The Poetics of Insecurity turns the emerging field of literary security studies upside down. Rather than tying the prevalence of “security” to a culture of fear, Johannes Voelz shows how American literary writers of the past two hundred years have mobilized insecurity to open unforeseen and uncharted horizons of possibility for individuals and collectives. In a series of close readings of works by Charles Brockden Brown, Harriet Jacobs, Willa Cather, Flannery O’Connor, and Don DeLillo, Voelz brings to light a cultural imaginary in which conventional meanings of security and insecurity are frequently reversed, so that security begins to appear as deadening and insecurity as enlivening. Timely, broad-ranging, and incisive, Johannes Voelz’s study intervenes in debates on American literature as well as in the interdisciplinary field of security studies. It fundamentally challenges our existing explanations for the pervasiveness of “security” in American cultural and political life.

Johannes Voelz is Professor of American Studies, Democracy, and Aesthetics at Goethe-Universität Frankfurt, Germany. In 2016, he was awarded a Heisenberg-Professorship by the German Research Foundation. He is the author of Transcendental Resistance: The New Americanists and Emerson’s Challenge (2010) and has edited several books and special issues, among them “Security and Liberalism,” a theme issue of Telos (Spring 2015) and “Chance, Risk, Security: Approaches to Uncertainty in American Literature,” a theme issue of Amerikastudien / American Studies (Fall 2015).
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American Fiction and the Uses of Threat

JOHANNES VOELZ

Goethe-Universität Frankfurt
To Magda
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