# Ava Pickett's 1536 reframes Tudor misogyny through intimate female friendship



Ava Pickett's debut play, *1536*, now at the Almeida Theatre, delves into the heavy themes of femininity and power dynamics in Tudor England through a uniquely modern lens. With its vibrant portrayal of female friendship against the looming backdrop of Anne Boleyn’s tragic fate, the production showcases how systemic misogyny affects even the most intimate relationships. Set in the final months of Boleyn’s life, the narrative unfolds in a sun-soaked Essex field where three friends—Anna, Jane, and Mariella—grapple with not only their personal ambitions but also the seismic shifts in the political landscape as the Queen faces treason charges.

The structure of the play cleverly shifts focus from the grandeur often associated with Tudor dramas, opting instead for a grounded exploration of womanhood in an oppressive society. This setting allows for a striking juxtaposition: while the characters engage in typical girlhood pastimes—gossiping and dreaming—news of the Queen’s confinement reverberates through their lives, altering the dynamics of their friendship. The impact of royal decisions on ordinary women is laid bare, emphasising that patriarchy permeates not just palaces, but also fields and farmhouses.

*1536* captures the bittersweet essence of female solidarity, portraying its fragility in the face of external pressures. The dialogue is described as both intimate and incisive, with lines that resonate with contemporary relevance. It parallels modern discussions around gender politics, akin to the themes explored in productions like Netflix’s *Adolescence*. Pickett’s script cleverly blends rich vernacular with sharp wit, delivering moments of both laughter and heart-wrenching gravity.

Critics have lauded the performances of Siena Kelly, Liv Hill, and Tanya Reynolds, who embody their characters with both lightness and depth. Each performance complements the others, crafting a palpable chemistry that draws audiences into their shared experiences. The laughter shared in their camaraderie shifts to tension as the escalating news from London infiltrates their sanctuary, reflecting how they inadvertently start to mirror the oppressive structures they hoped to escape.

Director Rebecca Frecknall's vision is crucial to the play's impact, creating a set that feels both tactile and ephemeral, where the beauty of the English countryside turns ominous as the plot thickens. Scenes shift seamlessly from comedic levity to haunting tension, capturing the disquiet that comes with watching friendships fracture under societal pressures. However, while the production is praised for its rich emotional exploration, some critics note that the final act could feel rushed, hinting at lost opportunities for deeper emotional resonance.

Yet, for all its intricacies, *1536* does not shy away from confronting female anger, which it portrays through a climactic montage featuring striking visuals accompanied by contemporary music. This artistic choice, while innovative, has elicited mixed responses, suggesting a clash between the play’s naturalistic tone and its stylised culmination. Critics argue that this dissonance slightly detracts from the powerful undercurrents established earlier in the narrative but ultimately contributes to the play's urgent commentary on misogyny across ages.

Ultimately, *1536* emerges not merely as a historical drama but as a resonant critique of the enduring challenges women face, transcending the confines of its period setting. It invites audiences to reflect on the cyclical nature of misogyny, asserting that the struggles of the past continue to echo in contemporary society. This nuanced exploration of women's resilience and camaraderie amidst adversity guarantees that *1536* will resonate deeply, leaving both laughter and uncomfortable truths in its wake.

In a world fraught with complexities, the play affirms that, despite the gloom, there exists a glimmer of hope and tenacity among women—a sentiment as relevant today as it was nearly 500 years ago. The narrative confirms that in the landscape of power, all are impacted; after all, for women caught in a web spun by patriarchal forces, victory appears elusive, but the fight for survival endures, underscored by moments of solidarity and joy.

### Reference Map

1. Lead article summary
2. Summary related to the production's thematic focus and setting.
3. Summary regarding the characters and plot development.
4. Summary discussing cast details.
5. Summary on the awards and accolades for *1536*.
6. Summary giving an overview of the play's impact and performances.
7. Summary regarding critical responses to the play's style and direction.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/1536-almeida-anne-boleyn-review-b2750887.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/6c0f5b9e-a8f8-4383-a3ff-300ac32b18c2> - A review of '1536', a new play by Ava Pickett, which offers a fresh perspective on Tudor England by focusing on the aftermath of Anne Boleyn's execution as experienced by three ordinary women. Directed by Lyndsey Turner, the production melds historical context with contemporary themes such as power imbalances, media manipulation, and misogyny. Set in an Essex field, the story centers on Anna, Mariella, and Jane—childhood friends navigating societal constraints based on gender and class. Their personal struggles become entangled as the political climate darkens. The play is praised for its vibrant dialogue, emotionally rich performances, and nuanced portrayal of how private lives are shaped by public events. Despite a rushed final act, '1536' is hailed as a striking and promising debut.
3. <https://almeida.co.uk/whats-on/1536-play/> - '1536' is a play by Ava Pickett, directed by Lyndsey Turner, running from May 6 to June 7, 2025, at the Almeida Theatre. Set in Tudor England, the story follows three women in an Essex field who meet to gossip and share dreams. As news spreads about the clash between King Henry VIII and his Queen, Anne Boleyn, the women realize the parallels between their ordinary lives and the royal drama, leading them to face choices that end in violence. The play won the 2024 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize and was commended by The George Devine Award for its 'sparkling dialogue and savage undercurrent'.
4. <https://www.broadwayworld.com/westend/article/Liv-Hill-Siena-Kelly-and-Tanya-Reynolds-to-Star-in-1536-at-The-Almeida-Theatre-20250217> - Liv Hill, Siena Kelly, and Tanya Reynolds are cast in the world premiere of Ava Pickett’s play '1536' at the Almeida Theatre. Directed by Lyndsey Turner, the production opens on May 13, with previews from May 6, and runs until June 7. The play, set in the year of Anne Boleyn’s death, explores whether female solidarity can survive in a world where barbarism and misogyny are state-sanctioned. The production is part of the Genesis Almeida New Playwrights, Big Plays Programme, and is the first play from the initiative to receive a world premiere at the Almeida.
5. <https://www.theatre-news.com/news/UK/112903/The-Almeida-Theatre-announces-five-new-productions> - The Almeida Theatre announces five new productions, including '1536' by Ava Pickett, directed by Lyndsey Turner. The play runs from May 6 to June 7, 2025, and is set in Tudor England, focusing on three women in an Essex field who meet to gossip and share dreams. As news spreads about the clash between King Henry VIII and his Queen, Anne Boleyn, the women realize the parallels between their ordinary lives and the royal drama, leading them to face choices that end in violence. The play won the 2024 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize and was commended by The George Devine Award for its 'sparkling dialogue and savage undercurrent'.
6. <https://www.broadwayworld.com/uk-regional/article/CAT-ON-A-HOT-TIN-ROOF-and-More-Set-For-The-Almeida-Theatre-20240920> - The Almeida Theatre announces its upcoming productions, including '1536' by Ava Pickett, directed by Lyndsey Turner. The play runs from May 6 to June 7, 2025, and is set in Tudor England, focusing on three women in an Essex field who meet to gossip and share dreams. As news spreads about the clash between King Henry VIII and his Queen, Anne Boleyn, the women realize the parallels between their ordinary lives and the royal drama, leading them to face choices that end in violence. The play won the 2024 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize and was commended by The George Devine Award for its 'sparkling dialogue and savage undercurrent'.
7. <https://www.whatsonstage.com/news/almeida-theatre-announces-cast-for-new-play-1536_1665391/> - The Almeida Theatre announces initial casting for the world premiere of Ava Pickett’s '1536'. Set in Tudor England, the play follows three women in Essex as they meet to discuss events in London, including the downfall of Anne Boleyn. As news spreads, the women see echoes of their own lives in the wider political turmoil, forcing them to confront difficult choices. Liv Hill, Siena Kelly, and Tanya Reynolds will star in the production, directed by Lyndsey Turner. The play runs from May 6 to June 7, 2025, and is part of the Genesis Almeida New Playwrights’ Big Plays Programme.