

**The Tactics of Concealment in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*:  
The Dynamics of Mobile Body, Space, Place and Subjectivity**

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**Abstract**

The “repeated theme or topos” of “trickster figure,” as Henry Louis Gates asserts, is the tradition of African-American narratives derived from the African myth of “Esu-Elegbara and the Signifying Monkey” (*The Signifying Monkey* 8). Harriet Jacobs (1813-1897) plays the conventional trickster role in her slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* accordingly. She uses the pseudonymous name, Linda Brent, disguises herself as a sailor, and successfully moves from the legal institution/place of chattel slavery into the narrow space of her grandmother’s garret where she dwells secretly for nearly seven years and outwits her master, Mr. Flint, by writing letters to her master to cunningly deceive him into believing she has been in the North. Jacobs’s tactical concealment thus liberates herself from Flint’s sexual exploitation and furthers the attainment of her freedom and her children’s in particular afterwards. She transforms the enclosed retreat into the resources of her empowered gendered subjectivity to reconstruct her black womanhood and alternative motherhood. Even after her flee/travel to the North, she still plays the trickster role by concealing her status of being a fugitive slave and disguising herself as a submissive housekeeper under the roof of proslavery master to secretly write her personal narrative at nights. In terms of Jacobs’s tactics of concealment and her transforming the confined space/body into an empowering subject, this paper aims to borrow Michel de Certeau’s concepts of space/place and tactics/strategies to thoroughly analyze how she mobilizes her body rhetorically to resist “the order established by the strong” with her “tactical ruses” (*The Practice of Everyday Life* 40). It is divided into three major parts. Part I compares the repeated trope of trickster figures in African-American narrative convention and Certeau’s theory of space/place and tactics/strategies. Part II investigates Jacobs’s secretly moving into the coffin-like attic and transforming the spatial loophole of retreat into her resources of gendered autonomy. Part III examines how Jacob continues playing the trickster role to mobilize her mobile body around the North and eventually gets her legal freedom. It, overall, attempts to survey how Jacobs attains her empowered subjectivity through her tactics of concealment and the dynamics of her mobile body, space and place.

Keywords: tactics, body, space, place, subjectivity