How do you go about translating Hamlet’s aggressive, bawdy sally against Ophelia “Do you think I meant country matters?”\(^1\) You may, of course, write an explanatory footnote, and solve the pun in the passage, but that will also show you were incapable of solving the crux textually, and you don’t want to do that. Or, at least, not just yet, since, as we all know, if you are in the business of translating, or of merely being a moral person, perseverance keeps honour bright. In my case, when I translated *Hamlet*, I adopted two or three simple guidelines, which, being clearly shorn of the dignity of theoretical principles, were explicitly devised as mere rules of thumb. Let me recapitulate them here.

The basic unit in equivalence sought between the original and the translation is the line: a single line in the original ought to be rendered by a single line in the translated text. If a complex syntactic clause takes up a large number of lines in the original, the isomorphism sought after in the translation will still be grounded in the unit line. A clause stretching over, say, six and a half lines which comes to a stop in an artfully deferred predicate will in the translation have the same length and will also come to a close in its long deferred predicate. Straightforward as the rule may seem, it may have, I fear, large implications. When, in the course of translating, a clause of this sort

\(^1\) *Hamlet*, edited by Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1986), 3.2.115-16.
presented itself, staggered through a long enjambment, and tantalizingly deprived of a predicate for a considerable stretch, I would translate along and hope for the best, that the predicate would materialize at the end, and not prove a syntactical misfit requiring retroactive changes in the translation. As such cases proved do-able, the equivalence of syntactical structure in the original and the translation seemed to be an argument in favour of the notion of a universal grammar determining all natural languages, and a practical refutation of a contrary notion according to which every utterance is a performance irreducible to any generic and abstract description. And if such a claim seems too broad, as such a neat dovetailing of syntactic structures is not obtainable in, say, translations of *Hamlet* into Japanese, or so I will presume, a weak, modular version of the argument of how, at this level, grammar trumps rhetoric will probably do the trick. We may then provisionally confine such salient homologies to that set of intertranslatable languages characterized by alphabetic systems of graphic linearity.

Although, as a translator, this theoretical hat doesn’t really fit me, allow me, before I doff it for good, to belabour the point. The point being, of course, in this and some other related contexts, the uses of grammar. Consider, for example, the nearly unanimous litany current in Portugal against a method of teaching Camões’s *The Lusiads* in school. We are told that the method is perverse because it consists, almost exclusively, in the grammatical parsing of lines, and thus deadens any perception of the living poetry. Although this is, of course, but a version of one of the most worn-out indictments of criticism, that critics murder to dissect, with the interesting, if doubtful, corollary here that, were it not for such pedagogical shenanigans, students would become readers of Camões for life, a wildly optimistic conjecture at best, the point is worth taking up briefly.

First, it is not immediately evident what an alternative method of reading which would ignore scanning the grammatical form of the text might be, unless we assume that the reader has access to a kind of immaterial intuitions which make negligible the words that pre-