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Thinking Small Across the Atlantic:
Ian McEwan's *Saturday* and Jay
McInerney's *The Good Life*

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ALIKI VARVOGLI

Thinking Small Across the Atlantic: Ian McEwan's *Saturday* and Jay McInerney's *The Good Life*

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks on The World Trade Center in New York, the consensus was, briefly, that fiction was no longer appropriate because it could not adequately express the horror of what happened. Now, six years later, the '9/11 novel' is becoming a sub-genre in American fiction, but also in Britain and beyond: not only has the event been processed by the culture sufficiently to make its way into fiction, but it has also acquired a global dimension which reflects both the troubled origins and the terrifying repercussions of that fateful day. So far, most American writers have dealt with the event directly by producing novels that assess the impact of 9/11 on New Yorkers. Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children* and Paul Auster's *The Brooklyn Follies* lament a happy past that came to an end on the morning of September 11, 2001. Other novels, such as Ken Kalfus's *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country*, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, examine the ways the nuclear family has been affected by the catastrophe, while at the same time making gestures towards social and political satire (in Kalfus's case), and a somewhat feeble attempt to link domestic concerns with recent history (the bombing of Dresden in Foer's novel) or global terrorism (in *Falling Man*). The two novels that this article discusses participate in both categories: they emphasise the importance of the family and indirectly suggest that it is the institution most hurt or threatened by terrorism, and they also express nostalgia for a recent past that becomes much more appealing once seen through the lens of 9/11.

Yet the unexpected pairing of McEwan and McInerney is not intended only to highlight their shared concerns for the survival of the family, but also to suggest that the two books help us to ask important questions about the usefulness and relevance of fiction, and about the meaning of national literary identity. Is McInerney's book an American novel because