Meleager’s Grasshopper (12 G-P = AP 7.195) and Tityrus’ Bees (Verg. Ecl. 1.53-55)

Meliboeus describes the rustic pleasures awaiting Tityrus (Verg. Ecl. 1.53-55):

hinc tibi, quae semper, uicino ab limite saepes
Hyblaeis apibus florem depasta salicti
saepe leui somnum suadebit inire susurro

Line 55 has drawn comment for its metrical shape,\(^1\) for suadeo with the infinitive,\(^2\) and for its alliteration and onomatopoeia.\(^3\) The primary influence of Th. Id. 7.135-147 upon Ecl. 1.51-58 is rightly recognized and for the above quoted lines Id. 7.141-142 are obviously important.\(^4\) However, although both sleep and bees feature in Theocritus, the latter never induce the former. Here I propose a further influence, Meleager 12 G-P (= AP 7.195), a pastoral-erotic epigram addressed to a grasshopper,\(^5\) in which the sound of the insect’s wings is figured as providing music by which the speaker might be lulled to sleep:

‘Ακρίς, ἐμῶν ἀπάτημα πόθων, παραμύθιον ὕπνου,
ἄκρις, ἄρουραὶ Μοῦσα λιγυπτέρυγε,
αὐτοφυὲς μίμημα λύρας, κρέκε μοί τι ποθεινὸν
ἐγκρούουσα φθόγγον ἐρωτοπλάνον.
δῶρα δέ σοι γῆτειον ἀειθαλὲς ὀρθρινὰ δώσω
καὶ δροσερὰς στόμασι σχιζομένας ψακάδας.

Grasshopper, beguilement of my passions, exhortation to sleep,
Grasshopper, shrill-winged rustic Muse,
Natural imitation of the lyre, play for me some much-desired song,

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1 Clausen 1994, 53.
2 Coleman 1977, 84.
4 Hunter 1999, 191 ad Th. Id. 7.135-147.
5 For ἀκρίς as a grasshopper or cricket rather than a locust, see Gow and Page 1965, 2.615.
Striking your loquacious wings with your dear feet,
So that you may relieve me of the pains of sleep-depriving worry,
Grasshopper, spinning out a sound that leads love away.
Then I shall give you as gifts at daybreak an evergreen leek
And dewy drops that I separate with my mouth.6

I suggest that the grasshopper’s epithet παραμύθιον ὕπνου (12.1) lies behind Vergil’s somnum suadebit inire: Vergil has adapted Meleager’s abstract noun with a verbal phrase, which we might see as reflecting Latin’s more general aversion to abstract nouns,7 or the colloquial tone of the Eclogues.8

Vergil had incorporated details from Meleager 13 G-P (= AP 7.196), an epigram addressed to a cicada, in the opening two lines of Eclogue 1,9 and alludes elsewhere in the Eclogues to other poems from Meleager’s Garland.10 Meleager 12 precedes his cicada poem in the Anthology and likely also in the Garland;11 it is moreover intimately connected to 13 in theme, structure and phrasing.12 Its context is distinct in some details from Ecl. 1.53-5513 but it possesses obvious common ground to suggest its relevance, and the arresting image of an insect (or a hedge of them) ‘urging’ or ‘exhorting’ (OLD s.v. suadeo; LSJ s.v. παραμύθεσαι, παραμύθιον) one to sleep by the sound of its beating wings is the crucial shared detail.14 At Verg. A. 2.9 suadentque cadentia sidera somnos, Horsfall adduces Vergil’s memory of Ecl. 1.55 or even direct recollection of Meleager’s phrase,15 but in Aeneid 2 much of the context which the Eclogues

6 The translation draws on Paton 1917, 2.111; Egan 1988, 24; Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004, 177.
7 See e.g. Hofmann 1951, 2-3; but cf. Catullus 2.10 solaciolum sui doloris glossing Meleager 12.1 ἀπάτημα πόθων; for discussion see Bishop 1966, 158-167.
8 On aversion to abstract-nouns as a marker of colloquial discourse see Rheinhardt 2010, 208. On colloquialism in the Eclogues see conveniently the indexes of Coleman 1977 and Clausen 1994 s.v. ‘colloquialism’.
9 Gutzwiller 1996, 95-96: viz., Ecl. 1.1 patulae recubans sub tegmine fugi ~ 13.8 ὑπὸ σκιερῆς κεκλιμένος πλατάνῳ, Ecl. 1.2 siluestrem... Musam meditaris ~ 13.2 ἀγρόνιμαν μέλπεις μοῦσαν. Gutzwiller posits Meleager as an ‘intermediate’ source, operating alongside of the primary model, Theocritus.
10 E.g. at Ecl. 9.59-60 namque sepulcrum / incipit apparere Bianoris ~ Diotimus 4.3 G-P (= AP 7.261) Ἰθέων γὰρ σῆμα Βίανος θέασθαι μήτηρ; see Clausen 1994, 286.
11 So Gow and Page 1965, 2.615, who take AP 7.190-203 as a sequence from the Garland.
12 Egan 1988, 24-32.
13 Meleager 12 is set before dawn (7 δῶρα δέ σοι... ὀρθρινὰ δώσω), whereas Vergil’s Meliboeus imagines midday rest (1.51-52, provided at Meleager 13.7-8); the speaker of the epigram seeks relief from sleeplessness as a symptom of desire (12.5-6).
14 Gow and Page 1965, 2.615.