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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

From Ferdinand and Courtezan: Shakespearean Ecstasy and Colton Gas



A Shakespearean scholar, New York's G. Q. Colton (1814 to 1898) promoted nitrous oxide as a super-oxygenating and resuscitating stimulant, the recreational use of which contributed to health and even ecstatic happiness. Perhaps laughing gas reminded Colton of characters' quotes from two of Shakespeare's comedies. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, King Ferdinand inquired, "What zeal, what fury hath inspired thee now?" And referring to one of the Antipholus twins (above, from an 1879 Broadway poster) in *The Comedy of Errors*, innkeeper Courtezan exclaimed, "Mark how he trembles in his ecstasy!" Sadly, Colton equated the jactitations and seizures observed with his hypoxic "Colton gas" administrations to ecstatic trembling, which he attributed incorrectly to excessive stimulation by oxygen. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists' Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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