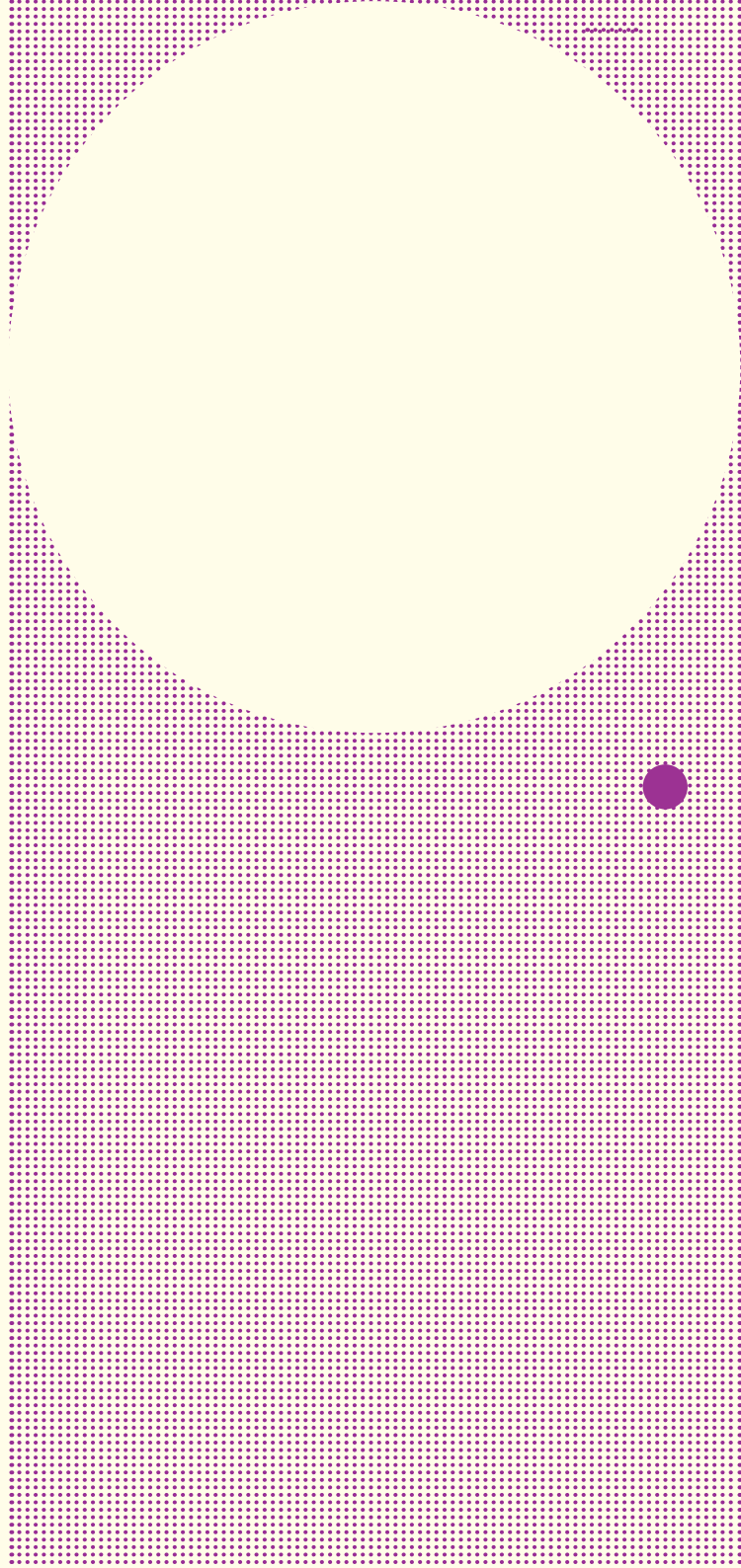


● ISABEL WAIDNER



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THE PRINCE OF HOMBURG: AN ESSAY PLAY

ISABEL WAIDNER

I'll be the Prince of Homburg, or else I'm not doing it.

Commissioned on the occasion of Patrick Staff's exhibition at Dundee Contemporary Arts (22 June–1 September 2019), this text connects a critical commentary on Heinrich von Kleist's play *The Prince of Homburg* (1810), and a new play that isn't a contemporary take on Kleist's play, exactly, but an attempt to rethink resistance to power from a queer working class perspective. It also includes autobiographical material in relation to the queer migrant experience in the '90s, contemporary references e.g. the Netflix series *The OA*, and some thoughts on the elitism of canonical literature.

In Kleist's *The Prince of Homburg*, the ORIGINAL PRINCE (or, 'the OP'), Chief Commander of the Prussian Cavalry, goes into battle in Fehrbellin, 1675, against the explicit order of his superior, the ELECTOR OF THE ROYAL STAFF. Despite winning the battle, the OP is tried and sentenced to death by a court martial for disobeying the royal order. Kleist's play ends with the OP being lead from his prison into the open air in the belief that he is about to be executed. But no, no bullet: instead, the OP is being crowned with a laurel wreath. He faints (v gay).

[CW: Homophobia, bullying.]

ACT 1

The bus stop outside Stratford Shopping Centre, East London, 1996. It is night. The PRINCE OF HOMBURG, a relatively recent immigrant from the Kingdom of Prussia, sits on a bench wearing their pink hoodie wt the integrated gold necklace and baby padlock. Thighs pressed together, they're making a plastic bead bracelet on their lap. The PRINCE OF HOMBURG is wide awake, one hundred percent alert, this isn't the luxury royal gardens, this is Stratford Shopping Centre—sleep here at yr peril. If there is moonlight you wouldn't know, the lighting at the bus stop is hyperreal neon. Two, three 25 buses come and go, the PRINCE OF HOMBURG is still threading plastic beads. The ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFFF comes out of the Shopping Centre with her REGAL ENTOURAGE.

REGAL ENTOURAGE: [*Announcing.*] The Eleck-tressss of the Ro-yaal Stafffff!

The ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF is wearing a futuristic detached hood and a garment depicting the full achievement of arms of the Kingdom of Prussia: v gay. The Prussian coat of arms features two basically naked mascs kissing, also eagles, lions, the lot. The PRINCE OF HOMBURG is transfixed. They have seen the Prussian coat of arms many times in the past, in Prussia, but draped round the ELECK-TRESSSS's body it signifes totally differently—it fulfils and surpasses, even, its gay potential.

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: [*Hastily scoops up plastic beads from their lap and jumps up.*] Yr Royal Highnesses...!

ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF: [*To the PRINCE OF HOMBURG, referring to the fact that several 25s have gone past and they haven't got on.*] Going anywhere special?

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: No—. [*Has seen the ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF and her REGAL ENTOURAGE + +owning+ + the bus stop with their talent and stylishness every night for the past few weeks. They can't believe the ELECK-TRESSSS has actually noticed them, is speaking to them. They prattle disjointedly about the Prussian coat of arms having acquired a whole new dimension for them.*]

ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF: Full achievement of what?? Kingdom of Prussia?! [*The ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF is Newham born and raised, second gen British. She ordered the garment from ASOS, est. 2000, and hasn't a clue about Prussia, abolished in 1947.*]

The COUNT OF PORTSMOUTH, member of the regal entourage, is wearing tracksuit bottoms and a Westwood style Harris Tweed sweater. She is wearing her hair braided into a wreath, not unlike the artist Patrick Staff on their 2015 press headshot. The COUNT OF PORTSMOUTH notices that the conversation between the ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF and the PRINCE OF HOMBURG is not going well, exactly. She decides to intervene. She takes the ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF aside and has a word.

ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF: [*Re-joins the group, with the COUNT OF PORTSMOUTH. To the PRINCE OF HOMBURG.*] Are you spezial?

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: [?]

ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF: Are you spezial, like her? [*Points at the COUNT OF PORTSMOUTH.*]

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: I—.

ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF: [*Interrupting the PRINCE OF HOMBURG.*] Not everyone gets an audience with the ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF by sitting at the bus stop every night, for weeks on end. I got to ask myself, are they spezial? Are they going to contribute to the survival of my royal house? Or are they going to take us down with them? [*Scrutinises the PRINCE OF HOMBURG.*] You might be in luck. She [*the COUNT OF PORTSMOUTH*] sees something special in you. ‘Cause I don’t.

ACT 1 SCENE 1 of Kleist’s *The Prince of Homburg* takes place in the gardens of a Prussian Castle, ca. 1675. The OP, actual royalty, is sleepwalking. He is weaving a laurel wreath in his sleep, anticipating heroics in battle, a giant, personal victory. He has an amazing dream, of palaces splitting open, of gold, silver, of precious chains, and of everyone he ever loved gathering in a circle around him. His specialness comes to him in his sleep, basically, he is entitled like that.

In contrast, the protagonist of this exxay-play doesn’t dream nor sleep much, they’re 100% vigilant, but rn, they push their dreamy plastic bead bracelet over their wrist—a kind of encircling, to be fair. And their gold necklace with baby padlock is literally integrated into their hoodie through eyelets in the back—that’s pretty special, too.

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: [*Decidedly.*] I AM special!!!

‘Every young person ever thinks that at least one special thing is going to happen to them, otherwise what’s the point of living.’ Dodie Bellamy or Kevin Killian, Facebook, 2019.

ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF: [*Signals approval and sits down at the bus stop.*] Ok, you work?

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: [*Affirms.*] Call centre.

ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF: Full-time? Good. Piece of advice, you want to hold down the job. [*Thinks.*] What do you want

to do with your spezialness? You want to channel your spezialness in a way that suits your personality. Can you move?

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: [*Moves.*]

ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF: No.

A missile-like whistle is being heard. Acutely alert, the PRINCE OF HOMBURG jumps—it's nothing, the COUNT OF PORTSMOUTH's pager going off. Stratford Shopping Centre is 100% safe in '96—but a level of vigilance is advisable probably. Having got off the plane from Prussia no more than a year or so ago, the PRINCE OF HOMBURG is already practicing vigilance of the highest standard. Migrants learn quick. Queer migrants learn quicker. Fake princes who rent in a converted warehouse that sleeps 40 in total learn quicker than anyone, especially if the partition walls between rooms don't reach all the way up to the ceiling.

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: [*Blurts out.*] I'll learn to dream while awake.
[*Creative-critical writing.*]

ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF [*Isn't impressed but ok. Lays down some rules.*] You have to apply yourself. You'll work, in the call centre and on your speziality. One does not come before the other. You'll present your wakey dreams or whatever every night, however wild, to a select-tttt audience consisting of myself and the REGAL ENTOURAGE. We'll want to see progress quickly 'cause we don't know how old you're going to get.

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: [*Commits emphatically.*] 100%.

ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF: Will you play by my rules?

In ACT 1 SCENE 5 of Kleist's play, the OP and other warlords are being briefed for an imminent battle against the Scandinavians. Shooting, rather than missile-like whistling, is heard in the distance. The OP is meant to pay attention to the ELECTOR's instructions and note them down, but he's asleep at the wheel, obsessing about his crush, cousin Natalie.

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: [*Hanging on the ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF's every word, they're so honoured to be in the presence of royalty.*] Why wouldn't I.

Kleist's original play is, for one, about disobedience to sovereign power. The OP goes into battle in 1675 despite specific instructions to wait it out at his allocated post. 'I never could get on with dictation,' the OP happily admits, 'it's the heart

gives the orders.’ The idea of free will is complete trash of course if you’re not Prussian royalty, and doesn’t relate to the lived experience of a British + working class, for example. The British working classes are seen to be unruly from the outset, but actually, they, I mean, we, have learnt how power works. Working class strategies of resistance are 100% more nuanced than the OP’s, primarily because in order to be effective, they have to be: we do not have an army at our command. So rather than look at the individual resisting state control, this exxay-play looks at collective forms of resistance, at what might become possible ++together++, in the particular queer working class milieu of Stratford, East London, ’96—‘cause, trust the working classes to know what to do with what small room for manoeuvre they’re able to free up for themselves.

+ Extended version of Britishness, including migrants.

Just like the ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFFF acquires regal status in relation to her entourage only, the PRINCE OF HOMBURG’s princeliness depends on subcultural context and community. It’s like in the Netflix series *The OA*, the movements only work if performed by at least five members of the REGAL ENTOURAGE. It’s like in the documentary *Paris is Burning*, a member of the ro-yaal stafffff acquires legendary status in the context of the NY ballroom scene only. You don’t go it alone.

ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF: Ok. You keep wearing yr bracelet [*a wreath, symbolically*], yr chain. PRINCE OF HOMBURG, you’re now a probationary member of the REGAL ENTOURAGE.

REGAL ENTOURAGE: [*Celebrate noisily. Chatter. Curiously, to the PRINCE OF HOMBURG.*] You always been a Prince? Your uncle the ELECTOR of Prussia? Your auntie the ELECTRESS? Why leave? Why come to England?

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: Familial background: broken. Not privileged. Hounded for being queer. England on Prussian TV: v gay, to be fair. And you, and you? [*The moment they get accepted as a member of the REGAL ENTOURAGE is the happiest moment of the PRINCE OF HOMBURG’s life so far.*]

ACT 2

The PRINCE OF HOMBURG’s room in an inadequately converted warehouse off the Holloway Road, North London, ’96. The dead of night. As mentioned in ACT 1, the partition walls between rooms don’t reach all the way up to the ceiling, maybe to allow daylight to travel into the depths of the warehouse, maybe the constructor bought the ‘walls’, unfit for purpose, off the back of a lorry, who knows. Most of the 40+

residents including TIFFY, WAFAA, OLU and CRYBABY are in their 'rooms', trying to sleep. The PRINCE OF HOMBURG is lying on their single bed, fashioning wakey dreams like some poet or creative-critical writer or something. Unusual stench of horse, no metaphor, wafting through the warehouse, what is it? Commotion in the room directly next to the PRINCE'S—the new neighbours, BULLIES, come in drunk. The BULLIES are noisy and inconsiderate, disturbing the PRINCE OF HOMBURG and the other residents.

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: [*Gets up and knocks on the BULLIES' door. The PRINCE OF HOMBURG is still wearing their pink hoodie w/ the integrated gold necklace and baby padlock, and they're definitely wearing their plastic bead bracelet.*]

BULLY 1: [*Opens. Stares.*]

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: [*To BULLY 1.*] Would you mind keeping the noise down please, it's the dead of night. Ah! Here's OLU. OLU!

OLU: [*To the BULLIES.*] Hear this? [*CRYBABY crying.*] You've woken up the CRYBABY with your brawling.

BULLY 1: [*Ignoring OLU.*] Wtf am I literally seeing. [*To BULLY 2, re the PRINCE OF HOMBURG.*] Pansy season.

BULLY 2: [*Doesn't come out, but has a good luck at the PRINCE OF HOMBURG.*]

PRINCE OF HOMBURG & OLU: [*Look at each other. They don't even know what to say.*]

BULLY 1: Relax, we'll pipe down. [*Shuts door in the PRINCE OF HOMBURG & OLU's faces.*]

OLU: [*Concerned. To the PRINCE OF HOMBURG.*] Want to stay with us tonight?

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: No thanks, I'll be fine.

The PRINCE OF HOMBURG & OLU go back to their respective rooms.

BULLY 1: [*Sings quietly but audibly in his room, in a high pitched, supposedly gay or girly voice, impersonating the PRINCE OF HOMBURG.*] WHAM! BAM! I AM! A MAN! Job or no jo-ob, you can't tell me that I'm no-ot—.

BULLY 2: [*Laughs quietly.*] 'I AM A MAN!' It wishes—.

BULLY 1: [*Clears throat and spits—across the partition wall into the PRINCE OF HOMBURG's room.*]

BULLIES 1 & 2: [*Laugh.*]

BULLY 1: [*Clears throat again, loudly.*]

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: [*Heart racing, gets up onto their bed. Looks over the partition wall and into the BULLIES' room.*] Leave it.

BULLIES 1 & 2: [*Stop laughing. Look at each other.*] You hear something? Surely not. You? No, nothing. Can't be, can it?

BULLY 2: [*Starts the song again, with an exaggeratedly butch, pretend male voice, yet again impersonating the PRINCE OF HOMBURG. Looks the PRINCE OF HOMBURG directly in the eye.*] WHAM! BAM! I AM! A MAN! Job or no jo-ob—.

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: [*Kicks the partition wall.*] LEAVE IT!!!

TIFFY, WAFAA, OLU, CRYBABY and other residents: [*Simultaneously.*] Everything alright, love? What's going on? Waaaaaaah! Shut it! Quiet! They're not worth it. Take it outside!

BULLIES 1 & 2, ok, they pipe down—for now. They go to bed.

BULLY 1: [*V v quietly, to BULLY 2.*] It's got death wish—.

The PRINCE OF HOMBURG sits in the dark with open eyes. Rather than counting the hours 'til daylight, they throw everything they got at practicing their speciality: fashioning dreams while awake. But what's happening—neighing? There's that horsey smell again. Clip-clopping out on the stairwell? Oh what—! Sthing outside, blowing raspberries.

'Damn the beast for being such a shiner! -'

In ACT 2 SCENE 7 of Kleist's play, the ELECTOR's blingy white horse attracts enemy attention a mile off. No wonder that whoever finds themselves riding the horse into battle should be the first to go down. Naturally, the ELECTOR delegates the honour to a common soldier—.

Can't you dress down, you're literally asking for it. The pink hoodie with the integrated gold necklace and baby padlock—the shiny horse—isn't blending in, is it. The plastic bead bracelet, come on, is like advertising *das* queer. The smart thing would be to lie low. The PRINCE OF HOMBURG lies on their bed, feels their precious bracelet, and decides to ignore the voice of reason (so-called) and fk it. Fk it! There is no lying low and no blending in. Look at the boy from the call centre who dresses like a National Trust volunteer—he'll never be part of anything like the regal entourage, plus, he gets beat anyway (gay look on his face). If anything, the PRINCE OF HOMBURG decides they will ramp it up. Fighting talk.

Assuming whoever was killed on the high vis white horse the ELECTOR, the OP decides to retaliate. Much like Tony Blair went into Afghanistan in '01 although no one wanted him to, the OP embarks on an unauthorised, warmongering frenzy. Unlike Tony Blair, Kleist's Chief of Cavalry conquers the enemy troops and returns a national hero—but there is the small matter of principle. The ELECTOR, alive and well, must, must, have his orders obeyed. Unlike Tony Blair, the OP is being court-martialled and put into prison.

ACT 3

The bus stop outside Stratford Shopping Centre, weeks after the PRINCE OF HOMBURG first joined the REGAL ENTOURAGE. Early evening. Having come straight from the day job at the call centre, the PRINCE OF HOMBURG sits on their usual bench. They are wearing royal blue harem trousers with several gold chains and key rings wrapped round their waist. Yellow sweater, hood up. A pile of books on the bench next to them, including publications by Caspar Heinemann, Abundance Matanda and Verity Spott. Some of these aren't even out until 2021, plus, the library has been closed for weeks—that's how seriously the PRINCE OF HOMBURG is taking their promise to develop their speciality and practice vigilant dreaming at a very high level. The COUNT OF PORTSMOUTH arrives. She is wearing a light grey boilersuit with bright pink accessories. Yellow hair, still in wreath-like braids. Kisses the PRINCE OF HOMBURG on the mouth, the gay way of saying hello.

COUNT OF PORTSMOUTH: How was work?

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: The call centre? Good. [*Signals to change the subject. Work is tiring and monotonous of course but it's somewhere to go in the morning and it just about pays the rent.*]

COUNT OF PORTSMOUTH [*100% relates. Having left school with two O-levels and two CSEs, she is lucky to work at the tax office full-time. She is saving*

up to start evening classes towards a BTEC though.] Work is work. [*Scrutinises the PRINCE OF HOMBURG.*] You're looking a little bit worse for wear. No, not the garments. The hunted expression. You twitch like a rabbit. Get your head out of your books so I can look at you? Look at me properly!

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: [*Is in fact avoiding eye contact.*]

The ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF arrives in full regalia, accompanied by the rest of the REGAL ENTOURAGE. She appears to have turned the previously dress-like garment depicting the full achievement of arms of the Kingdom of Prussia into a trouser suit. The basically naked mascs kissing each other appear on a lapel of the ELECK-TRESSSS's jacket respectively.]

ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF: [*To all members of the REGAL ENTOURAGE.*] Ok, give me hope. What you got.

COUNT OF PORTSMOUTH: [*Steps up. Has written an exxay examining the possibility of life in a very different dimension using the example of Buck Vu from The OA. Reads.*]

The ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF and her REGAL ENTOURAGE clap their hands and click their fingers in approval. Everybody but especially the PRINCE OF HOMBURG thinks that the COUNT OF PORTSMOUTH is just so talented—next level type stuff.

ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF: [*To the PRINCE OF HOMBURG.*] You.

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: [*Reads something pretty babyish about a shiny beast, a shiny something, a shiner.*]

COUNT OF PORTSMOUTH: [*Interrupts.*] A what, a shiner?

REGAL ENTOURAGE: [*Simultaneously.*] A SHINER?!!! Who, you?? Omg, let's see! Show us your face!!

ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF: [*To the PRINCE OF HOMBURG.*] Pull down your hood.

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: [*Pulls down their hood, revealing an actual shiner.*] What you think of the yellow [*meaning the hoodie*].

REGAL ENTOURAGE: [*Gasp.*] They got blackeye!

COUNT OF PORTSMOUTH: Who did this. Those BULLIES still coming at you?! [*Decidedly.*] You're moving in with me. [*Nice thought, but not easy.* The COUNT OF PORTSMOUTH rents a room in a shared house on the Clays Lane Estate down the road. She can't just take in a lodger.]

Thanks but no thanks, the PRINCE OF HOMBURG communicates with a look. They can't leave the Holloway Road, not just yet. They are saving up for a deposit and a month's rent for a room in a flat share somewhere, Clays Lane Estate, but until they'll have enough, they'll be saddled with the current situation. There's nothing for it, they got to deal with the BULLIES somehow. Not just for themselves, but for TIFFY, OLU, WAFAA and the CRYBABY that squeals every night.

This exxay-play stages the limitations of concepts such as 'free' and 'not-free' in the context of the lived experience of working class queers in London, the '90s. With jobs at the call centre or the tax office, it's not like the members of the REGAL ENTOURAGE get to selectttt their postcode or neighbours. Wth histories of migration, or a British education system designed to reproduce class inequalities, it's not like they can compete for jobs that pay above the National Minimum Wage. (The National Minimum Wage isn't even introduced until '98, by New Labour, £3.60 per hour.) But none of the members of the REGAL ENTOURAGE are experiencing imprisonment like Kleist's OP, and, more to the point, predominately Black, poc, working class and queer people historically and ongoing. Patrick Staff is including abolitionist perspectives on the prison industrial complex in their video work related to the DCA exhibition, and I align myself wth these. The baby padlock worn by the PRINCE OF HOMBURG holds some of these tensions symbolically.

ELECK-TRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL STAFFFFF: [*To the PRINCE OF HOMBURG.*] Yr reading was quite good—.

Having been sentenced to death in a court of law ('stonyfaced judges | moaning on like owls at a funeral'), the OP isn't particularly phased at first. Naturally, he assumes that his privilege and familial relation with the ELECTOR will save him. When it finally sinks in that capital punishment is a real possibility, the OP 'collapses centre stage into terror at the prospect of his own imminent death'. He basically faints of fear.

I know I've been coming at the OP and his privileged status, but he is v gay. (Also: 'My happiness, that fragile plant.') A Prussian Prince in a lead role displaying this level of 'effeminacy', fear, cowardice even? Led to state censorship of the play at the time—.

If this exxay-play thinks through collective modes of resistance within conditions of precarity, then the PRINCE OF HOMBURG, the COUNT OF PORTSMOUTH, the ELECKTRESSSS OF THE RO-YAAL

STAFFFFF and the REGAL ENTOURAGE's gender nonconformance is one of them. Gender nonconformance binds them together, outside Stratford Shopping Centre and beyond, and maybe through time wt the OP, Kleist's ORIGINAL PRINCE. But the REGAL ENTOURAGE are also rehearsing their specialities (subcultural practices) in dialogue wth one another. In doing so, they are performing the same weird shapes and movements simultaneously (figuratively speaking). They are coordinating like angels in *The OA*, creating a whole subcultural context from nothing. There's magic in that, probably.

'What's the first Prussian commandment? Never Touch Another Officer's Sword.' V gay. V v gay, tbf.

ACT 4

The PRINCE OF HOMBURG's room in the warehouse off the Holloway Road. The dead of night. The CRYBABY is gurgling in a room near the front, left. Most other residents are quiet, or asleep. Not for the first time, the PRINCE OF HOMBURG has gaffer-taped a bedsheet to the ceiling to help protect their privacy. They are lying on their bed about to drift off when—it starts up. V v secretive commotion in the adjacent room.

BULLY 1: [*Gets up on a bed or a chair in the neighbouring room. Tears gaffer tape off the ceiling, the bedsheet drops. Looks down on the PRINCE OF HOMBURG. Whistles through teeth, v quietly, so as not to alert TIFFY, WAFAA, OLU or any of the other residents who might want to thwart him.*] Hey! [*Whistles again.*] Pss!

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: [*Lies in the dark, eyes wide open. Whispers to themselves.*] Practice your speciality, practice your speciality, practice your speciality, dream while awake.

BULLY 2: [*Appears next to BULLY 1.*] Saying its prayers, is it.

BULLY 1: [*To the PRINCE OF HOMBURG.*] Your cash. Give it.

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: [*Stops talking to themselves.*] Got none.

BULLY 1: [*Looks at BULLY 2, mouths the words 'death wish'.*] Once more with feeling: HAND—OVER—YOUR—CASH.

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: GOT—NONE.

BULLY 2: [*Changes tack.*] Bracelet. Give it here.

BULLY 1: [*Stares at BULLY 2. Starts to worry about BULLY 2 who after all he is sharing a room with.*] Wtf do you want with the bracelet. [*Fking queer...*]

BULLY 2: [*Realises his request could be construed as queer. Steps up aggression. To the PRINCE OF HOMBURG.*] Fking queer.

PRINCE OF HOMBURG: [*To themselves.*] Practice your speciality, practice y—.

What's that, like, whinnying on the stairwell. Hooves on concrete.

BULLIES 1 & 2: [*Heard nothing. To the PRINCE OF HOMBURG, seeing they got no money.*] Tomorrow. Bring £, or else. [*They retire to their beds. Fall asleep.*]

The PRINCE OF HOMBURG hears raspberries galore, also: neighing. Where's this coming from, the stairwell? Really? Suddenly WHAM!, against the front door. Again, BAM! An army of absolute shiners, horses, break down the front door of this floor with brutal strikes of their hooves. ATTAACAAAAACCCCK!!!! And again, ATTAACAAAAACCCCK! Storming the warehouse, the shiners leap across partition walls like across hurdles, like across hedges at the Grand National, like this were a sporting event or some sort of jolly, not a war. They leap across two, three, four sets of partition walls—hello TIFFY! OLU! WAFAA, hello!—via the PRINCE's room (WHOOAAAAA!!), and into the BULLIES' room where they attack.

When the shiners leave, the warehouse falls quiet. TIFFY sleeps. WAFAA sleeps. OLU sleeps. The CRYBABY sleeps. The PRINCE OF HOMBURG, still, lies awake. No war heroes here. Only survivors.

In the middle of the upper margin of the main shield is the velvet-set, golden helmet of the Prussian Royal Crown. The helmet consists of *der* golden brilliant, seventeen face-value gemstones of otherworldly Google Translate, five majestic tulips, and between them three major sticks, each with the lustrous diamanté. From the tulips there is an equal of opals of declining size which, after the apex rejuvenates, occupy a golden staff. On the top rests a blue, gold-rimmed criss or cross, decorated with precocious imperial orb. Around the shield hang the chains of the Black Eagle Order, the Red Eagle Order, and the Order of the High Flying Crown. Sign holders are two laurel-wreathed and girdled mascs facing each other, footloose and fancy-free.

In the silver field is a black, gold-plated, red-mouthy eagle crowned with the royal tiara, holding in his right claw a golden pepper spray, and in her left an azure blue imperial orb, attacking.

In *der* golden field is a black, upright, red-reinforced, purple-tongued lion with double tail, attacking.

In the gold and black stripey field is a black, gold-plated, pansy-faced eagle wearing the ducal crown. On its chest is a silver crescent between whose upward-pointing tips grows a darling cross, attacking.

In the platinum field is the Prussian imperial eagle, on whose breast rests a little green heart covered with a silver band aid, attacking.

In *das* diamond field is a rising silver steed, attacking.

It is TIFFY, WAFAA, OLU and the rest of the Holloway Road residents who get out the BULLIES eventually, no army of shiners. No miracles, only community. Order tends to be upheld in working class spaces, mainly because—apart from the few known exceptions—people have learnt to coexist.

ACT 4 of Kleist's *The Prince of Homburg* stages a moral-philosophical dilemma interesting to Prussian white men circa 1810 only. Will the OP plead innocent against his better judgement, or will he preserve his honour, his righteousness, and accept the punishment he deserves? Death is conflicted in Kleist's original play, but ultimately meaningful—the result of a moral decision the protagonist is entitled to take. In the end, the OP chooses martyrdom, chooses honour, chooses to 'glorify the sacred rules of war', chooses death. 'Oh, Immortality,' he says at one point, 'now you are mine!' This, trading your life for the higher good, I wouldn't call streetwise—.

I'd understand the play's treatment of death better if this were a writer, Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811), grappling with suicidal thoughts and mental illness (which he was), or if his, Kleist's, real-life lover, Henriette Vogel, were terminally ill (which she was). People die over lost love in real life all the time, and they definitely die from grief.

In the white and beige stripey field is a cracked heart with the sinking feeling—.

While everyone else is asleep, the PRINCE OF HOMBURG practices lurid dreaming, noting it all down in their notebooks. None of their work will ever get picked up by an establishment publisher. The COUNT OF HOMBURG's been running the photocopier at the tax office though... a thousand pages, sound like a thousand galloping horses.

In a sense, this exxay-play highlights the specificity of Kleist's *Prince of Homburg*. I don't see how the ideas in Kleist's play can usefully be put to work unless your protagonist is literally a prince, or a middle-class neoliberal subject living the fever dream of autonomous selfhood. State control as directly opposed to

individual freedom, or authority as opposed to free will—barely applies in the queer working class milieu of Stratford, East London, '96. Choice per se—barely applies.

One of the criteria of 'great' literature is precisely its purchase on universality. All great works of literature are seen to stage or represent universal 'truths'. Actually, most of literature's so-called truths barely apply beyond their very specific historical settings, conditions of emergence, and rootedness in basically royal or neoliberal privilege, implicitly or explicitly. They are 100% relatable—to a middle-class readership only.

UK publishing professionals are always wondering why the working classes aren't engaging with canonical literature. Books come cheap off the Amazon, so—? What's your excuse? You too dumb to read this? Ill-educated, and lazy? You prefer sci-fi and Netflix, you unintelligent shits? But the working classes are disengaging, not because they lack educational capital or intelligence, but because literature is stupid. It gets almost everything wrong.

The PRINCE OF HOMBURG's Collected Photocopies, though, are instantly legendary. Imagine—people pay money to read that stuff.



