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Semantic shift of the colour-terms *maroon* and *magenta* in British Standard English

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the changing referent of the colour terms *maroon* and *magenta*. *Maroon* was a specialised technical term in the mid-eighteen-hundreds within the field of artists' colours, and the term *magenta* was introduced in 1860 in the newly-invented chemical dye industry. Both terms spread out into general usage, and in the case of *maroon*, caused earlier meanings to be disturbed and displaced so that today they are either forgotten or shifted into register-specific usage (namely, North American bureaucratic English and other Extraterritorial English bureaucratic varieties). It is speculated that the English artists' colours firm of Winsor and Newton had a role in retarding the American sense-development of the colour term *maroon*, as this firm had a near-monopoly in late nineteenth-century America. Thus, the paper offers a description of semantic change from specialised usage to general usage, with a restriction of specialised usage remaining in a specific functional context. Data is taken from artists' handbooks, tint-cards and paint catalogues; from police report forms, wanted persons notices, and other official bureaucratic forms; and mention is also made of the novels and letters of Charles Dickens.

Keywords: Aniline dye, artists' colours, Bureaucratic English, Charles Dickens, colour terms, historical semantics, magenta, maroon, semantic change.

1. Introduction

Although this paper is about the specialised usage of two colour terms within the fields of artists' colours and the chemical dye industry, we begin not with texts from those domains but with the writings of Charles Dickens. Dickens was a prodigious letter-writer, and it need hardly be said that this text-type flourished during the heyday of the postal service, with the ephemeral trivia of daily life sent on a daily, if not twice-daily, basis. Because he was famous in his lifetime, Dickens' letters were kept by the recipients, and being so famous, they have been edited.¹ Here follows a list of the nicknames of Dickens and his wife Catherine's children, gleaned from his letters. One nickname in particular may or may not be relevant for the meaning of our first colour-term, *maroon*.

¹ Especial thanks are due to Nigel Roche, Head Librarian, St Bride Library, and Paul Robinson, Technical Advisor at Winsor and Newton. Thanks are also due to David Trotter, Michael Picone, William Rothwell, Philip Durkin and William Kretschmar for etymological help.

Dates refer to letters published in the eleven-volume Pilgrim Edition (simply referenced by volume and page number), to the edition by Dickens' eldest daughter and sister-in-law (referenced as Dickens and Hogarth), and to the editions by Dexter (1932, 1935).

1. The Dickens Children

Charles Culliford Boz Dickens, born 1837. The odd name *Boz* was a childhood nickname of Charles Dickens's younger brother Augustus, and Dickens himself took it over as a *nom-de-plume* when he wrote his first stories and *Sketches by Boz*. It might have been an accident at the christening, as apparently Dickens's father John shouted it out during the ceremony (Ackroyd, 1990, p. 119). This first child was known as *Charley*, and his infant nickname was *Master Tobey*, which the child pronounced *Flaster Flobey* (25 Sept 1842, Dickens and Hogarth i., p. 76).

Mary Angela Dickens, born 1838, known as Mamey (*Mamey*, Dickens' spelling, *Mamie*, her spelling). Her nickname was *Mild Gloster*, as generally descriptive of her bearing, assuredly a reference to the cheese of that name (25 Sept 1842, Dickens and Hogarth i., p. 76). Dickens published *Oliver Twist* in that year, which makes mention of a 'piece of Double Glo'ster' –his earlier works do not mention this cheese. He had a tendency to reflect the name of the latest baby in the work he was currently writing.

Kate Macready Dickens, born 1839, known as Katey. *Macready* was after William Charles Macready, a famous actor and manager of the Covent Garden Theatre. He was Kate's godfather. Katey was also known as *Lucifer Box* when she was three years old (a reference to matches) 'from a lurking propensity to fieryness' (25 Sept 1842, Dickens and Hogarth i., p. 76).

Walter Landor Dickens, born 1841, named after the author and poet Walter Savage Landor. He was known as Wally, and as a toddler he was called *Young Skull* because of his high cheekbones (25 Sept 1842, Dickens and Hogarth i., p. 76).

Francis Jeffrey Dickens, born 1843, named after Lord Francis Jeffrey, the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*. He was called Frankey and his nickname was *Chickenstalker* (8 Nov 1844, Dickens and Hogarth i., p. 126), which is also the name of a grocer in the story *The Chimes*, which Dickens finished in 1844, so he would have been writing it during Frankey's infancy (Dexter, 1935, p. 112).

Alfred D'Orsay Tennyson Dickens, born 1845. He was known as Alf. He was named after his two godfathers: the French artist Count Alfred D'Orsay, and the English poet Alfred Lord Tennyson.

Sydney Smith Haldemand Dickens, born 1847. He was named after William Haldemand, who was a member of parliament and a benefactor of the Institution

for the Blind, which Dickens was patron of. He was known as Syd and Syddy. As a baby Sydney was also known as *the Spectre*, *Ocean Spectre*, *Ocean-Spec*, *Hosben*, and *Hosen-pec*. This was originally “in consequence of his having unnaturally large eyes which he stares with in a frightful manner” (7 Sept 1847, vol. 5, p. 160, n. 3). Mamie Dickens explains that *Hosben Peck* was a corruption of *Ocean Spectre*, with a “sad significance as the boy (Sydney Smith) became a sailor, and died and was buried at sea two years after his father’s death” (Dickens and Hogarth i., p. 171).

Henry Fielding Dickens, born 1849, known as Harry, named after the author Henry Fielding. His nickname was the *Jolly Post Boy* (Dexter, 1935, p. 167).

Dora Annie Dickens, born 1850. Dickens was writing about the character Dora in *David Copperfield* at the time of her birth, but she died at eight months of age.

Edward Bulwer Lytton Dickens, born 1852, named after his friend Edward Bulwer Lytton, novelist and playwright, who became the child’s godfather. Here follows a list of baby Edward’s nicknames, with reference to the editions of Dickens’ letters and date of first usage.

The Comic Countryman (vol. 7, p. 104: 26 June 1853 –sole attestation?).

The Plornishghenter (vol. 7, p. 136: 28 Aug 1853).

May-Roon-Ti-Goon-Ter (Dickens and Hogarth i., p. 338: 25 Nov 1853).

The Plorn (Dickens and Hogarth (eds) i., p. 338: 25 Nov 1853).

The noble Plorn (Dickens and Hogarth i., p. 340: 25 Nov 1853).

The Plornish-Maroon (Dexter, 1932, p.167: 2 Feb 1854).

Madgenter (vol. 7, p. 372: 19 July 1854 –sole attestation?).

The Gocter (vol. 7, pp. 491-2: 28 Dec 1854 –sole attestation? The editors suggest it is a pronunciation of ‘doctor’, which sounds reasonable, but they give no evidence).

Plornish Maroontigoonter (vol. 7, p. 501: 7 Jan 1855).

Mr Plornish (vol. 8, p. 155: 5 & 6 July 1856).

The Hammy boy (vol. 8, p. 156: 8 July 1856 –sole attestation?).

Plornish (Dickens and Hogarth ii., p. 76: 26 Sept 1858).

The noble Plornish (vol. 8, p. 672: 26 Sept 1858).

These nicknames have baffled many an editor –one of the most assiduous in tracking nicknames, Walter Dexter, wrote of the name *Plornishghbenter* “Its origin is not known” (Dexter, 1932, p.158). Elizabeth Hope Gordon wrote: “Surely Plornish-marootigoonter could not be accounted for as the perversion of any single recognizable word of good English standing” (Gordon, 1917, p. 23).

We are concerned here with the *maroon* element of baby Edward’s nicknames, not in order to explain his nickname, but to establish the Victorian meaning of the colour-term *maroon*. Wright (2007) considered the colour-term *pink*, which used to mean ‘yellow’. In that paper it was hypothesised that *pink* meaning ‘yellow’ may have derived from an etymon cognate with Low German *pinkeln* ‘to urinate’, the colour-term *pink* having changed its referent when it became no longer applied to the colour, but to the liquid state of made-up distemper in which pink was usually sold, rather than hard, dry pigment, as other paint-colours were. When that distemper shifted from being predominantly yellow-coloured to predominantly pink-coloured (it is hypothesised), so did the adjective. The present paper is concerned with the changing referent of *maroon* in British Standard English, but not all Standard Englishes, as we shall see. Does baby Edward’s nickname provide any evidence? Or, does the changing referent of *maroon* have any relevance for students of Dickens and his writings?

2. The evidence

In a letter to Wilkie Collins dated 26 Sept 1854 (vol. 7, p. 423) Dickens wrote in the sign-off: “The Plornish-Maroon desires his duty. He had a fall yesterday –through overbalancing himself in kicking his Nurse”. Apparently Dickens was absolutely tickled when he heard the Nurse, instead of addressing him as Master Edward, say: “Master Plornish Maroon, –there’s your Pa a calling for you” (2 Feb 1854, Dexter, 1932, p. 167) and *Plorn* was what Edward was known as all his adult life. In 1855 Dickens began writing *Little Dorrit* (Dickens and Hogarth i., p. 378), and he recorded the nickname of the baby in the names of two fictional characters. The *Plornish* part of baby Edward’s nickname was given to the character Mr Plornish, a fictional plasterer living in Bleeding Heart Yard and friend to Little Dorrit. The *Maroon* part also appears in *Little Dorrit*:

Plornish, going up this yard alone and leaving his Principal outside, found a gentleman with tight drab legs, a rather old hat, a little hooked stick, and a blue neckerchief (Captain Maroon of Gloucestershire, a private friend of Captain Barbary). (Dickens, 1855-7, p. 101)

(There was, in fact, reportedly a real Captain Maroon, alive and celebrated in the London newspapers in the 1730s. Had Dickens had access to newspapers of a hundred years earlier he might have been aware of this).

To concentrate on the element *maroon*, what might it have signified in London in the mid-1850s? To start with the obvious meaning deduced from the collocations with *captain* and *barbary* in *Little Dorrit*: the verb *to maroon* someone is derived from the noun *maroon*, meaning ‘a runaway slave living wild’, referring predominantly to the descendants of groups of slaves who became fugitive and took to the hills in Jamaica, Suriname, Colombia, Texas, Guyana, and Mexico. *Maroon* in this sense is known of from 1658 in French, and 1666 in that text’s English translation. The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that this sense of *maroon* derives from the Spanish word *cimarron* ‘wild animal’, ultimately derived from Latin *cyma* ‘top’ + suffix forming nouns, leading to Spanish *cimarra* ‘wild place’ (*OED*, *maroon*, *n.* 2 and *adj.* 2)². The verb *to maroon* someone then came to mean to leave them on a wild, uninhabited island. The semantic field of the two Captains’ names in the novel, *maroon* and *barbary*, coupled with the rank of sea-captain, reinforces the interpretation of runaway slaves or deserted sailors. And one might argue that both small babies and old sea salts are wild creatures, and so this sense of *maroon* is fitting for both. But it should be remembered that the nickname-element predated the fictional Captain, and *maroon* also has a colour-sense, which, if referring to face-colour, might also sit well with both small babies and old sea salts. However, if so, which colour did *maroon* designate in London in 1854?

² Larry Trask, Sum: Borrowing of French <marron>, HistLing@ListServ.sc.edu, 4 June 2003. There is also a further meaning for *maroon*, that of a type of loud firework, apparently in reference to a chestnut bursting on a fire (*OED*, *maroon*, *n.*1 and *adj.*1 2. a).

2.1. Referents of *maroon*

Maroon still has another meaning in a specific register of some Extraterritorial Englishes. No. 2. contains two transcriptions from prisoners' cabinet or description cards from the early twentieth century, now kept in the Police Museum of Memphis, Tennessee, USA:

2. Roland Gilder

Age:	14
Hair:	Black and Kinky
Eyes:	Maroon
Born:	Dec 26th 1920
Occupation:	Thief

Henry Simmons

Age:	38
Arrested:	Aug 24th 1917
Complexion:	Light brown
Hair:	black
Eyes:	maroon
Crime:	Vio. narc. law

(Beale Street Police Museum, 159 Beale, Memphis, TN, USA. Transcribed 2002).

Nos. 3-5. give some more uses of the adjective *maroon* taken from Extraterritorial, but Standard, Englishes:

3. Auburn, N.Y. Police Department Mug Shot Cabinet Cards, 1909.

Name:	Domenico Desanto		
Crime:	Petit Larceny		
Age:	20 yrs.	Height:	5 ft.
Weight:	120 lbs.	Build:	Small
Hair:	Med Chest.	Eyes:	Maroon
Nose:	Reg.	Face:	Smooth
Complexion:	Med.	Born:	Agiula, Italy
Occupation:	Laborer	Married:	No
Color:	W		
Arrested:	October 2, 1909		
Officer:	Kelly		
Sentenced:	120 Onondaga Pen.		
Remarks:	Small scar over left eye. Large burn scar under left jaw.		

(http://www.rootsweb.com/~nycayuga/records/police/apd_mugshots.htm, accessed March 2010).

4. Florida, Adult Day Care Center Background Screening Instructions, 2006.

Eyes and Hair

Color of eyes and hair are to be entered on fingerprint cards as follows:

Color	Enter on Card As
Bald*	BAL (Hair only)
Black	BLK
Blond or Strawberry	BLN
Blue	BLU

Brown	BRO
Gray or Partially Gray	GRY
Green	GRN (Eye only)
Hazel	HZL (Eye only)
Maroon	MAR (Eye only)
Pink	PNK (Eye only)
Red or Auburn	RED (Hair only)
Sandy	SDY (Hair only)
White	WHI (Hair only)
Unknown	XXX (Eyes and Hair)

* Bald (BAL) is to be used when the applicant has lost most of the hair on the top of their head.

(http://www.fdhc.state.fl.us/mchq/long_term_care/assisted_living/alf/ALF_background_Screening_Reneval_Instructions.pdf, accessed July 2011)

5. North Carolina national criminal history record check form, 2011.

Eye Color: (write the appropriate letters in the space provided)

BLK – Black	GRY – Gray	MAR – Maroon
BLU – Blue	BRO – Brown	GRN – Green
HAZ – Hazel	PNK – Pink	XXX – Unknown

(http://ncchildcare.dhhs.state.nc.us/pdf_forms/division_aging_live_scan.pdf, accessed September 2011)

Photographs of the faces of people wanted by the police are posted on the internet: two such were posted at <http://www3.dubaipolice.gov.ae/dubaipolice/mostwanted/mostwantedeng.htm>, accessed March 2006, which was a description of a South-Asian person wanted in Dubai in 2004, (the Dubai Police posted it in English), the caption to which read “Hair: Black. Eyes: Maroon. Place of Birth:

Bangladesh’; and http://www.seminolesheriff.org/en-us/advisories/transient_offenders/reports/trav587.html, accessed August 2009, which was a description of an African-American person wanted by the Sheriff’s office in April 2010 in Seminole County, Florida, USA, the caption to which read “Black Hair, Maroon Eyes, POB: Texas”. The following comment indicates that journalists who habitually deal with American police reports use *maroon* as a codeword for ‘African-American’.

At her paper, the Philadelphia Bulletin, saying that a person had “maroon eyes” was code for “black sources,” which meant that the editors should bury the story.

(Stephen M. Fee, “Hope Alongside Hatred”, *The Harvard Crimson* (Online Edition), http://www.southerncourier.org/crimson_reunion_sty1.html, accessed August 2009).

Note that these tokens of *maroon* are all found in official documents. They cannot be non-standard usages; rather, they are standard usages of *maroon* in Extraterritorial functional varieties of bureaucratic English (the phrase “maroon eyes” can also be found in literary texts, excluded here, simply because the bureaucratic usage establishes that there is nothing non-standard about the term). One can find *maroon* as an eye-colour listed elsewhere in the English-speaking world, though not in England itself. In Britain, *maroon* denotes a colour that lies in the red part of the spectrum and which cannot designate a human eye-colour:

6. *Maroon* ‘claret red’



The word *maroon* in the sense of ‘eye-colour brown’ is a restricted usage of the original English-language meaning, which was ‘chestnut brown’. *Yeux marron* occur in French and *ojos marrones* in Spanish, both meaning ‘chestnut-coloured eyes’. *Maroon* as a noun is first attested in English in a list of “dates, chestnuts, and marrons” from 1594 (*OED*, *maroon*, *n.*¹ and *adj.*¹). The English word *maroon* is probably derived from the French word *marron*, a Southern French term introduced into French from Italy, denoting the fruit of the chestnut tree. In June 2003 the late Larry Trask sent a query to *HistLing*² in an attempt to discover the ultimate etymology of the French word *marron*, as he noted that as a designator of the colour ‘brown’ it had spread into other Romance languages, sometimes displacing the reflex of Latin *castanea* (which gives us Present-Day English *chestnut*). He was interested in why it had “spread so far and so seemingly rapidly”. He summarised from the replies received that, as noted in *OED*, *marron* either comes from the French dialect of Lyon meaning ‘a chestnut’, or from Medieval Latin *marro* ‘stone, rock’, and that it is first attested as a colour term in French in the mid-1700s. However it was rare in French until the nineteenth century, and less common than *brun* well into the twentieth. As a colour term, Trask reported that in English the word *maroon* is first recorded in Hamilton’s 1791 translation of Berthollet’s *Art of Dyeing* (cited under *OED*, *maroon n.*¹ and *adj.*¹ 3.a), in a context which makes it clear that *maroon* still meant ‘brown’ at that date: “Darker colours such as browns and marones”. At present, *OED* does not distinguish between the two colour referents. *OED*’s definition (“a brownish-crimson or claret colour”) is ambiguous – are these synonyms, or two separate hues?

3. a. A brownish-crimson or claret colour. 1779 H. L. PIOZZI Diary 10 Feb. in K. C. Balderston *Thraliana* (1942) I. 367 We were..saying every body was like some Colour; & I think some Silk Sophy Streatfield was to be a pea Green satten..& Johnson..was to be a Marone. (*OED*, *maroon n.*¹ and *adj.*¹ 3.a).

The citation from Mrs Piozzi’s diary is ambiguous as to the precise colour, as are all the pre-1871 adjective citations.

So, various Extraterritorial Englishes have retained the meaning of ‘chestnut brown’, which is a reasonable descriptor of eye-colour, some human eyes being the same colour as chestnuts. The question is: how did the meaning of *maroon* transfer from ‘chestnut brown’ to ‘claret red’, and had this happened by 1854? Was Master Plornish Maroon, if a double allusion to both his wildness and his colour, red or brown?

3. The changing referent of *maroon*

The first mention (of which we are aware) that allows us to deduce that *maroon* had changed from meaning ‘chestnut brown’ to meaning ‘claret red’ is in a book of 1835 by George Field, *Chromatography*. George Field³ was a colour technologist who put the classification of pigments on a scientific footing. The great problem facing artists was permanence: colours were fugitive to varying degrees, and mixing a relatively fast colour with a non-fast one resulted in a change in hue over time. Field classified various pigments by describing their hue, naming their source and giving their chemical constituents, and then detailing their relative properties of permanence according to his experiments. His *Chromatography* of 1835 was highly influential, as the names of the subscribers in the frontispiece indicate. They include Sir Thomas Lawrence, late P.R.A.; Edwin Landseer, Esq., R. A., St John’s Wood; Messrs. Reeves and Sons, Cheapside; Messrs. George Rowney & Co., Rathbone Place; Joseph Mallord William Turner, Esq., R. A., Sandicombe Lodge, Richmond; David Wilkie, Esq., R. A., S. A., Kensington; and Mr. William Winsor, Rathbone Place. Chapter nineteen is *Of Marrone*:

We have adopted the term MARRONE for our second and middle semi-neutral, as univocal of a class of impure colours composed of black and red, black and purple, or black and russet pigments, or with black and any other denomination of pigments in which red predominates. It is a mean between the warm, broken, semi-neutral class of colours called *brown*, and the cold semi-neutral class of *grey*, or *ashen*. Marrone is practically to shade, what red is to light; and its relations to

³ For more on George Field see his entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/938>). Ball (2001/2002, p. 183) refers to him as “the leading English colour-maker of the nineteenth century”. Turner and Constable both bought their colours from him, and Ball suggests that “there can be little doubt that, without this collaboration with so adept a chemist, Turner would have been hard pushed to achieve his brilliant effects with lesser materials. And no doubt we have Field to thank, by dint of his thorough testing of colours, for the fact that Turner’s paintings are not now still more discoloured than they are”. Ruskin warned his students to ignore certain parts of *Chromatography*; Holman Hunt corresponded with Field about pigment permanence (Ball, 2001/2002, p. 188).

other colours are those of red, &c., when we invert or degradate the scale from black to white. It is therefore a following, or shading, colour of red and its derivatives; and hence its accordances, contrasts, and expressions agree with those of red degraded; hence red added to brown converts it into marrone if in sufficient quantity to predominate. In smaller proportions red gives to browns the denominations of bay, chestnut, sorrel, &c. (Field, 1835, p.164)

Field adopted the term maroon to cover brownish red, and he left bay, chestnut and sorrel to cover reddish brown. This is how it has been understood in Britain ever since.⁴

Thus, we can establish that baby Edward's nickname of *the Plornish Maroon* could have contained both the meanings of 'claret-coloured' and 'wild-runaway' in London in 1854. It is, of course, far harder to establish whenabouts the sense of 'chestnut brown' fell out of usage in London, and presumably some early readers of *Little Dorrit* may have interpreted a double pun on Captain Maroon's name on both the 'wild-runaway' and the 'chestnut brown' sense, which would be reasonable as an allusion to suntanned skin. But it is entirely possible that the *maroon* element in baby Edward's nickname was chosen to invoke one sense only (whether 'wild-runaway', 'chestnut brown' or 'claret-red', or maybe even something to do with fireworks), or indeed none: the onomasticon does not behave like the rest of the lexicon, and can be semantically empty. Thus we have not established a definitive interpretation for students of Dickens' naming practices; we have merely opened up the possibility of an interpretation.

4. The meaning of *magenta*

Dickens was calling baby Edward *the Plornishghenter* in August 1853 and *the Madgenter* in July 1854. Is this the colour-term *magenta*, or something else? The

⁴ However this is not to imply that Field's classification was immediately accepted by all speakers. F. C. Crace Calvert was Professor of Chemistry at the Manchester Institution, and in his book on *Dyeing* (dated by *OED* to 1873, 1876 at the British Library) he mentions maroon as being "a coal-tar dye obtained from the resinous matters formed in the manufacture of magenta". Crace Calvert lists aniline maroon together with brown, so possibly he regarded it as still signifying 'chestnut brown' in the 1870s.

editors of the Pilgrim Edition assume something else, the word *mad*. In vol. 7, p. 372, n.10, they suggest that the “joking reference is presumably because of his conduct on the voyage out” (to Boulogne). However Dickens’ description of Plorn’s behaviour on the voyage to Boulogne in June was that he got seasick and comported himself with noble suffering, not that he was mad. Of course, this does not rule out the possibility –indeed, likelihood– that the *Mad*- element of the nickname was, in fact, the word *mad*.

It is tempting to assume that the baby was nicknamed with colour terms as he was prone to turning bright pink in the face, as babies of English descent do, but it is not certain that the <dg> graphs represent an affricate (as in *Madge*); they could represent stops. However, if not *magenta*, then what? Was there ever a noun *ghenter*? *OED* tells us that there was an adjective, derived from the place-name *Ghent*, applied to azaleas:

The name of a city in Belgium (Flemish *Gent*, French *Gand*), used *attrib.* to designate any of a number of hybrid azaleas first developed by P. Mortier of Ghent between 1804 and 1834.

1841 J. LOUDON *Ladies’ Companion* 23/1 The kinds called the Ghent Azaleas, are hybrids and varieties raised in Belgium. (*OED*, Ghent).

It is thus possible, if perhaps unlikely, that Baby Edward was named *mad* + ‘type of azalea’ + agentive noun suffix *-er*, or, just as unlikely, *mad* + ‘person from Ghent’ + agentive noun suffix *-er*. There is little more to say here, other than to note that *maroon* was also applied to flowers, e.g.: “A most lovely *Convulvulus* ... with purple maroon flowers” (Kingsley, 1871, p. ii). However this floral coincidence is likely to be no more than a red herring. Let us proceed then with the hypothesis that *madghenter* is a spelling for the colour-term *magenta*. We immediately run into difficulties. The term is thought to have been coined in 1859 –but baby Edward was nicknamed *Madghenter* in July 1854. And the dissemination of the word *magenta* was not entirely straightforward. To consider this, we need to know a little about dye.

4.1. Victorian developments in the manufacture of dye

Before 1856 all dyestuffs came from minerals, insects (such as the cochineal insect) molluscs (such as the purple-dyeing shellfish *Murex brandaris* or *Purpura lapillus* - a white cloth once dipped in the shellfish dye turns pale green, twice dipped turns blue, thrice dipped turns purple); or roots or leaves of plants, like indigo and madder and woad. Sir William Henry Perkin invented aniline dye in 1856, and changed the appearance of Victorian fabric.

As his is such a remarkable story with such far-reaching effects, we take a paragraph to sketch his background. Sir William was born in the East End of London in Upper Shadwell, to a well-to-do family, in 1838. He went to junior school in the Commercial Road, and then he attended the City of London Boys School where he learnt about chemistry, which was taught in the lunch-hour because it was not yet deemed to be a proper subject like Greek or Latin. When he was fourteen, Perkin wrote to Michael Faraday asking for permission to attend his lectures at the Royal Institution on Saturdays.⁵ In 1846 the Royal College of Chemistry opened its new premises on the south side of Oxford Street, and at fifteen years of age, Perkin enrolled as a student. There, Perkin attended lectures given by the Director, August Wilhelm von Hofmann, and when he was seventeen, Perkin was appointed as Hofmann's assistant.⁶ Hofmann suggested to Perkin that it would be useful to synthesize quinine, which had been recently applied in the treatment of malaria, so Perkin set to work on the by-products of coal –this was because Victorian London was full of coal waste as the city was lit by gas produced from coal, and the poisonous residue was valueless and a health hazard.

One of the main diseases in the 1850s was malaria, killing millions in Asia, Africa, Russia, Australia and Europe.⁷ In Britain it killed inhabitants of the fens

⁵ English chemist and physicist Michael Faraday, b. 1791, d. 1867. Known for his pioneering experiments in electricity and magnetism. What follows about Perkin and aniline dye mainly comes from Garfield (2000) and Ball (2001/2002, pp. 236-41).

⁶ August Wilhelm von Hofmann, German chemist, Director of the Royal College of Chemistry, b. 1818, d. 1892.

⁷ Around 781,000 people still die from malaria today, mainly children in sub-Saharan Africa (Wikipedia: malaria).

in Cambridgeshire and the Kent and Essex marshes. In the 1850s it was not known that malaria was spread by mosquitoes, but it was known that it was cured by quinine, coming from the cinchona tree found only in Bolivia and Peru, so it was important to isolate the active elements. In 1856 Perkin set up a small laboratory in his home in Shadwell, and he experimented with aniline from coal-tar in order to create artificial quinine by oxidising aniline. One of his experiments resulted in a black sludge. He treated this sludge further by oxidising crude aniline with potassium dichromate, and this produced the dye-colour we now know as *mauve*.⁸ The word *mauve* was not used in English much before that point as a colour descriptor; it was a French word for the plant known in English as the *mallow*, ported into English by fashion magazines. Perkin tested the mauve dye on silk and found that it was relatively fast – a property mostly lacking in natural dyestuffs – and although he was only eighteen, he gave up his place at college to set up business. He persuaded a Scottish woollen-textile producer to buy his dye, and with his father and brother he purchased premises and began manufacturing.⁹

Perkin created aniline mauve dye in 1856 and began to market it; by 1857 the Empress Eugenie in Paris was wearing the new colour, and her influence in the fashion world cannot be overstated. In 1858 Queen Victoria wore mauve to her daughter's wedding (the word still required a gloss in the *Illustrated London News* report: "the train and body of her Majesty's dress was composed of rich mauve (lilac) velvet, trimmed with three rows of lace ... and the ... Koh-i-noor"). Mauve became the fashionable colour for both men and women, both clothes and accessories, to the extent that it was satirised by *Punch*. Here is an extract from the journal *All the Year Round*, Dickens's own magazine, which he edited – although it is not known whether this particular piece was actually written by him:

⁸ Professor Crace Calvert had already discovered aniline dye a couple of years earlier but he did not market it (Ball, 2001/2002, p. 237).

⁹ At Greenford Green in Middlesex. The Greenford site was chosen because as well as being in a London suburb it is by the Grand Union Canal and the River Brent, which were used for discharge of chemical waste. The site continues in use today by the pharmaceutical company currently known as GlaxoSmithKline. One of the by-products of the chemical dye industry is pharmaceuticals; Bayer, BASF, Ciba-Geigy and Agfa also all started as dye-works.

One would think that London was suffering from an election and that those purple ribbons were synonymous with “Perkins for Ever” and “Perkins and the English Constitution”. Oxford street windows are tapestried with running rolls of that luminous extract from coal tar. Oh, Mr. Perkin, thanks to thee for fishing out of the coal hole those precious stripes and bands of purple on summer gowns that, wafting gales of frangipanni, charms us in the West End streets luring on foolish bachelors to sudden proposals and dreams of love and a cottage loaf. (*All the Year Round*, 1859)

The name took a while to settle down; it was also originally known as *Perkin's purple*, *aniline violet*, *harmaline*, *aniline purple* and Perkin himself called it *mauveine*.

Meanwhile other dye factories were experimenting with aniline dyes. Garfield (2000, p. 78) lists twenty-eight dye-making firms exhibiting in 1862 at the International Exhibition, many presenting dyes of almost identical hue. Jakob Natanson in 1856 and August Hofmann in 1858 both created vivid pink-mauve dyes. In 1859 Emmanuel Verguin invented an almost identical dye in France, which was marketed there by Renard frères & Franc. Verguin named it *fuchsine* (Garfield, 2000, pp. 78-9), both as a German pun on the French name of the manufactory, and in reference to the Fuchsia flower (Chevreul, 1860, p. 62). Other names invented for this hue were *fuchsin*, *rubin*, and *aniline red*. Fuchsine became very successful, partly because it could be made in vast quantities, and partly because it was adopted by the military as well as becoming *à la mode*. Edward Chambers Nicholson, another former student of August Hofmann, created a similar dye in England in the same year. Originally he and his business partners marketed it as *roseine* and in conjunction with Hoffman *rosaniline*, but later this colour was marketed as *magenta* in reference to the Battle of Magenta in Northern Italy where in 1859 the Austrians were defeated by the French and Sardinians (Ball, 2001/2002, pp. 241-2; Garfield, 2000, p. 79).¹⁰

¹⁰ The Battle of Magenta was fought on June 4, 1859 during the Franco-Piedmontese war against Austria (second War of Italian Independence, 1859-61), resulting in a French victory under Louis-Napoleon against the Austrians under General Gyulai. (Source: Wikipedia).

7. Soldiers' uniforms at the Battle of Magenta.



The Italian Camp at the Battle of Magenta, 1859, by Giovanni Fattori

(<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/85/BattleofMagenta.jpg>, last accessed July 2011)

Solferino, a neighbouring town at which a battle was fought a few days later, also bestowed its name on a dye that was similar to aniline magenta.

8. Soldiers' uniforms at the Battle of Solferino



L'Empereur Napoléon III à la Bataille de Solférino, by Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier. Commissioned 1859, Exhibited 1861

(http://fr.wikimedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Napol%C3%A9on_III_%C3%A0_la_bataille_de_Solf%C3%A9rino.jpg, last accessed July 2011)

Garfield (2000, p. 78) states that the solferino and magenta dyes were actually identical. Whether or not this was so, they seem to have become differentiated later on. In 1905 the *Société Française des Chrysanthémistes* published a colour chart in order to aid the classification of flower petal hues. Here it appears that in French, at least, *solferino* and *magenta* were the names of similar but different hues:

9. Clarification of the terms *magenta* and *magenta rougeâtre* in 1905

Magenta	
Origine:	Dénomination ordinaire de cette couleur dans les commerces des laines, étoffes, cotons, rubans, etc.
Synonymes français:	Violet rougeâtre (impropre). Violet Amarante (impropre).
All.:	Magenta. Neurot.
Angl.:	Magenta. New red.
Esp.:	Magenta. Rojo Solferino (impropre).
Ital.:	Magenta. Rosso nuovo.

Magenta rougeâtre	
Origine:	Combinaison du Magenta et du Solférino.
Synonymes français:	Solférino de Lorilleux (impropre). Solférino violacé.
Synonymes étrangers:	
All.:	Rotmagenta.
Angl.:	Rosy magenta. Magenta ⁽¹⁾ (impropre).
Esp.:	Magenta rojizo.
Ital.:	Magenta rossastro.

Oberthur and Dautheny, 1905, pp. 182, 169

Dictionaries suggest that the name *magenta* was given either in reference to the soldiers' bright red uniforms or in reference to the blood shed in battle;

however, neither were coloured magenta, and the fact that *solferino* was also used as a dye-name suggests that the choice was merely a topical reference. Perkin's dyeworks began to produce aniline magenta dye in 1860, although his original formulation had to be abandoned as it contained mercury which poisoned his workers (Garfield, 2000, p. 80). Like aniline mauve, aniline magenta dye was tremendously successful, particularly for underwear. However it was becoming known by the late nineteenth century that aniline dyes were not entirely harmless. In the mid 1860s a wallpaper with a thick green pattern of foliage had become very popular which, when heated up in hot weather or if rubbed, discharged particles of arsenic, affecting the lips, eyelids and throat of anyone inhaling. This matter was much ventilated in the press and medical journals, and ten years later it was claimed by the dye industry that the problem had been eradicated. Yet, in the same year, 1870, fourteen samples of commercial magenta dye from European dyeworks were analysed and all fourteen were found to contain arsenic. The fashion for working-class Londoners in the late nineteenth century was to wear underwear and stockings that were dyed with aniline dyes including aniline magenta. Arsenic in dyed clothes caused inflammation of the skin, and people living near dye-works and drinking the local water also became ill. Yet nothing was done, apart from the publication of letters of protest, because it was in the dye-companies' interests to keep producing aniline dyes.¹¹ The dye companies claimed that the arsenic in dyed clothes did not come off on the skin, which was true so long as the fabric remained dry; however, fabrics worn next to the skin do not stay dry due to perspiration. The summer of 1884 was particularly hot, and a surgeon at St. John's Hospital for Skin Diseases in London put on a display of the dreadful things that aniline dye was continuing to do (Garfield, 2000, pp. 100-109). The debate about the health implications of aniline dyes continues today, although the malaise in question is no longer arsenic poisoning but whether aniline food colouring makes children hyperactive.¹²

¹¹ See e.g. letters to *The Times* for Friday, October 16, 1868, p. 4; Issue 26257, col C. and Monday, July 07, 1884, p. 4; Issue 31179, col F.

¹² See, for example, McCann et al (2007), where it is reported that it does.

Readers will have noticed that there has been a recurring habit of referring to magenta as ‘red’, even though the hue it denotes was not originally red (and is not now): Hofmann originally announced that he had synthesised “a crimson colouring principle” (quoted in Garfield (2000, p. 74)); Ball (2001/2002, p. 241) refers to Verguin’s fuchsine as “a deep red substance” and “the red dye”; another name for *fuchsine* in 1858 was *aniline red*; the French Society of Chrysanthemumists’ colour card in no. 9. gives *new red* as a synonym for *magenta* in English, and the redness of the blood shed in battle and the red soldier’s uniforms at the Battle of Magenta have been suggested as explanations for the success of the term. *OED* is clear that *magenta* denotes a pink-mauve hue but also registers the red component in its nomenclature: “A purple-pink aniline dye, fuchsin; the colour of this dye. Originally more fully Magenta red.” (*OED*, *magenta n.*, and *adj.*). That *magenta* never signified ‘red’ but always ‘pink-mauve’ can be established by a late nineteenth-century Winsor and Newton tint card.

10. Winsor and Newton’s *magenta*, late nineteenth-century

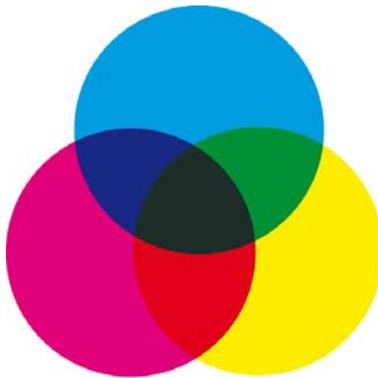


“*Specimen Tints of Winsor & Newton’s Artists’ Oil and Water Colours*, p.1878-a.1882. Magenta. Cobalt violet. Mineral violet. Mauve. Permanent violet. Permanent mauve. Mineral violet, 2. Mauve, 2.” Winsor and Newton’s own earliest tint card, showing the magenta strip. Winsor and Newton, with permission.

The actual hues on the tint card may have altered somewhat over the intervening 130-odd years, but it is clear that *magenta* was classified with the violets and mauves, not the reds.

However, we may note that one place where the colour magenta really was called *red*, as late as 1961, was within the colour-printing industry. *Magenta* is an essential technical term today in this industry. What is now known as CMYK colour-printing on paper was first mass-circulated when newspapers began to run coloured comic strips in the late nineteenth century. The initials stand for *cyan, magenta, yellow, key* –these three colours were keyed to black ink to give depth, and between them generated the all the colours seen on paper.

11. CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow, key (black), producing blue, green, red)



However, the term *CMYK* was not in use in the nineteenth century; its original –and lasting– name was simply ‘three-colour printing’, and the three colours referred to were just known as *red, yellow* and *blue*. Yet for successful output it mattered precisely which shades of red, blue and yellow were used. The 24th *Annual Report of the American Photo-engravers’ Association* of June 1920 states: “The red ink should contain no yellow, for otherwise it would be difficult to produce pink or purples. ... We all know that the red plate is the trouble maker” (quoted in Wiborg (1926, p. 220), in which there is no mention of the term *magenta*). In other words, the red plate has to be a bluey kind of red. The

British *Printing Ink Manual* for 1961 makes it clear that it was still being called the *red* plate in Britain within the industry: “The old nomenclature of red, yellow and blue for the primaries of subtractive colour mixture still persists, but its use is to be deprecated since the “red” is not red but blue-red” (Bowles, Askew, Holness, Idle, Leach (eds), 1961, p. 229). The term *magenta* had been previously introduced within the industry-literature for this colour but it took decades before it caught on. The print industry’s standardising body had begun to use the term *magenta* for the ‘red’ plate in 1949, but only as a gloss: “The four-colour set comprises Yellow, Red (magenta), Blue (cyan), Black” (B. S. 1480, 1949, p. 4). So this particular functional variety (that of colour-printing) did use *red* as a synonym for ‘magenta’. But we can establish that it was not the case that the early pink-mauve hue denoted by the term *magenta* was ever replaced by a red hue by looking outside the print industry. We find, for example, pink-mauve coloured samples illustrating the term *magenta* in the British Colour Council *Dictionary of Colour Standards* for 1934, who note: “magenta B. C. C. 198. This colour was one of the earliest dyestuffs synthesised from coal tar, and was put on the market in 1859. Its brilliant but fugitive shade caused a sensation. The name was derived from the Battle of Magenta.” (B. C. C. 198). Turning to the sample for B. C. C. 198, we find the modern shade of pink-mauve.

12. *Magenta*, UK, 1934



And in America, Maerz and Rea Paul’s 1930 *Dictionary of Color* defines *magenta* in its present-day pink-mauve sense in Plate 52 square K 12. We conclude that there was simply a resistance to naming the ‘red’ plate *magenta* within the British

print industry for seventy-odd years.¹³ This is an instance of slow diffusion of a new word throughout all the functional varieties.

4.2 Was *Madgenter* magenta?

To return to our starting point for this consideration of *magenta*: Dickens was calling baby Edward *the Plornishgenter* in August 1853 and *the Madgenter* in July 1854, which is prior to the battles of Solferino and Magenta in 1859. The word *magenta* was mentioned in *The Times* in April 1853,¹⁴ as a place-name, whilst two years earlier it was reported that thirty cannon had been assembled at Magenta,¹⁵ and there were mentions of the town in the preceding decade. Dickens could well have read *The Times* in 1853, 1851 or earlier, and seen the place-name *Magenta*, and it might have tickled his fancy as a euphonious word, but presumably it could not have had any colour significance at that date. In a letter dated 25th November 1853, in allusion to baby Edward, Dickens called him “an irresistibly attracting, captivating May-Roon-Ti-Goon-Ter”, which may or may not be relevant (to either *maroon* or *magenta*). In a letter to his wife (12 Feb 1852, vol 6, p. 597, and n. 5) he referred to Frank or Walter as “Keeryleemoo”, to which his editors append the note: “but joke not obvious”. In a letter dated 1 April 1852 he referred to one of his children, probably Walter or Sydney, as “Rightfollarolliddedeerightfollarollaa” (Dexter, 1935, p. 168), so probably intonation, prosody and euphony played a far more important part than semantics in baby nicknames. It is tempting to see Plorn’s nickname as an antedating of the colour-term *magenta*, but there is no evidence that this is what it is. Although both Plorn’s baby nicknames in *Maroon* and *Madgenter* look like colour terms befitting a baby semantically, there is no way of proving that they are, and every likelihood that they are not.

¹³ A further development within the colour-printing industry is *electric magenta*, which uses the RGB model (*red-green-blue*). Electric magenta is lighter than process magenta as the magenta colour is produced by intersecting red and blue light on a screen, rather than ink on paper. This referent of *magenta* seems to date to the 1980s and will not be treated here.

¹⁴ Thursday, April 21, 1853, p. 5, Issue 21408, col B.

¹⁵ Monday, February 17, 1851, p. 6, Issue 20727, col A.

5. On why *maroon* has retained the sense ‘chestnut’ in some Extraterritorial bureaucratic Englishes

We may have been unable to establish the meaning of baby Plorn’s nicknames, but we have been able to pinpoint the changing referent of *maroon* to the usage of one man, George Field, in an influential publication of 1835. We can go a step further, and present a hypothesis as to why it is that human eyes can still be considered maroon in Florida and North Carolina but not in Britain. In order to do this, we need to compare four editions of Field’s *Chromatography*, and understand something of the incomparable influence of the artists’ colour firm of Winsor and Newton in America.

Field’s *Chromatography* of 1835 listed just two pigments under “Marrone” in Chapter XIX, firstly, *marrone lake*, and secondly, *carucru, or chica* (Field, 1835, p. 165). A “new, improved” edition of *Chromatography* appeared in 1841. To these two pigments were added a third, *burnt carmine* and a fourth, *chocolate lead* (Field, 1841, pp. 289-90). Next, in 1869, came the edition known as ‘Salter’s Edition’, which was published not by the original publishers Tilt (who had mutated into Tilt and Bogue by 1841) but by the firm of Winsor and Newton (George Field had been well known to both William Winsor and Henry Newton when they started their artists’ colour firm in 1832 (Pavey, 1984, p. 23)). Thomas W. Salter altered and added to the list of pigments given under “Marrone” 5. *brown madder* (“an exceedingly rich marrone or russet-marrone brown”); 6. *mixed marrone*; 7. *chica marrone*; 8. *chocolate lead* (“or marrone red”); 9. *cobalt marrone* (“it is an expensive compound, and must rank among those colours which are interesting in the laboratory but superfluous in the studio”); 10. *madder marrone* (“or marrone lake ... in every respect a good pigment, it was one of those colours which gradually –and often, as in this case, unfortunately– became obsolete, on account of their hues being easily given by admixture of other pigments”); 11. *mars marrone* (“The one marrone of brown-marrone pigment at present employed, brown madder, is permanent.”) (Salter’s edition of Field’s *Chromatography*, 1869, pp. 365-71). Unsurprisingly this welter of product, not all of which was available or practical, proved uncommercial. The original 1835 edition had stated that the maroons (that is, the ‘claret red’ hues) were placed in various classes, due to the instability of their names:

“Owing to the instability and confusion of the nomenclature of colours, most of the colours and pigments of this class have been assigned to other denominations, as reds, browns, and purples –puce, pavonazzo, murrey, morello, chocolate, &c. (and the seasons of London bring us annually new names for broken colours from the dyer, few of which survive the ephemeral fashions which introduce them): hence pigments which belong properly to the present and other classes, have been arranged according to their names under other heads” (Field, 1835, p. 164)

Salter’s edition reworded the parenthesis to:

This vagueness also accounts for pigments having been ranged under heads not suited to the names they bear, and explains why Brown Ochre has been classed among the yellows, Italian Pink among the same, Brown Pink among the citrines, &c. (Salter’s edition of Field’s *Chromatography*, 1869, p. 362)

So the maroon-nomenclature was found to be unsatisfactory: unstable, confused, and vague. We now come to an important edition of Field’s *Chromatography*, “modernised” by J. Scott Taylor in 1885. J. Scott Taylor was Winsor and Newton’s Scientific Director and chief chemist from 1890 to 1939 (the firm still possesses W. John Winsor’s much-handled personal copy, marked “for factory use 7/8/85”), and it is noticeable that the colour-terms used in this 1885 edition are the ones that appear in Winsor and Newton’s tint cards.

13. Winsor and Newton’s late nineteenth-century names for the maroon shades



Specimen Tints of Winsor & Newton’s Artists’ Oil and Water Colours, p.1878-a.1882. Ex. Purple Madder. Burnt Lake. Purple Lake. Burnt Carmine. Purple Madder. Brown Madder. Rembrandt’s Madder. Rubens’ Madder. (sic). Winsor and Newton, with permission.

The maroon (in its ‘claret red’ sense) shades were covered by madder pigments such as *brown madder* and *purple madder* –Winsor and Newton were particularly productive with madder-derived pigments as they owned George Field’s method for extracting the pigment from the root.

14. Present-day Winsor and Newton madder shades



Winsor and Newton’s *Genuine Rose Madder* (so-called because it is still made from actual madder root according to George Field’s recipe), and *Alizarin Crimson* (alizarin is the colourant in madder. It was synthesized in 1869, causing the virtual cessation of madder cultivation). Winsor and Newton, with permission.

Scott Taylor says in his preface that he wanted to make Field’s *Chromatography* both cheaper and more accessible. In doing so, he made a radical change to the manual: he did away with the word *maroon*. No longer was there a category of “semi-neutral colour”, and no longer a chapter “of marrone”. The single maroon pigment which Salter had declared permanent, *brown madder*, became reassigned to the chapter on brown pigments and praised highly (“altogether is a pigment which cannot be too strongly recommended to artists”). The other claret-red maroons were swept out of the text and into the Appendix: “A Dictionary of Pigments not in Ordinary Use, and of Synonyms of Pigments Described in Part III”. Here are now to be found “Madder Marrone –or Marrone Lake. An obsolete preparation, made from the madder root.”; “Chica Red. –Extracted from the leaves of a tree which

grows in Central America. It is not permanent.”; Chocolate Lead. –A compound of the oxides of lead and copper, prepared by a dry process. It dries well; but is blackened by sulphuretted hydrogen. It is sometimes known as “Marrone Red.” (J. Scott Taylor’s edition of Field’s *Chromatography*, 1885, pp. 189, 193, 194). Thus, wanting to save space and make Field’s *Chromatography* more useful for the firm, J. Scott Taylor effectively knocked the word *maroon* out of Winsor and Newton’s colour vocabulary for around eighty years. The word does not reappear in their trade literature until the year 1951, when mention is made of *maroon* not as a pigment but as a passe partout binding.¹⁶ *Maroon* only reappears as a pigment-term in the American catalogue of 1961 in the “Artone Tempera Water Colors” range (Winsor and Newton, 1961, p. 11), and not in the international catalogue until the introduction of the water-colour *Perylene Maroon* and the acrylic *Benzimidazolone Maroon* in 1997 (Winsor and Newton, 1997, pp. 30, 31, 46, 110, 119).¹⁷

Why is this absence of the word *maroon* from Winsor and Newton’s colour vocabulary so significant for Extraterritorial Englishes? The answer lies in Winsor and Newton’s global dominance, particularly in America, in the realm of artists’ colours. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the lay-person’s colour vocabulary (outside the core nomenclature) came essentially from two industries: that of dyeing, and that of artists’ materials. However the two, as has been seen, cannot be kept strictly separate. The first industry accounts for why a wide knowledge of colour-nomenclature has, to some extent, been seen as a feminine attribute. Until barely a generation ago, clothing was made in the home predominantly by women, and colour-coordinating cloth, knitting-wools, threads, buttons, silks and other haberdashery items necessitated frequent visual appraisal of colour terminology when reading labels, and only a couple of generations ago, verbal utterance thereof, as one had to ask an assistant behind the counter for whatever one wanted. There was considerable crossover (*mauve* and *magenta* are examples) of terminology from one domain to the other. In both

¹⁶ ““Butterfly” Passe Partout Binding For framing pictures and photographs. Black, Brown, Dark Green, Dark Blue, Light Blue, Light Green, Maroon, Red, White”. (Winsor and Newton, 1951, p. 156)

¹⁷ Neither the 1951 passe partout nor the 1961 Artone Tempera maroons are illustrated in the catalogues.

domains, colour-terminology introduced by the producers was not always the term that survived: *benzimidazolone maroon* has been withdrawn as a product name as customers are loathe to pronounce *benzimidazolone* in public; both *mauve* and *magenta* had many long-forgotten synonyms bestowed by their discoverers. There has long been a dissonance between producers on the one hand and marketers on the other –Maerz and Rea Paul’s 1930 *Dictionary of Color* describes the difficulty of classifying colours when they have been given names such as ‘suppressed sigh’ or ‘whispered regrets’. The more outlandish colour-terms introduced by chemists or marketing departments stood less chance of survival, whereas those which were relatively transparent in meaning, were pronounceable, and which sounded right to the customer (whether for reasons of euphony, familiarity, or catching the zeitgeist) were more likely to endure. Winsor and Newton’s unprecedented, unequalled and unsurpassed success in marketing artists’ colours in America was put down, by one assessor at least, to their large number of travelling salesmen, who saturated retail outlets with Winsor and Newton tint cards, catalogues and products, thereby disseminating Winsor and Newton colour terminology (W. E. Killik, 1925).¹⁸

This is how the late nineteenth-century American market came to be less familiar with the colour-term *maroon* in its new sense. The British market was crowded with dyers introducing and arguing over colour terminology in the late nineteenth century, and the British market knew stiff internal competition between artists’ colour firms and other paint makers. By contrast, one firm was able to dominate late nineteenth and early twentieth-century America, and their in-house terminology had the effect of slowing down the spread of the new sense of the word *maroon*, so that the older meaning of *maroon* still functions in American bureaucratic English. Essentially, the hypothesis presented here is that in countries where racial distinctions were routinely and bureaucratically made, the vocabulary-set for describing eye-colour must have been drawn up either

¹⁸ Winsor and Newton employee W. E. Killik tells of his passage by sea in 1890 to America (Killik, 1925, pp. 17-18). Upon being accosted by a fellow passenger who demanded to know what line of business he was in, he gave the reply “artists’ materials”. Killik was told that he might as well take the next boat back “because there is nothing sold in the United States but Winsor & Newton” (www.winsornewton.com, accessed September 2009).

before 1835 (when *maroon* still meant ‘chestnut’), or some time shortly thereafter. The tension that would have been felt in Britain in describing eyes as *maroon* after that date was simply far weaker in America, due to the lower frequency of usage of *maroon* in the ‘claret’ sense.

6. Conclusion

This consideration of the colour-terms *maroon* and *magenta* started with the observation that baby Plorn’s nicknames, as evidenced by his father’s letters, seem to contain these terms. It is concluded that there is no safe way of deciding one way or the other whether these nickname elements really are colour-terms or not. Leaving aside the nicknames, then, and treating the colour-terms *maroon* and *magenta*; it has been suggested that *maroon* changed its referent in 1835 according to the publication of one particularly influential individual, George Field. Therefore, if the *maroon* element of baby Plorn’s nicknames was a colour-term, we have established that this element could have signified ‘claret red’, along with all the other things that the word *maroon* meant, including, presumably, the old ‘chestnut brown’ sense too (Dickens is well-known for his interest in language –he used old-fashioned words, meanings and sound-changes in the speech of elderly characters, and would presumably have been aware that *maroon* previously meant ‘chestnut’). It has been noted that *maroon* still means ‘chestnut’ in some Extraterritorial bureaucratic Englishes, and it has been hypothesised that this lag has been influenced by Winsor and Newton’s omission of the word from their colour-vocabulary. If the *Madgenter* element of baby Plorn’s nicknames was the colour-term *magenta*, then it would be an antedating of the previously-known earliest attestation, and would also antedate the Battle of Magenta in June 1859. However the fact that there was also a dye marketed at the same time under the name *solferino* makes it likely that both dyes, *magenta* and *solferino*, were named after the battles, but not in reference to colour (either of uniforms or of blood), but merely as a topical reference –that is, euphonious exotic-sounding words which were very much in the air at the time (compare the term *garibaldi*, which also enjoyed a brief vogue in English in the 1860s, referring to both a jacket and a hat, and again in the 1890s, referring to a biscuit). This leaves baby Plorn’s nickname unexplained, other than the guess that the first

element might be the word *mad* (there appears to be no obvious explanation for the element –*genter/ghenter/goonter/gunter*). However, it has been established that the earliest meaning of the colour-term *magenta* designated a pink-mauve hue, even though contemporary names (*aniline red, new red*) and later commentary might lead one to assume that it had originally meant ‘crimson red’.

It is fairly unusual to ascribe the semantic change of a word to the influence of one single individual, and even more unusual to ascribe the *absence* of a meaning in a particular variety to the influence of one individual. The roles of George Field and J. Scott Taylor in the development of the word *maroon* must remain at the level of hypothesis, but, as the combination of technological development plus the marketing of that development (that is, the workaday processes of trade) is one of the main causes of semantic change, here is a glimpse as to how this mechanism might work.

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