

The Play-Centre in The Tempest  
(Tempest 4b from audio Tempest 4)

The total number of printed play-lines in The Tempest, not counting the epilogue, is 2245. The single central line is therefore play-line 1123; this is act-line 466 in Act II, it is quite near the end of Act II and brings us to the moment when Stephano is pulling Trinculo out from under Caliban's gabardine. The passage around the centre is:

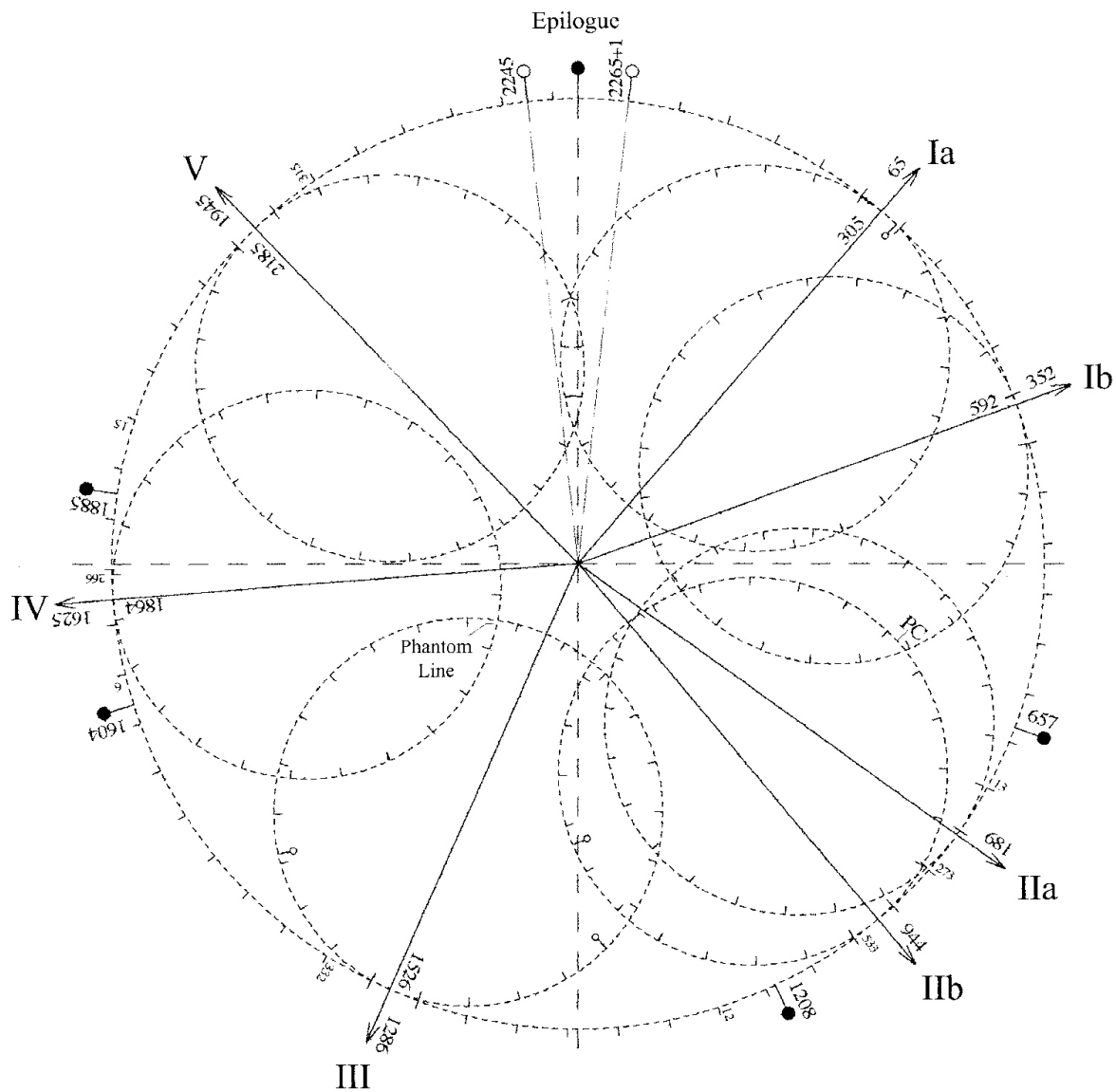
*Tri. Stephano:* if thou beest *Stephano*, touch me, and  
speake to me: for I am *Trinculo*; be not afeard, thy  
good friend *Trinculo*.

*Ste.* If thou bee'st *Trinculo*: come forth: I'll pull  
thee by the lesser legges: if any be *Trinculo's* legges,  
these are they: Thou art very *Trinculo* indeede: how  
can'st thou to be the siege of this Moone-calfe? Can  
he vent *Trinculo's*?

The actual central line is: 'thee by the lesser legges: if any be *Trinculo's* legges.' We have to ask if this is the true centre, or whether we ought to include the epilogue which is 20 lines. If we include the epilogue we come to a central line, which is 1133; Stephano is saying:

*Ste.* 'Prethee doe not turne me about, my stomacke  
is not constant.

This sounds like a strong negative. On the one hand, 'no not here,' my stomach may be sometimes here and sometimes somewhere else. The implication seems to be that the epilogue stands on its own outside the play, which is what those who believe it is Shakespeare's farewell to the stage would I suppose expect. When we look in the 'figure' (see *diagram 1. ed.*) for the position of the first play-centre which we now regard as the true play-centre we find that it lies extremely close to an intersection of small circles that is the intersection between the second circle in Act I and the second circle in Act II. We ask: does the play-centre actually fall at the intersection? If so, the radius of circle Ib meets the radius of circle Iib at this point. What this makes us think of in this context is two legs held rather wide apart; are these '*Trinculo's* legges?' Is a Trinculo a name for a little circle? Within the word, although it is not spelt that way, is the word, 'ring' - 'T-ring-culo' and the 'culo' must be a little thing like an animalcule.



### The Tempest

I have lately been looking more closely at the structure of Scene 2, Act II in which the play-centre lies. From the point of view of the original text, whose number is odd, that is 2245, there is a single line at the centre. The passage is that in which Stephano pull Trinculo out from under the gabardine of Caliban; Scene-line 106, Stephano:

*Ste.* If thou bee'st *Trinculo*: come forth: I'll pull thee by the lesser legges: if any be *Trinculo's* legges, these are they: Thou art very *Trinculo* indeede: how

The central line of 2245 lines is:

thee by the lesser legges: if any be *Trinculo's* legges,

and the second line of the central couplet is:

these are they: Thou art very *Trinculo* indeede: how

On either side of the play-centre there are balancing passages. On the near side there is the moment when Stephano first pours a drink into the mouth of Caliban:

*Ste.* Come on your wayes: open your mouth: here

is that which will giue language to you Cat;

Balancing this on the far side of the play-centre is the moment when Caliban first speaks directly to Stephano, although Stephano is talking to Trinculo and apparently doesn't hear. Stephano has just told Trinculo to swear upon his wonderful bottle. Caliban, who must be a little way off says:

*Cal.* I'le sweare vpon that Bottle, to be thy true sub-  
iect, for the liquor is not earthly.

If we think in terms of a single central line then Caliban's words:

*Cal.* I'le sweare vpon that Bottle, to be thy true sub-(iect)

Is balanced by:

(here) is that which will giue language to you Cat;

and Caliban's second line:

... for the liquor is not earthly.

is balanced by:

*Ste.* Come on your wayes: open your mouth: here

If on the other hand we think in terms of a two-line centre, then Stephano's lines beginning, 'Come on your ways: ...' are balanced by Caliban's second line, '... for the liquor is not earthly' plus its following line spoken by Stephano, '... sweare then how thou escap'dst.' But Stephano is talking not to Caliban but to Trinculo. We observe that Stephano's promise to give language to Caliban is fulfilled when Caliban stops crying out in terror or murmuring to himself and directly addresses another human being. Therefore the promise of language should be echoed by its fulfillment. The words, '... for the liquor is not earthly' now echo the moment when Caliban first tastes that liquor and licks his lips, presumably. If we make the centre of the play double, then Stephano's words, beginning '... Come on your wayes' is echoed by words that are divided between Caliban and Stephano and this feels much less artistic and probable. So on this evidence we may surmise that there is a single central line from the text point of view.

If we look for the Act-mirror of the play-centre, which of course comes earlier in Act II, we come to the passage where Anthonio and Sebastian are mocking Gonzalo who has just told them that Tunis used to be Carthage. Anthonio says, 'His word is more then the miraculous Harpe.' and Sebastian says, 'He hath rais'd the wall, and houses too.' 'His word is more then the miraculous Harpe' is echoed by, '(Seb.) these are they: Thou art very *Trinculo* indeede: how' And Sebastian's words, 'He hath rais'd the wall, and houses too' is echoed by, '(I'le pull) thee by the lesser legges: if any be *Trinculo's* legges.' But first we may think that this argues for a central couplet since the words 'miraculous Harpe' and '*Trinculo* indeede' are mirrored in the second line of the centre. But, 'He hath rais'd the wall,' not 'walls,' indicates the division; and this line is mirrored by the original central line, '(I'le pull) thee by the lesser legges: if any be *Trinculo's* legges,' and this line has a colon in the middle of it, when presumably Stephano pulls, and he pulls Trinculo out half way. Anthonio's line does not point to the 'miraculous Harpe' itself but to something that is 'more' than the 'miraculous Harpe,' as the line following the true centre is 'more' than that true centre. On the whole this seems to point us back to the single central line of the text, although it is not unthinkable that there is a reality in both, a single line and a couplet at the centre of the play. The next step is to look at the geometry of the 'figure' according to where we decide to place the exact play-centre.