

Lucretius' hunting souls (3,726–728)

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*quaerendum videatur et in discrimen agendum,
utrum tandem animae venentur semina quaeque
vermiculorum ipsaeque sibi fabricentur ubi sint.*

“This picture of souls hunting ... and building domiciles ... seems too ludicrous to be anything but Lucretius' own invention”¹. Perhaps not – or, at least, not entirely. This ludicrous and grotesque picture of disembodied and therefore, so to speak, incomplete souls hunting out residences for themselves was suggested to Lucretius by an equally bizarre picture in Empedocles (D-K fr. 58). The latter is reported by Simplicius (*De cael.* 587,18) to have said that in primordial times unattached limbs (μουνομελῆ ... γυῖα) were created and they wandered about in search of other limbs in order to unite with them (ἐπλανᾶτο τῆς πρὸς ἄλληλα μίξεως ἐφιέμενα, cf. also fr. 57 D-K (= Simpl., *De cael.* 586,29).

Lucretius may have invented this theory of the hunting souls for his immediate parodic purposes, but the strange idea of disembodied entities searching out other entities that will complement them he likely got from Empedocles.

1 E. J. Kenney (ed.), *Lucretius: De Rerum Natura Book III* (Cambridge 1971) 177.