The Rose, Flower of Love and Beauty

Like ancient roses, medieval roses were not pink but red or white, two colors that together constituted a particularly admired chromatic pairing. Here they are associated with spring, the favorite season. c. 1260.

The Mystery of the Red Chamber

The empty space in conjunction with the ubiquitous reds makes this one of the strangest and most disturbing pictures in the whole history of painting. The mysterious visitor has left his cane and gloves on the table; he lurks in the shadows, hands bare. What is about to happen? A simple romance? Prostitution? Incest? A blood crime? In contrast, the painting by Édouard Vuillard reflected in the mirror above the mantle seems very peaceful. Félix Vallotton, La Chambre Rouge, 1898.

Dyers at Work

In order to dye in red, whether with madder, brazilwood, orcein, or kermes, the water in the vat had to be boiling hot, and mordants had to be used abundantly. Bartholomaeus Anglicus and Jean Corbechon, Le Livres des Propriétés des Choses, manuscript copied and painted in Brussels, 1482.

Red’s Theatricality

Ever since Roman antiquity red has been—even more than the color of the theater—the color of theatricality. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, The Box with the Golden Mask, oil on paperboard, 1894.