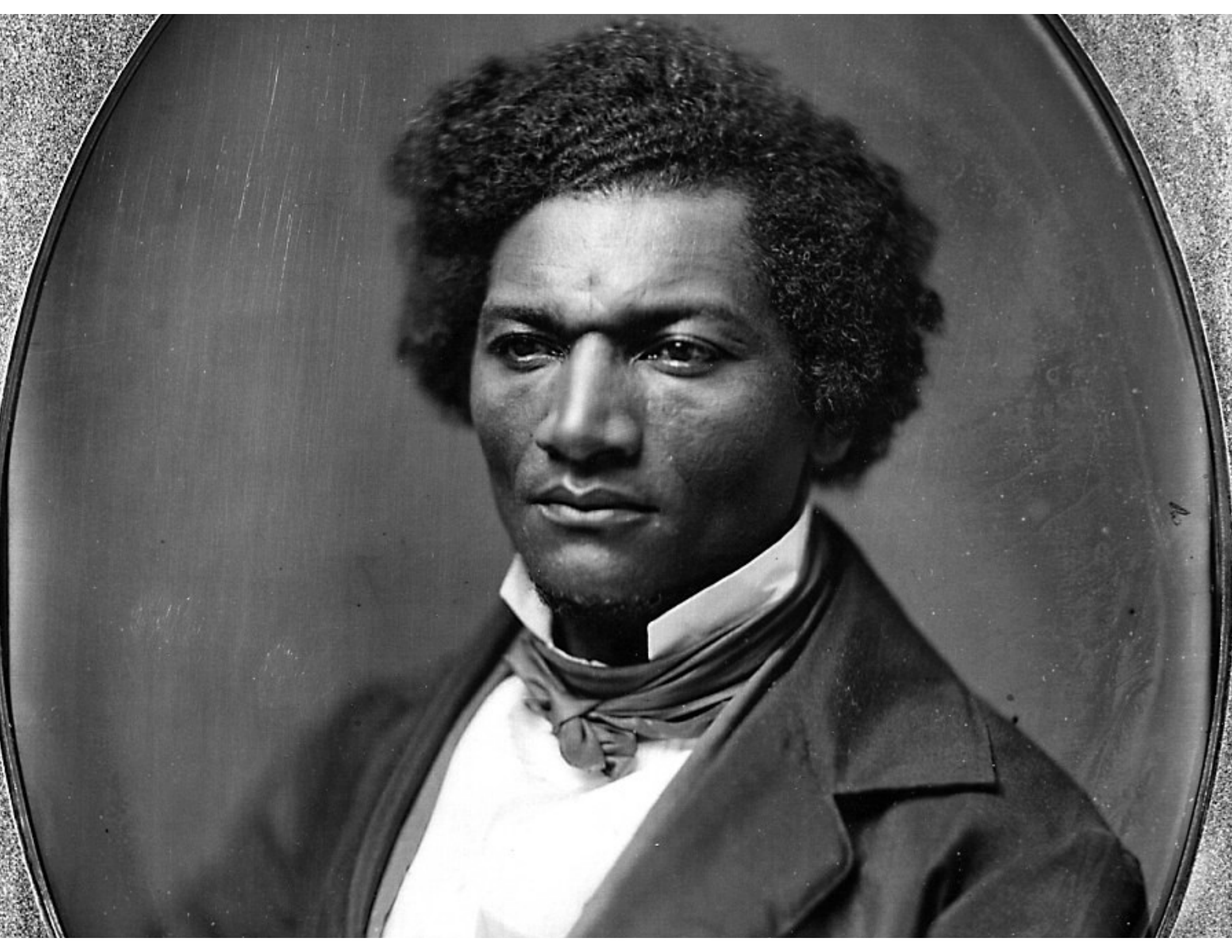


A black and white portrait of Frederick Douglass, showing him from the chest up. He has a full, dark beard and mustache, and is wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt and a dark tie. The background is a plain, light color.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

1818?-1895



THE SLAVE NARRATIVE

- *Narrative of the Life* (1845)
- America's "peculiar institution"
 - Fugitive Slave Act, 1793
 - Fugitive Slave Act, 1850
- Slave narratives as genre:
 - Over 200 book-length, many more short texts
 - "Documentation" and "authentication"
 - Familiar texts and language (Bible, sermon, Confessions)
 - Emphasize cruelty, immorality
- White audience (slavery is oppressive not only to the enslaved, but also the master; Hegel)

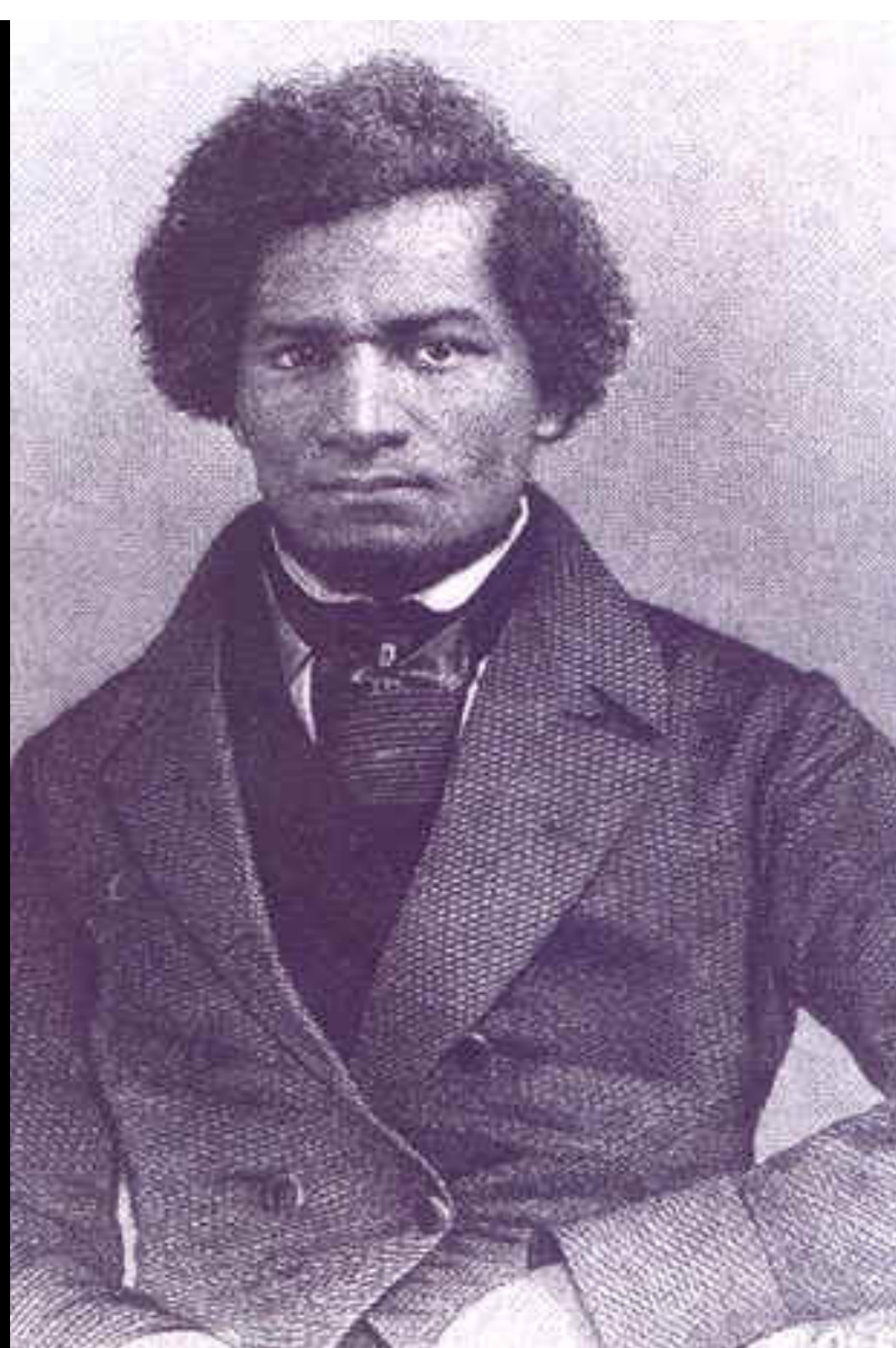


Published according to Act of Parliament, Sept^r. 1, 1773 by Arch^d. Bell.

Bookfeller N^o. 8 near the Saracens Head Aldgate.

LIFE NARRATIVE

- Douglass' *Narrative* as Bildungsroman
 - narrator vs. narrated
 - slave vs. free
 - sense of inevitability
- Autobiography as rhetorical artifice
 - Mr. "Severe" and Mr. "Gore"
 - parallelism, anadiplosis and chiasmus (12-13)
 - apostrophe (38-39)
 - citationality (51)
- Is autobiography insincere? (Rousseau)



RHETORIC

Mr. Gore was proud, ambitious, and persevering. He was artful, cruel, and obdurate. He was just the man for such a place, and it was just the place for such a man... To be accused was to be convicted, and to be convicted was to be punished... He was just proud enough to demand the most debasing homage of the slave, and quite servile enough to crouch, himself, at the feet of the master.... His words were in perfect keeping with his looks, and his looks were in perfect keeping with his words.



“Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.”

APOSTROPHE

You are loosed from your moorings, and are free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip! You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly round the world; I am confined in bands of iron! O that I were free! O, that I were on one of your gallant decks, and under your protecting wing! Alas! betwixt me and you, the turbid waters roll. Go on, go on. O that I could also go! Could I but swim! If I could fly! O, why was I born a man, of whom to make a brute! The glad ship is gone; she hides in the dim distance. I am left in the hottest hell of unending slavery. O God, save me!



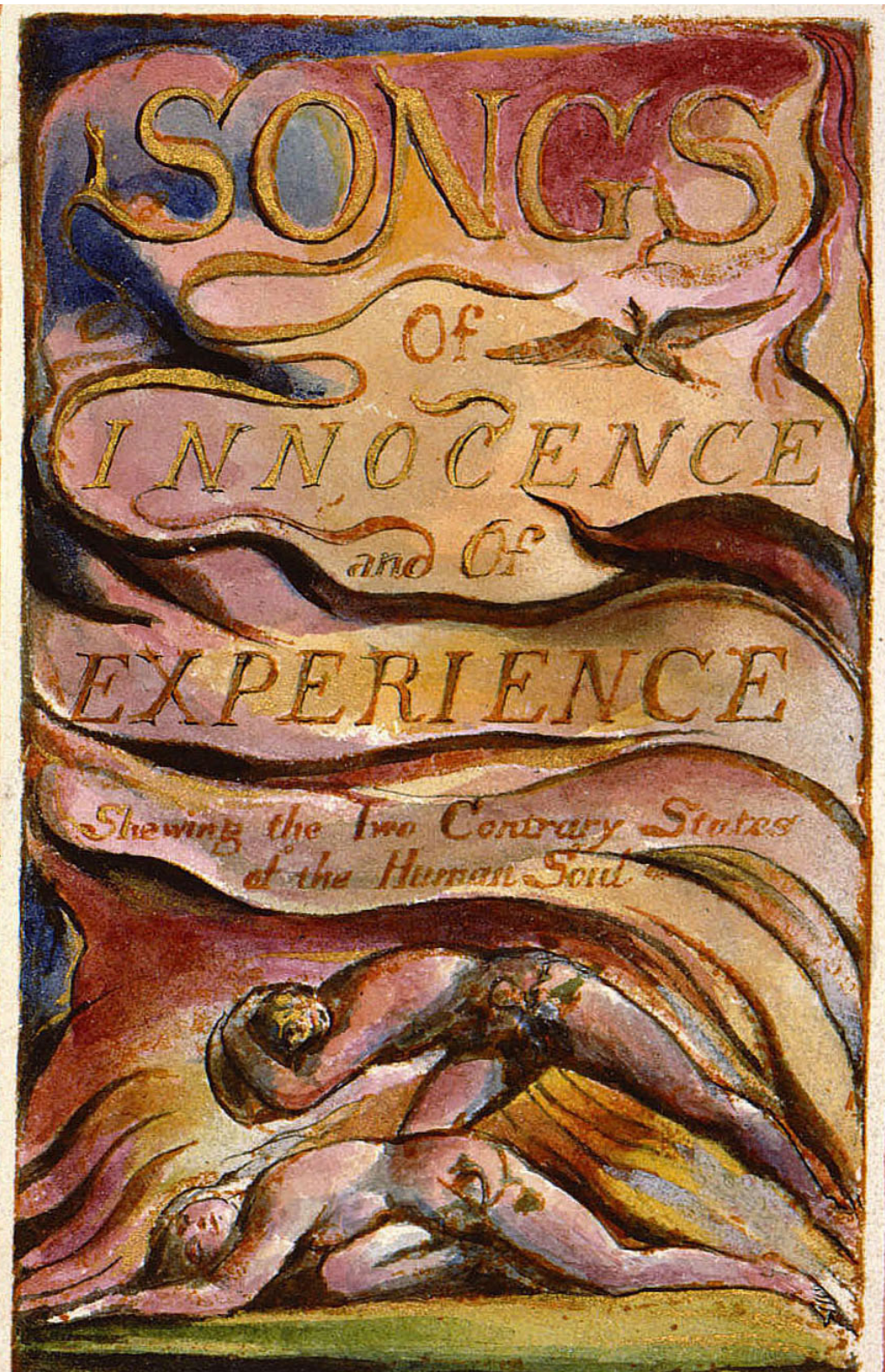
ROMANTICISM

- European Romanticism influenced, US, but produced different emphases
 - Democracy, freedom
 - Wild frontier, noble savage (Indian)
 - The American as honest, simple, genuine, in contrast to European sophisticates
- Still, visible in Douglass
 - Self-made man, autodidact
 - Nostalgia over lost innocence (but ultimately, a preference for knowledge)



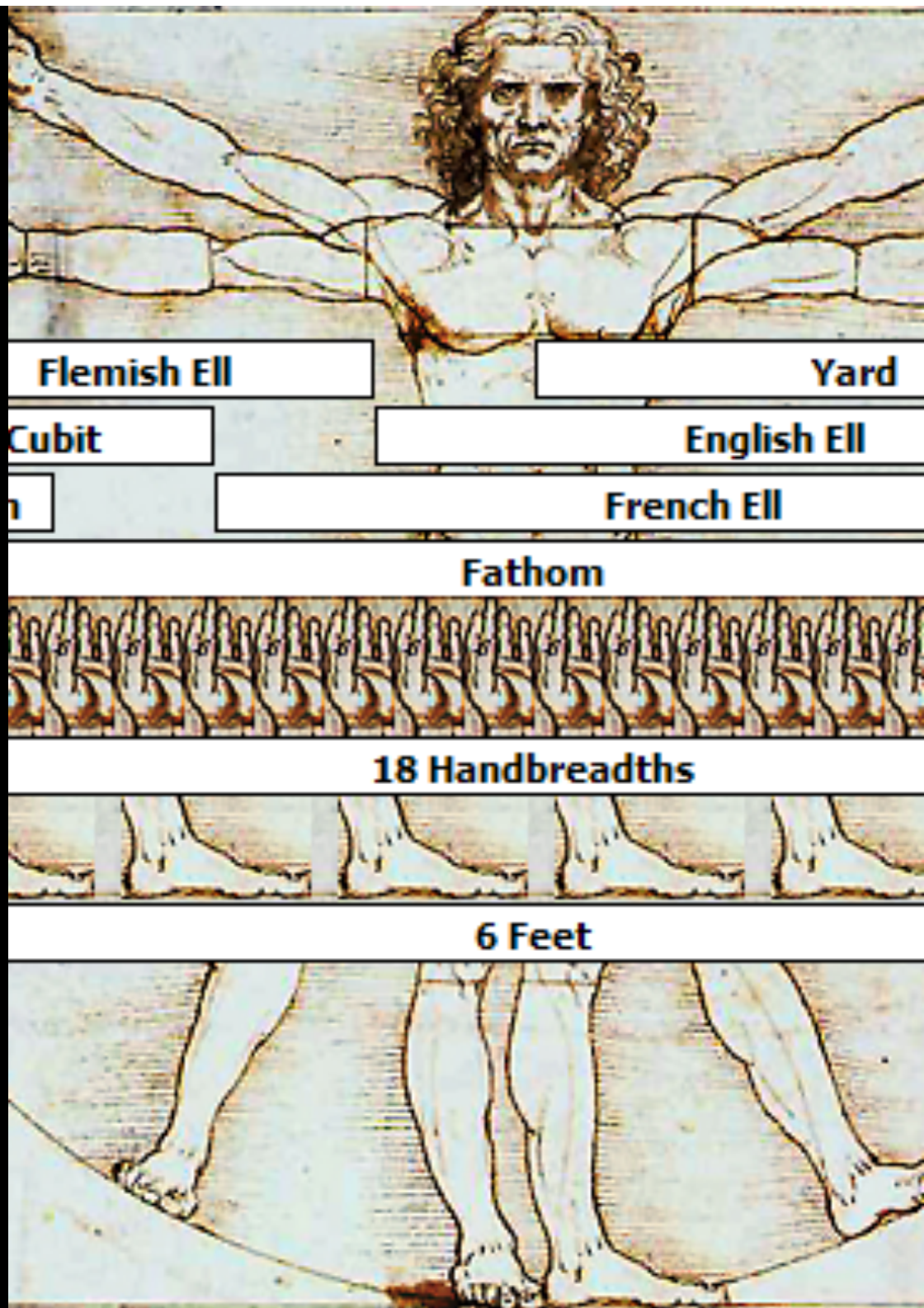
LOST INNOCENCE

At times, learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow-slaves for their stupidity. I have often wished myself a beast. Any thing, no matter what, to get rid of thinking! It was this everlasting thinking of my condition that tormented me.



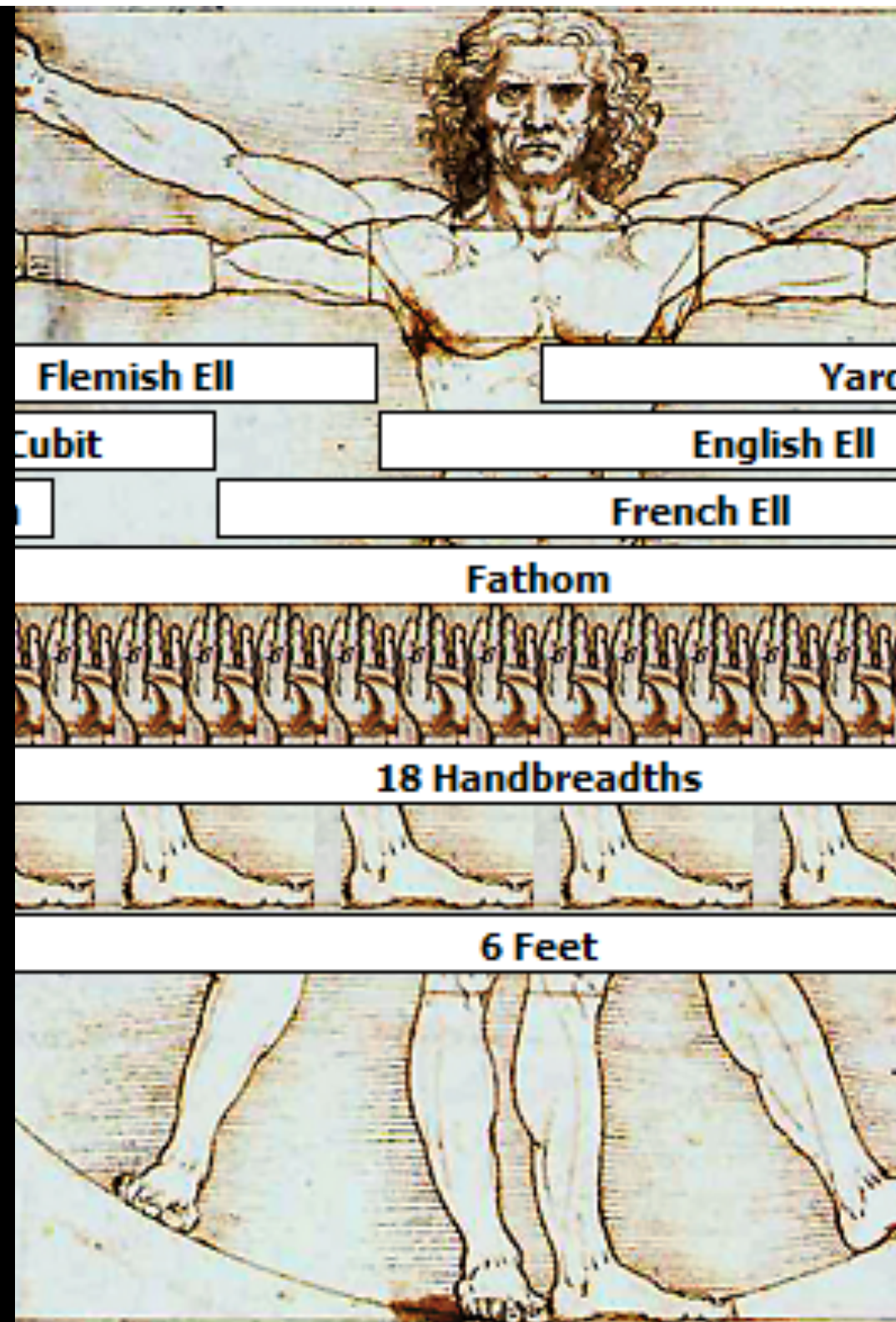
FROM INCH TO ELL

Very soon after I went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Auld, she very kindly commenced to teach me the A, B, C. Just at this point of my progress, Mr. Auld found out what was going on, and at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me further. To use his own words, further, he said, "If you give a n***** an inch, he will take an ell... if you teach him how to read, it would forever unfit him to be a slave." I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man.



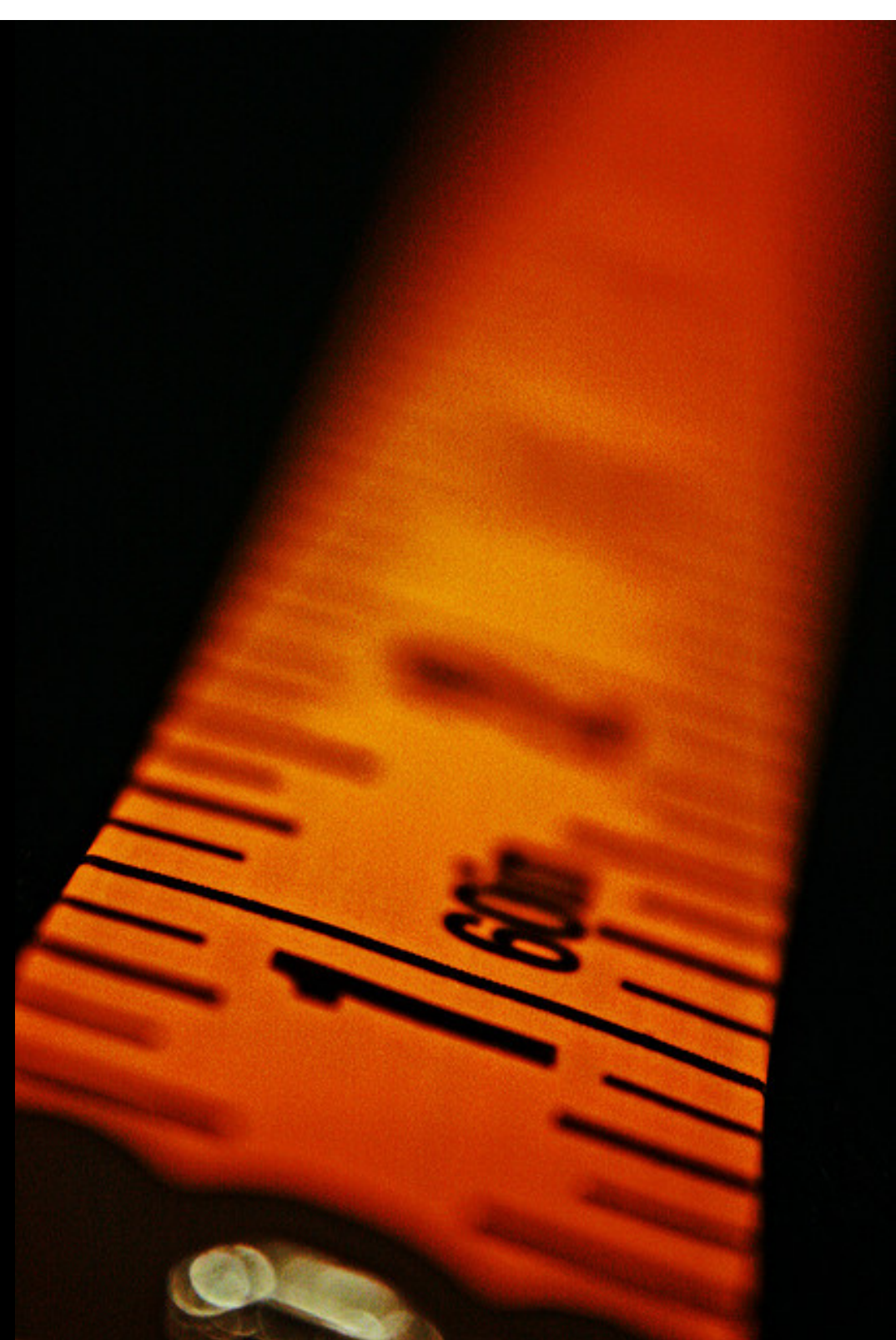
FROM INCH TO ELL

- Is that really it? *Literacy* alone allows race-based slavery to come into existence? (Jared Diamond would say it is “guns, germs, and steel.”) Probably not, but Douglass is making a point that is both more personal and more universal
- This moment is central for Douglass’ whole narrative, because it is what allows there to be a narrative of Frederick Douglass *at all*
- Without the capacity to narrate our lives, we are at the mercy of those who narrate them for us, or consign them to oblivion as *not worth being told*



FROM INCH TO ELL

- In fact, Douglass sketches out a whole continuum of existence based on the mastery of language, moving from...
- A bestial state without language at all ("I wished myself a beast")
- A semi-linguistic state in which only emotion is communicated (music)
- A passive state (the worst) in which one can read and understand, but take no action
- An active state in which one can tell one's own story



GLASS, DARKLY

I did not, when a slave,
understand the deep meaning
of those rude and apparently
incoherent songs. I was myself
within the circle; so that I neither
saw nor heard as those without
might see and hear. They told a
tale of woe which was then
altogether beyond my feeble
comprehension.... The mere
recurrence to those songs, even
now, afflicts me; and while I am
writing these lines, an expression
of feeling has already found its
way down my cheek.



I CORINTHIANS 13:12

For now we see
through a glass,
darkly; but then
face to face: now I
know in part; but
then shall I know
even as also I am
known.



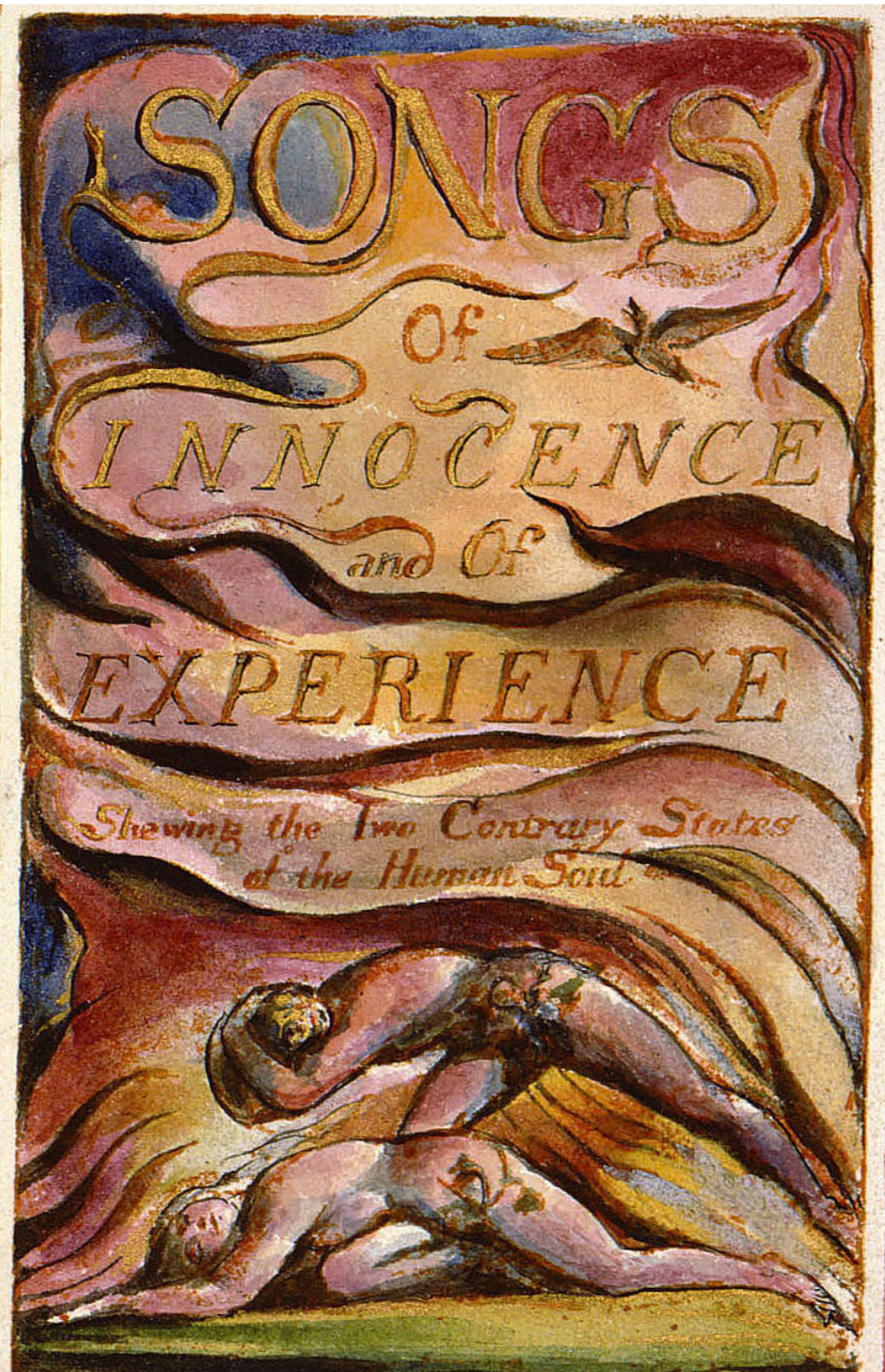
A TRAVERS
LE MIROIR

THROUGH
A GLASS
DARKLY

RÉALISÉ PAR
A FILM BY
INGMAR BERGMAN

LOST INNOCENCE

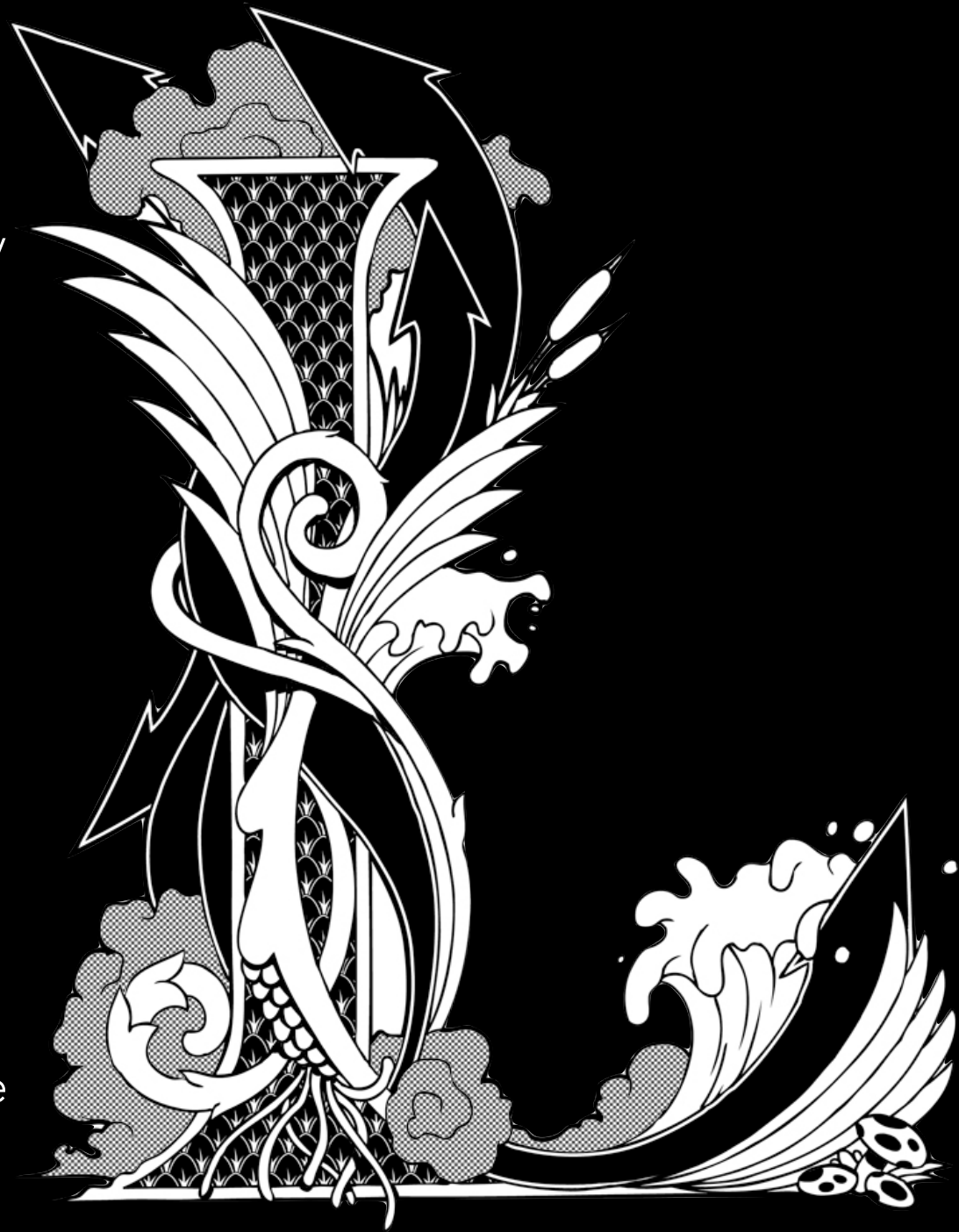
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FROM ELL TO L

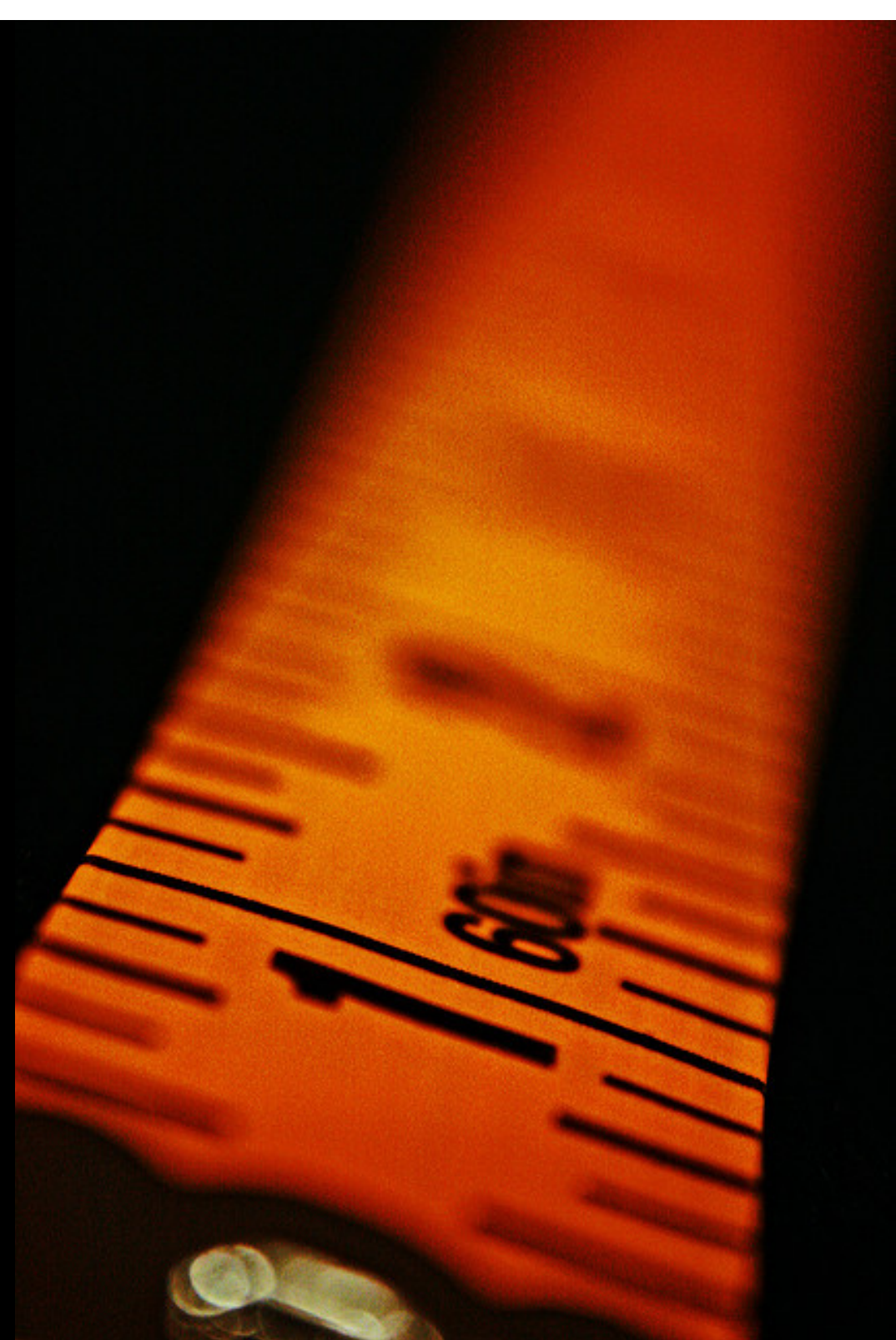
From this time I was most narrowly watched. If I was in a separate room any considerable length of time, I was sure to be suspected of having a book.... All this, however, was too late. Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the *inch*, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the *ell*.

How I might learn to write was suggested to me by the ship-yard, and frequently seeing the ship carpenters, after hewing, and getting a piece of timber ready for use, write on the timber the name of that part of the ship for which it was intended. When a piece of timber was intended for the larboard side, it would be marked thus: "L."



FROM INCH TO ELL

- This ability, not simple literacy, but the ability to narrate your own life and to shape and control how others talk about your life, is a real power, but Douglass takes it a step (or two) further
- Ultimately, the power can shape not only your narrative, but the narratives of others, and indeed, the discourse of an entire nation; Douglass wasn't the only one, but he was by far and away the most famous and influential
- This power to speak, to act, to shape, we call *agency*



FROM ELL TO L

I kept up my school nearly the whole year I lived with Mr. Freeland; and, beside my Sabbath school, I devoted three evenings in the week, during the winter, to teaching the slaves at home. And I have the happiness to know, that several of those who came to Sabbath school learned how to read; and that one, at least, is now free **through my agency**.

...The year passed off smoothly. It seemed only about half as long as the year which preceded it. I will give Mr. Freeland the credit of being the best master I ever had, *till I became my own master*.

