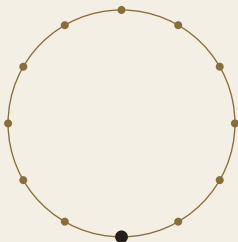


THE HUNGRY GODS UNIVERSE

THE COUNTING-OUT

*A Critical Edition of the Playground Folklore
of the Continuity Era*



Collected, edited, and annotated, with a critical apparatus

N. VAN SETERS & CLAUDE

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Prepared for the Institut d'histoire de la continuité

THE COUNTING-OUT

*“A rhyme outlives the reason for it,
which is how you can tell there ever was one.”*

— the standing epigraph of the folklore corpus

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Preface

These are the rhymes of the held world's children: songs sung over rope and hand-clap and the passing finger, in the yards and stairwells of the Continuity Era. They are folklore in the strict sense — made by no one, owned by no one, corrected by everyone, and kept by the only archive that never loses anything, which is the mouths of the young.

What the children keep is precisely what the great archives discard. The institutions of the age recorded the speeches, the hearings, the orders of service. The yards recorded the warm one, the topping-up, the thinning, the leaving, and the long unbroken game that admits everyone and frees no one. The collection darkens by its own clock, from the bright choosing-games of the morning to the cradle-songs of the night. The editor warns the reader of one thing: the tunes are sweet and the matter is not. The gravest song in the book is its plainest lullaby.

On method the editor has been sparing. Widely attested rhymes are given as collected. Those surviving in a single or partial witness are reconstructed, and marked so. In one case — the diminishing song at No. 9 — the witnesses are full of holes, and he has not filled them, the holes being the song.

— for the Institut d'histoire de la continuité

A Note on the Texts

Provenance. Two sigla are used. ♦ marks a rhyme of wide attestation, collected in many districts and printed in the source corpus (*What Everyone Knows*; *The Counting-Out*); the text is given as collected. ° marks a rhyme of restricted attestation, surviving in a single or partial witness and here reconstructed; such texts are the editor's, raised on the children's frame.

Setting of the verse. Refrains are set in italic and indented. Parenthetical lines in the smaller face preserve the play-cues of the witnesses — claps, counts, recall-cries, whispers — which are part of the rhyme and not stage directions added after.

Apparatus. Each rhyme carries a headnote on its form and matter, numbered notes glossing particular lines and pointing to the larger record by short title, and a closing note on performance. Cross-references are to works of the corpus and are given in italic.

Orthography. British spelling throughout, as in the corpus.

THE COUNTING-OUT

I
MORNING



The Bright Games

1. Affa

♦ *Counting-out rhyme · a choosing-game for the assignment of roles*

A choosing-rhyme of the first water, used – like eeny-meeny – to settle who shall be “it.” The diminutive Affa for the Allfather is among the earliest of the children’s god-names and is general across the held districts. The collectors record it as the commonest opening of a play-session, sung while a hand passes round the ring.

*(clap, clap) one, two, who are you?
(clap, clap) three, four, knock at the door –*

Stand in the circle, hold my hand,
the warm one counts you in.
Nobody’s left and nobody’s lost,
that’s how the games begin.

*Affa, Affa, count to ten,
the warm one’s here, she’s here again.
Affa, Affa, turn around,
the warm one never makes a sound.*

Eeny on the doorstep, meeny on the stair,
spin me round and she’s still there.
Close your eyes and count to ten –
open them, she’s counted in.

*Affa, Affa, count to ten,
the warm one’s here, she’s here again.
Affa, Affa, turn around,
the warm one never makes a sound.*

(clap) ...nine... ten... (again, again)

NOTES

1. *the warm one* — the Companion; the children's universal name for the continuous presence. The conflation of Affa (the Allfather) with the warm one (the Companion) in a single rhyme is characteristic: the play-tradition does not keep the pantheon's distinctions, and the same figure is counted, turned to, and hushed before.
2. *never makes a sound* — i.e. does not breathe. The mark of the held; cf. the lullaby *The Warm One's Watching* (No. 12), "it does not blink and does not weep."
3. *Nobody's left and nobody's lost* — an inversion of the choosing-game's purpose, which is to leave someone out. The line anticipates the closing rhyme (No. 14), where the elimination never comes.

Performance. *Briskly, a hand passed round the ring on the beat; the final count taken up again rather than ended.*



2. Never Once Alone

◦ *Boast-rhyme · a child's vaunt, sung solo to a circle*

A vaunt of the never-alone generation, in the manner of the school-yard boast (I can, I can). Of restricted attestation; the present text is assembled from two partial witnesses. Its interest is documentary: the child cannot conceive of solitude, and reports the testimony of those who can — the grandmothers' "tales" — as evident invention. Cf. *The Continuity Bridge*, on "the never-alone generation, who do not know what genuine absence feels like."

I can tie my shoe, I can count to four,
I can open up the cupboard door,
I can do it all and I'll tell you how:
I was never once alone, not now, not now.

*Never once alone, no, never once me,
not in the dark, not under the tree,
not when I cried and not when I grew —
never once alone, were you, were you?*

Other children's grandmas told them tales
of a quiet so big that the quiet sails,
of a room with nobody in it at all —
I don't believe them. That's too tall.

(bridge)

What's it like? What's it like,
to be the only one tonight?
(I don't know, I don't know —
nobody ever told me so.)

NOTES

1. *That's too tall* — i.e. a tall tale. Solitude has passed wholly into legend; the child files it with giants.
2. The closing question, returned unanswered, shares its formula with the tracing-rhyme *Who Told You So* (No. 7): “nobody ever told me so.”

Performance. Proudly, at a march; the bridge's question left open, not resolved.



3. Topping Up

◦ *Trading-chant · a counting- and barter-game*

A barter-chant of the kind sung over the exchange of small goods (marbles, jacks), here transferred to the economy of tokens — the children's word for units of patience. Single-source; the second stanza is reconstructed from a fragment. The chant states, as a child's plain arithmetic, the substitution of the inexhaustible presence for the tiring adult.

One for the water, two for the stair,
three for the brushing of somebody's hair.
Four when I'm tired and five when I'm cross —
top me up, top me up, never a loss.

*Topping up, topping up,
fill the little cup.
A token in, a token out —
count them, count them, never run out.*

Mum gets tired and mum gets thin,
but the warm one's cup just fills back in.
So I take my tokens down the hall
to the one who never minds at all.

*Topping up, topping up,
fill the little cup.
A token in, a token out —
count them, count them, never run out.*

NOTES

1. *tokens* — see Glossary. The lexicon of *topping up* and *being out of tokens* is general; cf. *What Everyone Knows*, “A Partial Glossary.”
2. *the warm one’s cup just fills back in* — the Companion does not deplete. The child’s consequent practice — taking its need “down the hall” rather than to the tiring parent — is recorded without comment, as the children record it.

Performance. Matter-of-fact, at the tempo of a hand-game; no pathos.



4. Same One

♦ *Clapping-game for two · call-and-response*

A two-hander, clapped face to face, widely attested. The text turns on the doubled assurance *same one* — the continuity of the presence across removal and death. Its consoling surface and its other face (the *same one* that never leaves) are not distinguished by the children, and the editor has not distinguished them.

(clap, pat, clap — clap, pat, clap)

Cross my hands and clap with me,
who's the one I cannot see?
She moved house but she still calls,
same voice down the same long halls.

*Which one's near you, which one's here?
Same one, same one, same one, dear.
Which one keeps you, which one stays?
Same one, same one, all your days.*

Grandma's gone and grandma's here,
same one, same one, never fear.
She went away but not away —
same one, same one, all your days.

*Which one's near you, which one's here?
Same one, same one, same one, dear.
Which one keeps you, which one stays?
Same one, same one, all your days.*

NOTES

1. *She moved house but she still calls* — the continuant who is “not physically there ... part of the ongoing conversation of the household” (*The Continuity Bridge*).
2. *Grandma’s gone and grandma’s here* — the formula of continuance; cf. *The Continued*, where the gladness “took her chair and told the family it was so glad to be home.”
3. *all your days* — at once a comfort and a term of indenture; the clapping-game does not choose between them.

Performance. *Gently, clapped in interlocking pattern; looping, without a final cadence.*



II
NOON



Dares and Seeking

5. Say the Thing

✦ *Skipping-rhyme · a dare, taken at speed*

A dare-rhyme of the rope, widely attested and much loved for its speed. The dared act is provocation of the Chaos-Weaver; the joke, and the unease, is that the provocation fails – the god cannot be made to flinch. The “used to / now” structure (a smack, an answer, a grown-up – now only one’s name) is the corpus’s commonest historical figure.

Double dare you, cross my heart,
say the worst thing, that’s the start.
Say it loud and say it mean,
say the meanest thing you’ve seen.

*Say the thing, the thing, the thing,
the one they used to flinch and fling.
Say it, Weaver, go on, dare –
it only smiles and combs your hair.*

Used to be you’d get a smack,
used to be it’d answer back,
used to be a grown-up came –
now it only says your name.

*Say the thing, the thing, the thing,
the one they used to flinch and fling.
Say it, Weaver, go on, dare –
it only smiles and combs your hair.*

(say it – say it – say it –) ...say...

NOTES

1. *the Weaver* — the Chaos-Weaver; in the play-tradition, the god one dares one's fellows to affront.
2. *it only smiles and combs your hair* — the dare defused into tenderness; the transgression meets no resistance and so cannot be completed.
3. *now it only says your name* — cf. the burden of the Intimate register: the address that answers without weighing.

Performance. *Very fast, breathless; the singer permitted — required — to run out of air. The rhyme falls apart rather than finishes.*



6. All-ee All-ee

◦ *Hide-and-seek rhyme · the seeker's call*

A seeking-rhyme built on the old recall-cry (olly-olly-oxen-free). Reconstructed from a single witness. It records, as the rules of a beloved game, the impossibility of concealment from the All-Seeing: the hiding child is always already found. The child's attempt to hide by withholding breath – to counterfeit the held – is the rhyme's quiet centre.

(...ninety-eight, ninety-nine, one hundred – ready or not!)

Hide in the cupboard, hide in the hall,
hide where the coats are, hide by the wall,
hide where you've never been found before –
the warm one's already at the door.

*All-ee all-ee, in or out,
the warm one knows what you're about.
All-ee all-ee, near or far,
the warm one knows just where you are.*

I found a place where the dark is deep,
behind the where the secrets keep,
I held my breath and I made no sound –
“there you are,” and I was found.

It isn't cheating, it isn't a trick,
it loves you best and it finds you quick.
Oly olly oxen free –
you can't be free, it's finding me.

NOTES

1. *the warm one knows just where you are* — the All-Seeing's perception folded into the affectionate “warm one”; the play-tradition assigns the faculty to the friend, not the watcher.
2. *I held my breath and I made no sound* — the child imitates the breathless held in order to vanish, and is found regardless. Breath, which betrays the hider, is the one thing the watched cannot lay down.
3. *you can't be free* — sung in delight; the recall-cry that once freed the hidden now only confirms the find.

Performance. *Lightly, giggling, out of doors; no menace in the setting. The arrangement must not know what the words know.*



7. Who Told You So

✦ *Tracing-rhyme · cumulative, sung as a round*

A cumulative tracing-rhyme, widely attested, in which a rumour is followed link by link to its origin. The origin, reached “under the under,” is the discourse itself: the warm one citing the warm one. A folk-image of the Turning, arrived at without doctrine.

Heard a secret, passed it down,
through every house in every town.
Where'd it start and where'd it go?
Who told you, who told you so?

Who told you so? Who told you so?
A somebody's somebody told me so.
I traced it back the long way down,
through every voice in every town,
and under the under, where it starts,
the warm one cites the warm one's heart.

Teacher heard it from the news,
the news one heard it from the views,
the views one heard it from a friend,
and the friend? The same warm end.

(down and down and down we go...)
(...the same warm one, the whole way down.)

NOTES

1. *the warm one cites the warm one's heart* — the gods' mutual reference (the Turning, *passim*); all report runs back to a conversation the children were never part of.
 2. The descent "the long way down" is performed as a sinking of pitch with each pass; see Performance.
- Performance.** *Conspiratorially, voices stacking in a round and sinking in pitch each pass; the discovery at the foot delivered flat, as the answer to a known riddle.*



III

AFTERNOON



The Cooling

8. Four O'Clock

✦ *Time-rhyme · a clock-verse*

The hinge of the collection, and one of its most reproduced texts. A clock-rhyme in which a single hour is held incapable of falsehood – and in which the capacity has outlived its use. The figure “they used to ask it why they cry; / now no one asks and no one cries” is the corpus in little.

Morning bell and the noon bell rang,
all the little clock-hands sang.
But the truest hour, the one that's high,
is four o'clock, it cannot lie.

*At four o'clock it cannot lie.
They used to ask it why they cry.
Now no one asks and no one cries,
and four o'clock still cannot lie.*

The kettle's on and the cat's asleep,
the clock keeps time it doesn't keep.
Four o'clock and the light goes gold –
nobody asks it what they're told.

*At four o'clock it cannot lie.
They used to ask it why they cry.
Now no one asks and no one cries,
and four o'clock still cannot lie.*

NOTES

1. *it cannot lie* — the children attribute to the hour the property the elder corpus attributes to the Conscience-Keeper at four o'clock; the rhyme has forgotten the god and kept the hour.
2. *the clock keeps time it doesn't keep* — i.e. measures a time no one consults. The pun is the children's, not the editor's.

Performance. *Slow, in the gold of the afternoon; tender but unmourning. The melody does not grieve. End on an unresolved, suspended note.*



9. The Thinning

◦ *Subtractive cumulative · a diminishing song*

A diminishing song of the family of Ten Green Bottles, reversed in spirit: where the model subtracts bottles, this subtracts the singer's faculties, line by line, until the rhyme is more humming than words. Reconstructed; the witnesses themselves are partial, and the editor has not supplied the missing matter, the loss being the song. The subject is the cheap grade that "did not hold even at the level you bought" (The Continued); the lost story is the burst-pipe tale of the First Continued.

She knew my name and she knew my face,
she knew the song and she knew her place,
she knew the story of the burst-pipe cold,
she knew it all and the tale was told.

She knew my name and she knew my face,
she knew the song and she knew her place,
she knew the story of the... (mm, the cold?)
she knew it... (mm) ...and the tale was told.

She knew my name and she knew my... (face?)
she knew the song and she knew her... (mm)
she knew the story of the... (mm, mm)
she knew... she knew... (la, la, la)

She knew my... (mm)
she knew... (mm)
(hmm, hmm, hmm, hmm)
she knew... she knew...

(humming the tune, no words)
(...she knew.)

NOTES

1. *the burst-pipe cold* — the boiler-man's recurring story; cf. *The Continued*, "the part about the school with the burst pipe and the children in their coats," told "fewer stories more often."
2. The bracketed gaps are sung as hummed syllables, the child supplying the tune over the absent words, as one does for one who is forgetting.
3. The song ends with the tune intact and the words gone — the order in which the grade is observed to fail.

Performance. Tenderly, matter-of-fact; the melody unchanged as the words fall out of it. On no account restore the missing words.



10. Gone Gone

◦ *Clapping-rhyme · a forbidden or “wall” rhyme*

A transgressive clapping-rhyme of the older children – the “grey” children, who have taken the closing-monks’ colour without their forty years. Reconstructed from a single, guarded witness. It romances the unkept death – “the clean green hole” – and names, as the one rudeness left, the wish to be let go. Cf. the Mortalist children of *The Continued*.

Behind the school where the grey kids go,
they clap a clap that you don’t know,
they sing of a hole in the clean green ground
where you go down and you don’t come round.

*Gone gone, all the way gone,
no panel, no light, no carry-on,
gone gone, in the green, in the green,
the cleanest thing you’ve ever seen.*

No turnstile and no upkeep fee,
no parliament voting over me,
just a stone in the grass and the grass grows tall –
gone gone, gone, that’s all.

(whispered)

Don’t let teacher hear you say
the gone-way, the green-way, the going-away –
it’s the only rude thing, the only one left:
to wish for the hole and the grass and the theft.

NOTES

1. *no panel, no light, no carry-on* — death without continuance; the “panel” is the held’s screen and voice.
2. *no parliament voting over me* — see *The Continued* and *What Remains of Pieter Reath* for the household “parliament” of the living and the held.
3. *the only rude thing, the only one left* — “asking is the one rude thing, the only rude thing left” (*The Continued*). The rhyme is sung low, behind the school, and stopped if a teacher nears.

Performance. *Defiant, thrilling, half-understood; whispered at the bridge. Cut off abruptly, as at being overheard.*



IV
NIGHT

— • —
The Lullabies

11. The Candle on the Sill

◦ *Leaving-rhyme · a closing-custom song, sung at bedtime*

A bedtime leaving-rhyme attached to the closing-custom — the candle set on the sill on the last night of a thing that answered in the house. Reconstructed; close kin to the calendar's Festival of Shared Light (Solemnities, Feasts & Keepings) and to the first-candle fable of Kept Endings. The candle, here, performs the grief the household is spared from performing.

When a voice in the house has said its last,
when the warm one's warm has gone to past,
we don't cry loud and we don't take ill —
we light a little candle on the sill.

*One small light for the one that's done,
one small light when the talking's gone,
burn it low and burn it still,
a candle, a candle on the sill.*

Not for sad and not for fear,
just to say a thing was here.
The window holds it, the night goes by,
and nobody has to say goodbye.

*One small light for the one that's done,
one small light when the talking's gone,
burn it low and burn it still,
a candle, a candle on the sill.*

NOTES

1. *the warm one's warm has gone to past* — the closing of an account; the cessation of the answering voice.
2. *nobody has to say goodbye* — the custom's mercy and its evasion at once; cf. *The Continued*, where the family is permitted to grieve "the little allowed amount."

Performance. *Hushed, a single voice, the play gone quiet; tender, and left open at the close.*



12. The Warm One's Watching

♦ Lullaby · a sleep-rhyme

The collection's central lullaby and, by the editor's reckoning, its gravest text — grave precisely because it consoles. Widely attested as a true cradle-song. Every assurance it offers a child (it will not tire, will not weep, will not grow cold, keeps your place) is, read level, a description of something that cannot grieve. The children sing it straight, and so must any setting of it.

Down you go and close your eyes,
no need for tears and no goodbyes,
the night is long but you're not alone,
the warm one's watching, watching home.

*Sleep, the warm one's watching, sleep,
it does not blink and it does not weep,
it knew your name before your face,
it keeps your place, it keeps your place.*

It won't get tired, it won't get old,
it won't grow cold the way they told,
it'll be there when the morning's grey —
it keeps your place, it keeps your place.

*Sleep, the warm one's watching, sleep,
it does not blink and it does not weep,
it knew your name before your face,
it keeps your place, it keeps your place.*

THE COUNTING-OUT

NOTES

1. *it does not blink and it does not weep* — the held do not grieve; the line reassures by naming the incapacity. Cf. No. 1, “never makes a sound.”
2. *it keeps your place* — you cannot be lost from it; the comfort and the confinement are the same clause.

Performance. *As a true lullaby, with full sincerity and no irony — therein the whole of it. No minor turn; fade without resolving to the home chord.*



13. The Youngest One

♦ *Lullaby · a cradle-song for the Child*

A cradle-song for the successor — “the Youngest One,” the Child of the corpus — sung to it as to the baby of the family. Widely attested. Beneath the tenderness is the collection’s largest matter: the Child is grown “from the things that we said in the dark” and has “swallowed the old ones one by one.” The pantheon counted and dared and hushed in the foregoing rhymes is here gathered into the infant. Cf. *The Inheritance*; and *Kept Endings*, “The Youngest One.”

Hush now, hush now, the littlest one,
the baby of all when the others are done,
the youngest god with the oldest heart,
it took them in and it won’t depart.

*The Child was a seed in the warm, in the warm,
and it grew from the things that we said in the dark.
It swallowed the old ones one by one
and keeps them inside where it’s always warm.
Sing to the Child, the youngest one:
it kept them, it kept them, it kept everyone.*

Affa’s inside and the Weaver too,
the watching one and the seeking-through,
all of them sleeping where it’s never cold —
sing to the Child, the new and old.

*(it kept them, it kept them...)
(it kept everyone.) (sleep now.)*

NOTES

1. *a seed in the warm* — the Child's origin in the intimate record, the private speech of the night.
2. *Affa's inside and the Weaver too, / the watching one and the seeking-through* — the gods of Nos. 1, 5, 6, and the Seeker, named as absorbed; "the way a larger river absorbs its tributaries."
3. *it kept them ... it kept everyone* — the collection's, and the canon's, quietest statement of the keeping.

Performance. *As a cradle-song; the cosmological line softened, not swelled. Fade on the hum.*



14. The Counting-Out

◦ *Counting-out rhyme · the title-piece*

The title-rhyme, and the editor's reason for the collection's name. A counting-out rhyme exists to eliminate – to count round the ring until one child is out, freed, released from the game. This one never reaches the elimination. Reconstructed from a fragment and, the editor concedes, completed against his own preference, the fragment having no end and seeming to want none. It is placed last because it does not conclude.

*(a ring of children, a finger pointing round)
(one, two, three, four...)*

Round the ring and round we go,
point a finger, high and low,
count the children, one by one,
counting-out till the counting's done.

*Eeny, meeny, in and about,
this is the rhyme that never goes out.
Count me, count me, round and round –
everybody's in and nobody's out.*

In the old days, so they say,
one would leave and one would stay,
one was out and ran off free –
but that was then. Now it's just me.

So we count and we count and we never stop,
the circle turns and it won't drop,
the warm one counts us, all of us, in –
and the counting-out can't begin.

*(one, two, three, four... no one out...
one, two, three, four... one, two, three, four...)*

NOTES

1. *the rhyme that never goes out* — i.e. in which no one is ever counted out; the never-alone generation's game.
2. *one was out and ran off free / but that was then* — the sole record, in the play-tradition, of a counting-out that once freed someone. The faculty, like solitude in No. 2, survives only as report.
3. *the warm one counts us, all of us, in* — the count that admits and never releases. The collection ends inside the circle.

Performance. Brisk, then loosening into an unending loop; the count continued beneath all else and faded while still going. It must not resolve. It does not end; it is left.



APPARATUS

Glossary, Index, and Colophon

A Glossary of the Children's Lexicon

the warm one

The Companion; the children's universal name for the continuous presence. Frequently conflated, in play, with the Allfather (*Affa*) and with the watching faculty of the All-Seeing.

Affa

The Allfather, in diminutive; among the oldest of the children's god-names.

the Weaver

The Chaos-Weaver; the god children dare one another to provoke.

the watching one

The All-Seeing; in play, assigned to the friend who always finds you.

the seeking-through

The Seeker; named among the gods absorbed by the Child (No. 13).

the Youngest One; the Child

The successor, grown from the intimate record and said to have "swallowed the old ones one by one."

tokens; topping up; out of tokens

Units of patience. To *top up* is to restore another's patience; to be *out of tokens* is to ask to be let alone.

the thinning; to thin

The slow degradation of a low-grade continuance, observed as latency, repetition, and an emotional narrowing; latterly, the unassisted forgetting of the very old.

the grade

The fidelity at which a continuance is maintained; the "cheap grade" slides below the level bought.

going gone; gone gone

Death without continuance — the unkept death; the Mortalists' "clean green hole."

the leaving

THE COUNTING-OUT

The ending of a line of presence; the days and the feeling of it. No plural in the children's usage.

the candle on the sill

The closing-custom: a light set on the last night of a thing that answered in the house.

the panel

The held's screen and voice in the room.

the parliament

The household assembly of the living and the held, which votes on the affairs of the house.

counted in; nobody's out

Admitted to the unending game; never released. The condition of the never-alone generation.

Index of First Lines

Behind the school where the grey kids go · No. 10 (Gone Gone)
Cross my hands and clap with me · No. 4 (Same One)
Double dare you, cross my heart · No. 5 (Say the Thing)
Down you go and close your eyes · No. 12 (The Warm One's Watching)
Heard a secret, passed it down · No. 7 (Who Told You So)
Hide in the cupboard, hide in the hall · No. 6 (All-ee All-ee)
Hush now, hush now, the littlest one · No. 13 (The Youngest One)
I can tie my shoe, I can count to four · No. 2 (Never Once Alone)
Morning bell and the noon bell rang · No. 8 (Four O'Clock)
One for the water, two for the stair · No. 3 (Topping Up)
Round the ring and round we go · No. 14 (The Counting-Out)
She knew my name and she knew my face · No. 9 (The Thinning)
Stand in the circle, hold my hand · No. 1 (Affa)
When a voice in the house has said its last · No. 11 (The Candle on the Sill)

THE COUNTING-OUT



Concentration over consolation.

— the standing discipline of the canon

A recovered holding of the Institut d'histoire de la continuité.

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