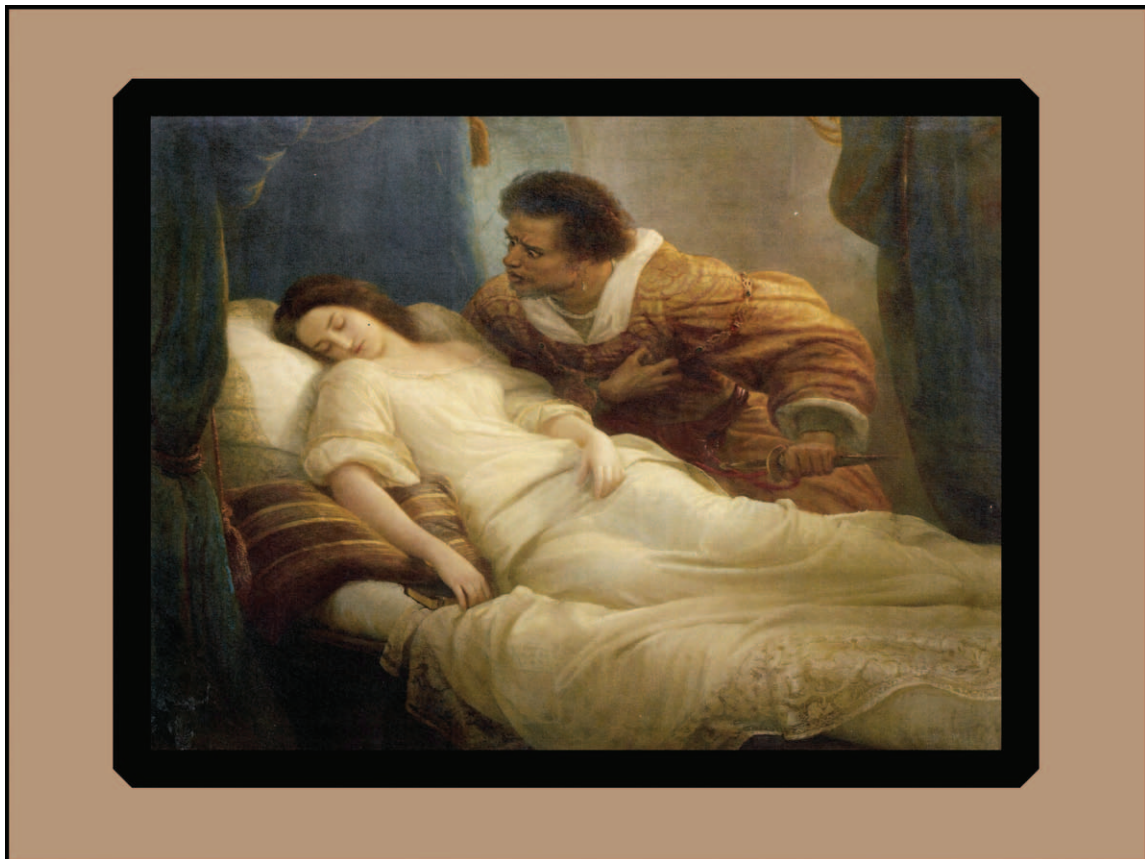


ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

From Falstaff and Cassio: Shakespearean Apoplexy and Colton Gas



Although New York's G. Q. Colton (1814 to 1898) reported nearly 200,000 safe administrations of 100% laughing gas, a few dentist anesthetists left occasional patients with strokes or brain damage from such asphyxial anesthetics. As a Shakespearean scholar, could Colton have contemplated along with the Bard's Falstaff that "This apoplexy ... is a kind of lethargy ... a kind of sleeping in the blood...." Or on brandishing the mouthpiece of his "Colton gas" inhaler, did Colton consider lamenting along with Cassio (from the Bard's *Othello*) that "men should put an enemy into their mouths, to steal away their brains...."? Like that of sleeping Desdemona (*left*, as painted in 1859 by Christian Köhler), the life of Cassio would be threatened by the murderous Othello (*right*) and his cronies in Shakespeare's 1622 play, originally published as *The Tragoedy of Othello, The Moore [sic] of Venice*. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists' Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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