

ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

From a Queen and from an Earl: Shakespearean “Black Blood” and Colton Gas



While administering 100% nitrous oxide to his Manhattan patients for just under a minute, dental anesthetist G. Q. Colton (1814 to 1898) routinely watched patients' complexions change with "Colton gas" from blue to black before dental extractions commenced. While hypothesizing that "overstimulation" by laughing gas led to death-like congestion, was Shakespearean scholar Colton reminded of quotes from two of the Bard's characters? In Shakespeare's narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece*, Queen Hecuba's "blue blood changed to black in every vein." And in the Bard's *Henry VI*, the Earl of Warwick observed that the Duke's face was "black and full of blood." The scene (above, from *Chroniques d'Angleterre*) depicts England's Henry VI and his coronation as King of France. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists' Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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