Remind yourself of the following description of Mrs Logan when Joe goes to Oxford to meet her. What do you think is the importance of this character in the novel?

'The woman who came to the door was surprised to see me and we looked at each other a full two seconds before I hurriedly reminded her of our arrangement. The eyes that held mine were small and dry, not reddened by grief, but sunk, and glazed by weariness. She looked a long way off, out on her own in unspeakable weather, like a lone Arctic explorer.'

(p 108)

A suggested approach

Introduction - give a brief overview

- Jean Logan is a minor character in the novel - she is not very clearly defined except as John's widow and the mother of his children yet she has an important role in the sub-plot of the novel and in the way that she affects Joe.

First main point - linked to extract in question

- She is first introduced into the novel when Joe visits her. Joe describes her as the embodiment of grief but is surprised by her 'sourness' and 'anger.' This visit is important to Joe as he needs to 'establish [his] innocence' in the balloon accident. Jean gives an alternative perspective on the accident through what she says about her husband's character and her theory that 'he was showing off to a girl.' The effect of the accident on Jean is contrasted with the effect on Joe who is experiencing guilt at his involvement. When Joe visits her he is 'keeping a rendezvous with real grief'.

- Through his contact with her, Joe is able to understand more about himself and his own situation with Clarissa. Her loss represents the 'slow [agony] of love's destruction' and makes Joe see the need to 'save' his love. It is ironic that despite this realisation, he is unable to act upon it. (112) Jean is therefore linked with the important theme of love and loss.

- Jean is linked with Clarissa in Joe's mind. 'Jean Logan, with whom Clarissa now shared a neural address, a category in my mind of women who believed themselves to be wronged and expected something from me.' (146) He has to face up to his responsibility towards them. Joe reluctantly fulfils his promise to Jean but is unable to give Clarissa what she needs.

- During the picnic at the end of the novel, Jean discovers the truth about the scarf as a result of the meeting which is arranged by Joe and consequently the sub-plot is resolved. Jean's obsession is over but she is unable to achieve forgiveness - another key issue in the novel.

- Joe's contact with Jean and the children has some restorative power. Joe and Clarissa are both 'very good with the children' and Joe enjoys talking to them about the river at the end of the novel - this can be linked to his ability to explain science. McEwan has said that this is an indication that he has accepted his role as a writer about science rather than an instigator of scientific discovery. (It is also worth remembering that as a result of Joe's contact with the Logan children he is able to move forward in his analysis of Jed when he remembers De Clerambault's syndrome.)

Conclusion

- Summarise the importance of Jean's character in your opinion - what does her character add to the novel?