Come into the Garden, Maud

A NIGHT-SONG OF LOVE is how the poem is prefaced in the original collection.

The language of the poem looks very interesting and I want, for a while, to look at it separately.  If I try to do so by just reading the poem normally, my mind keeps trying to unravel the poem’s ‘meaning’ and is constantly distracted - so I've used Word to decontextualise the words for me.  (See below, and Techniques)

I would ask students to mark the text in different ways, e.g. words that seem slightly out of place in a ‘love poem’; words that strike them as interesting; words which they wish to look up and so on. When they have marked the whole text, discuss their findings before turning to the original poem.

There are many fascinating aspects to investigate - the extreme sensuousness of nature; the lover's repetition of 'faint' and the impression that he is, like Keats, 'half in love with easeful death'; plants that cry, weep and whisper...  All build to an impression of dreamlike intoxication.

The poem is a dramatic monologue and thus brings Browning to mind. One of Browning's monologues would make a good comparison activity - perhaps even the famous Duchess?  It seems to me that Browning is more obvious in his sympathies; irony, where it exists, is more obvious. Tennyson, I feel, does not deal in irony. That does not mean that we have to take the lover's plaint (I couldn't resist that word) at face value. Is he deluding himself? Is he, even, slightly mad?

Because the poem is telling a story, one cannot help asking what has happened, what is happening and what might happen next. These imaginings may have some bearing on the poem - but, as I am very well aware, they can take one far off course and leave one marooned on a shore many leagues adrift from one's original purpose.  
However, some interrogation of the text at this level is in order, and the poem with comments/questions inserted might be useful here. (See Questioning Maud)

We do not always associate Victorians with voluptuousness and yet their writing (like their architecture, design, visual arts etc etc) is the very opposite of minimal. Here is one famous critic of the day, describing 'Maud' - "Surely the voice of love never sang with a more passionate sweetness than in this night-song.  What ethereal luxury and flower-like tenderness it has, and yet with what a pulse and fire of passion it beats and glows!—"  Would any contemporary critic dare to use such language? I doubt it: too frightened of ridicule.

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**Come into the Garden, Maud – collapsed into alphabetical order.**

I would ask students to mark the text below in different ways. I’ve started to do so in the following way: red text to signify words that seem slightly out of place in a ‘love poem’ – if that is what it is… Blue text for words that just strike me as interesting; the repeated references to dance, for instance. Students might then highlight words which they wish to look up.

When they have marked the whole text, discuss their findings. Then look at the original poem and investigate: the part played by the words in red, the significance of those in blue, are one’s feelings about the tone of the text born out when you see the words in context?

a abroad acacia airy all alone am an and are as at awake away babble bassoon bat be beat bed beginning bird black blood blossom blown blue breeze brief but by casement century clash'd come coming cries curls daffodil dance dancers dances dancing dawn day dead dear dearer die done dove dozed dust earth earthy echoes ever eyes faint fall fallen fate feet fell flowers flown flute for from garden gate gay girls glimmer gloss goes gone had half hall has have he head hear heard heart her here high his hither hollows hush I in into is it jessamine jewelprint knowing lain lake lake-blossom larkspur last late lea leave left life light lilies lily listens little long lordlover loud love loves low march-wind Maud me meadow meet milk-bloom mine moon morning moves music musk my near never night not now o of on one our out over own paradise passion-flower pearls pimpernel planet play promise purple queen red revel rising rivulet rose rosebud roses said sake sand satin sets setting shake she shine sigh'd sighs silence sky slender so soul spices splendid start stirr'd stone stood sun sunning sware sweet tear than that the thee their there they thine those till to tread tree tremble tune under valleys violets violin wafted wait waking walks was we weary weeps went were what wheel when whenever which whispers white whom will wine with wood woodbine woody would young your

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