intersect.

Keywords: Ian McEwan, *On Chesil Beach*, pebbles, shingle, geoliterary studies.

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow
T. S. Eliot (1974: 92).

1. A Geoliterary Approach

This article adopts a geoliterary approach primarily informed by haptic and sensory geography. Foundational to this perspective is Yi-Fu Tuan's (1974) notion of topophilia, which foregrounds the affective and experiential dimensions of place. It also engages with the spatial approaches to literature developed since the Spatial Turn, including Gregory's (1994) geographical imagination, Westphal's (2011) geocriticism, and Tally's (2019) spatial literary studies. Together, these perspectives provide the conceptual background for the discussion by suggesting that the meaning of place emerges through bodily and sensory engagement as much as through representation[1]. The analysis focuses mainly on the lived spatial experience, drawing on the phenomenological tradition which privileges the subjective and embodied relations with space (Wylie 2019). Particular attention is given to tactile perception, movement, and the body's spatial relation to the surrounding environment: Paterson's haptic geography (2009) emphasises that "feeling" a place, through touch, texture, and sensory immersion, is integral to its interpretation.

This framework makes it possible to move beyond predominantly author-centred or historically contextualised readings by privileging the dynamic interplay between narrative and spatial configuration. It therefore offers a suitable approach for examining how material landscapes shape perception, affect, and narrative meaning. Read in the light of these theoretical perspectives, Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach* (2007), often overshadowed by some of the author's more acclaimed novels, emerges as a compelling case study because of its sustained engagement with landscape and spatiality, as well as its dense intertextual framework[2].

The seaside occupies a prominent position in the English literary tradition, where it frequently functions as a liminal and transformative space, suspended between land and water, stability and uncertainty (Meiner & Andersen 2024). Especially from the modernist period onwards, coastal landscapes have frequently been associated with introspection, emotional tension, and states of psychological crisis. In *On Chesil Beach*, the seaside becomes a space of transition that condenses the novel's central tensions: the failed wedding night of Florence and Edward, set in July 1962, becomes emblematic of a historical and cultural threshold, poised between the sexual repression in post-war Britain and the profound social and sexual transformations that would come to define the 1960s.

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[1] The interaction between geography and literary imagination has a much longer critical history than the Spatial Turn itself. The latter did not inaugurate the study of literary space but rather renewed and systematised longstanding reflections on the imaginative construction and cultural experience of place. See Crang & Thrift (2000).

[2] Among the many critical studies devoted to McEwan's fiction, Head (2019) is especially relevant. A detailed reading of *On Chesil Beach* has been provided by Head (2009).

Located in Dorset, Chesil Beach, the long ridge of pebbles separating the English Channel from the Fleet Lagoon, provides the physical and symbolic setting in which this historical and personal transition is dramatically enacted. McEwan combines modernist and postmodernist strategies (Gefter Wondrich 2012: 117-118), notably through the device of compressing entire lives into the temporal frame of a single day. Within this tightly concentrated narrative structure, the beach assumes a crucial function: its liminal geography becomes the stage for a "negative" epiphany, a moment of painful awareness that reveals the impossibility of reconciling private stories and the forces of history.

Florence and Edward, the protagonists of the novel, arrive at a hotel overlooking Chesil Beach to spend their wedding night. From the outset, their relationship appears marked by profound emotional and psychological asymmetries: Florence, a gifted violinist from an upper-middle-class background, is restrained, self-controlled, and deeply uneasy with physical intimacy, whereas Edward, more impulsive, experiences desire with a mixture of longing, confusion, and frustration. Through a third-person voice that moves fluidly between the consciousness of both characters, the narrative reconstructs, by means of flashbacks and retrospective fragments, the personal stories that have shaped their fragile relationship, including family tensions, class differences, and emotional misunderstandings. Set on the threshold of the social and sexual transformations associated with the 1960s, and on the eve of what Philip Larkin famously termed the *Annus Mirabilis* in the poem of the same name (1967)[3], which constitutes an important intertext for *On Chesil Beach*, the novel presents Florence and Edward as figures suspended between two historical moments. They emerge as the reluctant inheritors of a repressive moral culture that is already beginning to disintegrate, yet whose constraints continue to shape their inability to communicate and to achieve intimacy. The failed consummation of their marriage and the subsequent confrontation on Chesil Beach ultimately crystallise both a personal tragedy and a wider historical rupture.

The bedroom scene is remarkably extended (Courtney 2013: 191-194) within a narrative deeply structured by temporality. It forms the emotional and psychological core of the novel and precipitates the crisis culminating in the couple's final separation on Chesil Beach. Time operates on multiple interconnected levels: it shapes the landscape through geological processes, informs the emotional and communicative difficulties that define the protagonists' relationship, and permeates the social context in which they are embedded.

Edward's identity as a history student further reinforces the novel's concern with the relationship between private lives and historical change. His interest not only in medieval millenarian movements and contemporary campaigns for nuclear disarmament, but also in historical marginal figures who intersect with major events without shaping them, reflects a broader preoccupation with individuals caught within larger historical processes. Edward and Florence themselves emerge as marginal figures amid social and sexual transformations. As Mathews observes, the novel primarily focuses on the transition from Victorian moral restraint to modern sexual attitudes (2012: 84). In this respect, Florence appears as the embodiment of a repressed Victorian femininity still present at the beginning of the 1960s.

[3] The year evoked in Larkin's poem is 1963, "between the end of the 'Chatterley' ban / And the Beatles' first LP", ironically identified as the symbolic beginning of Britain's sexual revolution (1970: 146).

Through Florence, McEwan suggests that the Victorian inheritance survives not as a set of explicit social rules but as an internalised form of sexual repression. Her reaction to the handbook she consults before the wedding reinforces her sense of disgust and apprehension and clearly illustrates the extent to which inherited anxieties and prohibitions continue to shape her perception of intimacy.

Against this historical and spatial background, the following sections focus on the materiality of Chesil Beach's shingle, examining how its geological properties and tactile qualities shape the protagonists' embodied experience and acquire narrative and symbolic significance.

2. Matter and Metaphor

Much of the criticism devoted to the novel has focused on the beachscape, whose material instability and multiple metaphorical meanings are central to McEwan's spatial imagination. Neither fully land nor sea, the beach constitutes a liminal and constantly shifting environment, shaped by erosion, sedimentation, and movement. As a transitional and mutable space, it resists fixity and becomes suited to the novel's exploration of uncertainty and emotional fracture[4]. Cavalié's analysis (2018) has been influential in highlighting the beach as a tactile and sensory environment. Building on this insight, the present article shifts attention from the beachscape as a whole to the materiality of the shingle itself. A geoliterary reading foregrounds the pebbles' geological properties and tactile qualities, revealing how the shingle functions as a material and affective agent that shapes bodily perception and contributes to the novel's narrative, symbolic, and historical meanings.

Chesil Beach constitutes one of Britain's most remarkable shingle formations. Traditionally identified as a tombolo, it is more accurately described in geomorphological terms as a barrier beach gradually rolled landwards until it connected the mainland to the Isle of Portland. Stretching for almost twenty-nine kilometres, the massive ridge of pebbles forms an apparently continuous line along the Dorset coast, enclosing the Fleet, a shallow tidal lagoon. Its scale, density, and material compactness contribute to the beach's distinctive physical presence and to the sense of separation and isolation that permeates McEwan's novel[5]. Far from providing mere topographical background, these geomorphological features determine the beach's tactile qualities and material consistency, making the shingle a constitutive element of the protagonists' experience and of the novel's symbolic economy. Chesil Beach thus emerges as a geographical formation in which geological materiality and literary imagination converge, generating a dense network of cultural and intertextual resonances.

McEwan constructs Chesil Beach simultaneously as a material landscape and as a literary landscape. The most explicit intertext is Matthew Arnold's 1867 poem "Dover Beach",

[4] The beach is constructed through multiple material, cultural, and symbolic practices. Given the multifaceted nature of the beachscape and the plurality of processes involved in its construction and representation, an interdisciplinary approach proves not only useful but necessary, as Breidenbach, Fröhler, Pensel, Simon, Telsnig & Wittmann (2020) have demonstrated.

[5] Several scientific and geomorphological studies have highlighted the specificity and ecological uniqueness of this coastal environment, emphasising the exceptional geological formation and dynamic evolution of Chesil Beach. See Carr (1969), Carr, Gleason & King (1970), Carr & Seaward (1981).

because McEwan's title clearly recalls its Victorian precursor. The connection is strengthened by the circumstances surrounding the composition of Arnold's poem, written during his honeymoon and addressed to his bride while the two figures stand together by the sea at night. Similar emotional tensions between intimacy, uncertainty, and estrangement permeate *On Chesil Beach*. "Dover Beach" also recalls McEwan's *Saturday* (2005), where Daisy Perowne recites Arnold's poem to Baxter during his intrusion into the family home: the poem acquires a salvific function by suspending violence through the power of poetic language. In this sense, Arnold's text serves as a key intertextual reference, linking *On Chesil Beach* both to the English literary tradition and to McEwan's own fictional world. Further intertextual connections may be traced with John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), likewise set on the Dorset coast and similarly concerned with history, sexuality, and repression, as well as with D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), another key text in the literary history of sexual transgression and emotional intimacy. Further significant parallels emerge with Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915), from which McEwan appears to have borrowed the names of his protagonists (Utell 2016).

The narrator's observation that "the matter lay between them, as solid as a geographical feature" (McEwan 2007: 139) establishes a powerful equivalence between physical substance and emotional obstruction. The image evokes the immovability of a mountain or a rocky formation. Florence's and Edward's affective distance is thus spatialised and materialised into an insurmountable obstacle, suggesting that the separation between them has acquired the permanence and solidity of the landscape itself. Significantly, the environment surrounding the couple is a maritime landscape strongly characterised by rock and stone, namely by the pebbles that constitute Chesil Beach. The pebbles are fragments of matter whose physical density reflects the psychological burden that obstructs communication; their endless multiplicity suggests the fragmentation of perception and experience that increasingly defines the relationship between the two protagonists. The metaphor thus operates simultaneously on three interconnected levels. Geologically, it derives its force from the material compactness and apparent permanence of the shingle itself. Emotionally, it externalises the protagonists' inability to communicate, transforming affective distance into a tangible obstacle. Narratively, it becomes a structuring principle that binds landscape and plot together, so that the physical environment does not merely reflect the protagonists' crisis but actively shapes the unfolding of their relationship.

The shingle of Chesil Beach is composed predominantly of flint and chert pebbles whose size gradually decreases from the large stones near Portland to the much smaller pebbles extending towards West Bay. This geological variation is explicitly foregrounded in the novel when Edward reads aloud from a guidebook describing how "thousands of years of pounding storms had sifted and graded the size of pebbles along the eighteen miles of beach, with the bigger stones at the eastern end" (McEwan 2007: 19). The same passage recalls the local legend according to which "fishermen landing at night knew exactly where they were by the grade of shingle" (McEwan 2007: 19). These details emphasise not only the immense spatial scale of Chesil Beach but also the subtle ordering imposed upon it by natural processes operating over geological time. The apparently impersonal logic governing the formation and distribution of the pebbles becomes a significant metaphor within the novel:

McEwan draws on this slow, cumulative, and inexorable process to reflect on the equally powerful forces of history shaping individual lives and relationships. The vast shingle ridge conveys a powerful impression of permanence and immobility. Yet this apparent stability is itself a product of extremely slow processes: the forces that continue to reshape the beach operate on temporal scales far exceeding human perception, making change appear as stasis. In this sense, the shingle invites a reading in terms of "deep time", foregrounding forms of material temporality that extend beyond the scale of human history while remaining intimately entangled with it[6].

Poised between the moral restraints of the past and the approaching sexual revolution, the novel presents its protagonists as figures caught in a moment of cultural transition[7]. Edward's and Florence's inability to consummate their marriage may thus be read as a microcosm of a wider historical transition, in which inherited codes of behaviour were beginning to disintegrate without yet being replaced by new forms of emotional and sexual openness. The ancient and seemingly immutable landscape of Chesil Beach provides a striking counterpoint to the rapid social transformations surrounding the characters, exposing their incapacity to inhabit the new cultural and emotional landscape taking shape around them.

This interplay between natural processes and historical change also makes Darwin's implicit presence especially significant. The gradual variation in the size of the pebbles along the beach, shaped over millennia by the relentless action of tides and waves, reflects a process governed by impersonal natural forces. The landscape thereby evokes an evolutionary logic of selection and adaptation that subtly parallels the historical and emotional pressures acting upon the protagonists. This geological sorting becomes a powerful analogue for the forces of history that silently yet inexorably shape the lives of Florence and Edward. The two characters stand at the beginning of adult life while simultaneously living in a period marked by profound transformations in British attitudes towards sexuality. In both cases, individual destinies emerge not from isolated acts of will but from slow, cumulative processes operating across temporal scales far beyond human perception.

As a transitional environment, the seaside acquires a symbolic function, while the failed wedding night dramatises the cultural tensions underlying the passage from one social order to another (Mohácsi 2021: 375). Hence, Chesil Beach functions simultaneously as a geographical boundary separating the English Channel from the Fleet Lagoon and as a metaphorical dividing line charged with historical significance. For both protagonists, the beach initially appears as a possible escape from the oppressive formality and emotional discomfort of the honeymoon dinner, during which they experience a growing sense of unease and constraint. Edward reflects that "trudging along the beach would have been better than sitting here" (McEwan 2007: 19), imagining the open coastal landscape as an alternative to the rigid social conventions governing their behaviour inside the hotel. Both Florence

[6] Recent ecocritical discussions of deep time have highlighted the need to read human histories within geological temporalities operating on scales far beyond individual experience (Clark 2015).

[7] The social context and sexual relationships of the 1960s have been extensively examined in numerous studies, which have emphasised the scale and significance of the transformations that reshaped British society during the decade. See Cook (2004), Sandbrook (2006) and Szreter & Fisher (2010).

and Edward would prefer to walk along the shore with its infinite shingle, examining the changing sizes of the pebbles and escaping the suffocating ritual of the wedding meal. Significantly, Edward senses that "if he had known how to propose it, or justify it, he might have suggested going out straightaway" (McEwan 2007: 19), an observation that reveals the extent to which even spontaneity requires social justification within their world. Their shared after-dinner project "to collect stones along the way and compare their sizes to see if storms really had brought order to the beach" (McEwan 2007: 142) acquires an additional symbolic resonance. The apparent order imposed upon the shingle by geological and coastal processes contrasts with the emotional disorder and communicative failure experienced by the protagonists. The projected act of collecting and comparing pebbles transforms the shingle into an object of shared inquiry. Yet while the protagonists seek to understand the ordering of the beach, they remain incapable of interpreting the emotional and historical forces that shape their own lives.

3. Beachscape with Pebbles

Viewed from the hotel window, the beachscape immediately acquires a distinctly sexualised dimension, and every element of the surrounding environment contributes to an atmosphere of erotic tension. At the same time, however, McEwan introduces a subtle irony, since the sensuous vitality of the landscape sharply contrasts with the protagonists' sexual anxiety. The passage can be read in the light of Paul Rodaway's (1994) reflections on sensuous geographies and Tim Ingold's (2000) understanding of landscape as an embodied and experiential environment, perceived not only visually but through touch, sound, movement, and atmospheric immersion. McEwan describes the scenery in markedly sensual terms:

> The garden vegetation rose up, sensuous and tropical in its profusion, an effect heightened by the grey, soft light and a delicate mist drifting in from the sea, whose steady motion of advance and withdrawal made sounds of gentle thunder, then sudden hissing against the pebbles (McEwan 2007: 5).

This passage develops a dense sensory texture in which visual, tactile, and auditory impressions converge. The luxuriant vegetation, the soft light, the drifting mist, and the rhythmic movement of the sea create a sensuous atmosphere that sharply contrasts with the protagonists' emotional inhibition. Particularly significant is the recurring movement of "advance and withdrawal" whose oscillating rhythm anticipates the couple's failed attempt at physical intimacy (Mohácsi 2021: 376). Even the hissing sound of the waves against the pebbles contributes to this emotional architecture, transforming the material landscape into an active participant in the scene.

McEwan progressively constructs the landscape through multiple sensory registers. The beach is experienced as sound and movement before it becomes fully visible, anticipating the haptic mode of perception that dominates the protagonists' encounter with the shingle. As Elsa Cavalié remarks:

> The role of the beachscape goes much further than just outlining the pre/post 1963 divide. Chesil Beach's shingle indeed seems to delineate the very passing of time, an almost philosophical meditation about man's place in the grand order of things, for its virtually infinite space may at first be considered as a *ligne de fuite* opening up endless potentialities for the individual (Cavalié 2018: para. 13).

Building on this perspective, the present analysis argues that the pebbles shape not only the representation of the landscape but also the protagonists' bodily engagement with it. Walking across the shingle is repeatedly presented as a strenuous and physically demanding activity. The narrative evokes movement through the "heavy shingle" (McEwan 2007: 139), the prospect of "trudging along the beach" (2007: 19), and, later, walking up and down on the "exhausting shingle" (2007: 158), emphasising the material resistance of the pebbled landscape. For Florence, the physical effort of traversing the shingle mirrors the painful resurfacing of long-repressed memories, turning movement across the landscape into a bodily expression of psychological trauma. The pebbled surface resists movement, slowing, destabilising, and exhausting the body while materially reinforcing the protagonists' emotional impasse. The landscape does not merely mirror their predicament: it actively shapes the way it is experienced.

During the climactic confrontation on the beach, the landscape no longer functions as a potentially liberating or protective space in which Florence might articulate her traumatic experience. Instead, it intensifies her isolation and underscores the impossibility of meaningful mutual understanding between the two characters. The material and symbolic significance of the shingle culminates in the novel's final image of Florence:

> He stood in cold and righteous silence in the summer's dusk, watching her hurrying along the shore, the sound of her difficult progress lost to the breaking of small waves until she was a blurred, receding point against the immense straight road of shingle gleaming in the pallid light (McEwan 2007: 166).

Florence's departure is rendered not only visually but acoustically: the "sound of her difficult progress" foregrounds the physical resistance of the shingle, making the effort of movement itself audible. The landscape thus materialises separation through bodily exertion rather than through visual distance alone. The striking image of the "straight road of shingle" momentarily transforms the beach into a linear trajectory, suggesting both an irreversible departure and the impossibility of return. What had initially appeared as a space of potential escape becomes instead the material trace of definitive separation. As Florence's figure is gradually absorbed by the vast extension of the beach, the scene becomes the image that will continue to haunt Edward throughout his life. Florence's suffering remains largely inaccessible, as the novel ultimately privileges Edward's retrospective perspective and enduring sense of loss.

As suggested earlier, both Edward and Florence initially perceive the beach as a potentially liberating haptic environment (Cavalié 2018: para. 17). For Florence, running out of the hotel room momentarily signifies an escape from the oppressive reality of the wedding

night, whereas Edward associates the open coastal landscape with release from the rigid social conventions constraining their behaviour. Their experience of the beach may therefore be understood in terms of Deleuze's and Guattari's (1987) notion of "smooth space", where orientation derives from movement and sensory experience rather than from stable coordinates or clearly demarcated boundaries. Its immense linear extension encourages movement without offering the reassurance of fixed orientation, reflecting the uncertainty that characterises both the landscape and the protagonists' relationship.

The sea itself is frequently perceived not visually but through sound, motion, and especially smell, often in unsettling ways. For Florence, maritime sensations are inseparable from disturbing memories connected to the sailing trips she took with her father across the Channel. The failed consummation of the marriage is therefore deeply intertwined with the novel's gradual reconstruction of her past. The narrator appears to imply a history of paternal abuse, suggesting that Florence's revulsion towards sexuality may originate in childhood trauma. The sea functions as a sensory trigger for these repressed memories, which violently resurface during the wedding night when its smell evokes the indistinct recollection: "She was twelve years old, lying still like this, waiting…" (McEwan 2007: 99). Although the novel deliberately leaves aspects of Florence's childhood experience unresolved, several critics have read its allusions to the sailing trips with her father as evidence of sexual abuse and repressed trauma (Mohácsi 2021: 377-379).

As sea, lagoon, and sky become almost indistinguishable, the landscape is experienced less as a clearly delimited space than as a fluid sensory continuum:

> A shift or a strengthening of the wind brought them the sound of waves breaking, like a distant shattering of glasses. The mist was lifting to reveal in part the contours of the low hills, curving away above the shoreline to the east. They could see a luminous grey smoothness that may have been the silky surface of the sea itself, or the lagoon, or the sky – it was difficult to tell (McEwan 2007: 18).

Continuously reshaped by tides and long-term processes of erosion and sedimentation, Chesil Beach exemplifies the liminal nature of littoral environments (Preston-Whyte 2004). Situated between land and sea, it embodies what Thomassen defines as "permanent liminality" (2012: 28). The beachscape participates in a long literary tradition that associates the seashore with rites of passage, transition, and the possibility of transformation. In McEwan's novel, however, the transformative potential traditionally associated with the seashore remains unfulfilled, as the beach comes to reflect the uncertainty and emotional fragility that permeate Edward's and Florence's relationship. At the same time, the tactile materiality of the shingle paradoxically complicates visual perception. Florence observes Edward approaching across the beach as "at first no more than an indigo stain against the darkening shingle, sometimes appearing motionless, flickering and dissolving at its outlines, and at others suddenly closer" (McEwan 2007: 139). Edward's blurred figure does not simply mirror the uncertainty of their relationship; it is produced by the material conditions of the beach itself, where the shingle and the fading light destabilise visual perception. In both passages McEwan systematically undermines visual certainty. Boundaries between

sea, lagoon, and sky become indistinct, just as Edward's body gradually dissolves into the shingle. The erosion of visual definition parallels the protagonists' inability to establish clear emotional and communicative boundaries.

McEwan draws a striking contrast between the apparent order of the beach, shaped by long-term processes of geological accumulation and stratification, and the progressive disintegration of the protagonists' relationship. The enduring physical presence of the beach makes the fragility and brevity of Edward's and Florence's marriage all the more evident. The shingle thus emerges not simply as the defining feature of the landscape but as the material medium through which McEwan explores the disproportion between geological permanence and human fragility.

The image of the countless pebbles covering the shoreline crystallises many of the novel's central concerns: the fragility of human relationships, the consequences of miscommunication, and the lasting effects of emotional hesitation. The shingle, however, functions not merely as a metaphorical reflection of these concerns but as an active material presence. In the light of Jane Bennett's (2010) notion of "vibrant matter", its geological properties, tactile resistance, and incessant movement participate directly in the protagonists' experience, giving its material presence a significance beyond the symbolic. The shingle's unstable surface, its constant noise, and its resistance to movement generate discomfort and disorientation, while the plurality of its pebbles suggests fragmentation and the impossibility of fluid continuity. The beach thus emerges not as a static setting but as a dynamic configuration in which shingle, bodies, memory, desire, and silence interact to produce emotional and narrative effects. Ahmed's (2004) account of affect further clarifies how emotions become attached to material objects and environments. Throughout the novel, shame, fear, and sexual anxiety are repeatedly displaced onto the shingle, whose tactile resistance and unstable surface acquire an affective force of its own.

In conclusion, the pebbles of Chesil Beach come to embody the central paradox in the novel: a landscape shaped by incessant movement appears immobile, while the protagonists' relationship, seemingly founded on permanence, proves unexpectedly fragile. From a geoliterary perspective, the shingle reveals how geological materiality, bodily experience, and historical consciousness converge to shape the novel's narrative and emotional structure. By shifting attention from the beachscape to the pebbles themselves, this reading suggests that geological materiality is not simply represented in the novel but becomes one of the conditions through which narrative, perception, and affect take shape.

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