

ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

From a Jailer and from a Queen: Shakespearean Deadening and Colton Gas



Shakespearean scholar G. Q. Colton (1814 to 1898) revived Americans' anesthetic use of laughing gas. Preferring to deaden dental pain rather than the dental patient, Colton apparently agreed with Shakespeare's First Gaoler (or Jailer, from the Bard's comedy *Cymbeline*) who opined that "he that sleeps feels not the tooth-ache...." Although administration of 100% nitrous oxide was reported as safe by Colton, dentists delivering hypoxic "Colton gas" could render patients "untimely smothered," to quote Dowager Queen Margaret from Shakespeare's historical play *Richard III*. She despised King Richard III, who was played onstage by actor David Garrick. In 1745, painter William Hogarth immortalized Garrick (above) playing Richard III. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists' Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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