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**Nota di bibliografia**

Includes bibliographical references and index.

**Nota di contenuto**

Introduction: literary executions -- Anti-gallows activism in antebellum American law & literature -- Simms, Child, & the aesthetics of crime and punishment -- Literary executions in popular antebellum fiction -- Hawthorne & the evidentiary value of literature -- Melville, Mackenzie & the Somers affair -- An American travesty: capital punishment & the criminal justice system in Dreiser's *An American tragedy* -- Epilogue: the death penalty in literature.

**Sommario/riassunto**

"In *Literary Executions*, John Barton analyzes nineteenth-century representations of, responses to, and arguments for and against the death penalty in the United States. The author creates a generative dialogue between artistic relics and legal history. Novels, short stories, poems, and creative nonfiction engage with legislative reports, trial transcripts, legal documents, newspaper and journal articles, treatises, and popular books (like *The Record of Crimes* and *The Gallows, the Prison, and the Poor House*), all of which participated in the debate over capital punishment. Barton focuses on several canonical figures--James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Lydia Maria Child, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Theodore Dreiser--and offers new readings of their work in light of the death penalty controversy. Barton also gives close attention to a host of then-popular-but-now-forgotten writers--particularly John Neal, Slidell MacKenzie, William Gilmore Simms, Sylvester Judd, and George Lippard--whose work helped shape or was in turn shaped by the influential anti-gallows movement. As illustrated in the book's epigraph by Samuel Johnson -- "Depend upon it Sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully" -- Barton argues that the high stakes of capital punishment dramatize the confrontation between the citizen-subject and sovereign authority. In bringing together the social and the aesthetic, Barton traces the emergence of the modern State's administration of lawful death. The book is intended primarily for literary scholars, but cultural and legal historians will also find value in it, as will anyone interested in the intersections among law, culture, and the humanities"--