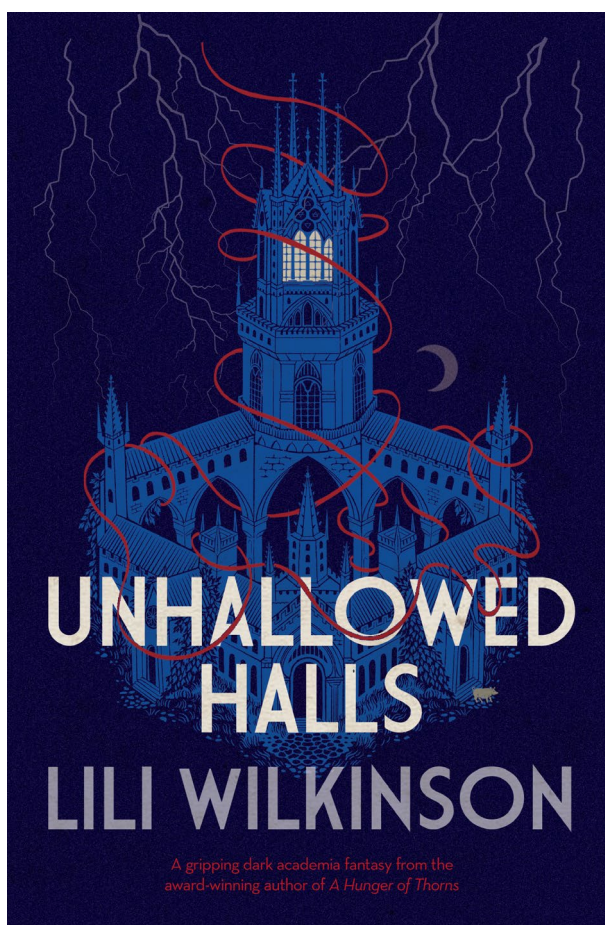


# Unhallowed Halls

By Lili Wilkinson



**DARK ACADEMIA...WITH DEMONS.**

After a deadly incident at her old school, Page enrolls in Agathion College, an exclusive boarding school, only to find that it's built over centuries of secrets – including an ancient society potentially linked to demonic magic. Perfect for fans of Lynette Noni and Leigh Bardugo, from the acclaimed author of *A Hunger of Thorns*.

**RECOMMENDED FOR**

13 – 18 (Secondary)

**THEMES**

Fantasy, demons, dark academia, magic, witches, romantasy, romance, boarding school, mystery, found families, friendship

**ISBN (AUS)**

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## SYNOPSIS

Page Whittaker has always been an outcast. She's too smart, too quiet, too weird. And after the deadly incident that destroyed her only friendship at her old school, she needs a fresh start.

Agathion College is everything Page has ever wanted: a safe haven of wood-panelled halls and dusty books, on a remote Scottish moor. And for the first time in her life, she has a close group of friends. Cyrus, Ren, Gideon, Lacey and Oak help her feel at home at Agathion; the only problem is, they're all keeping secrets from her.

Page doesn't know it yet, but her perfect new school has a crooked foundation, rooted in an ancient clandestine society with rumoured ties to demonic magic. Soon, Page will learn that not everyone at Agathion is who they say they are. Least of all, her friends.

Agathion claims to teach its students history...but some histories are better left buried.

A wonderfully captivating dark academia fantasy from the award-winning author of *A Hunger of Thorns* and *Deep is the Fen*.

## AUTHOR MOTIVATION

'A few years ago, Ellie Marney [author of *The Killing Code*, *None Shall Sleep* and *Some Shall Break*] sent me an article about a US boarding school for gifted, troubled youth. It was in a castle with an actual moat, and I immediately knew I had to write a book about it. The castle in the US became a crumbling mansion in Scotland, and I added demonic mischief, ancient Gaelic magic and lots of dark academia vibes! I wanted to write a diverse found family/lovable squad of misfits, and found lots of opportunities to explore gender and identity.

'There's such a romanticism to dark academia: tweed, ivy-clad buildings and dusty old books. It's a world where learning and knowledge is glamorous – a haven for nerds. In our current world of polarised politics, disinformation and oversaturated social media, the solemn halls of dark academia are a respite. Sure, there are evil teachers and rituals and probably demons, but honestly, that's nothing compared to what today's teens have to deal with.'

Lili Wilkinson

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lili Wilkinson is the award-winning author of more than twenty books for children and teenagers, including *Deep is the Fen*, *A Hunger of Thorns*, *After the Lights Go Out*, *The Erasure Initiative* and *Bravepaw*. Lili established the Inky Awards at the Centre for Youth Literature, State Library of Victoria. She has a PhD in Creative Writing, and lives in Melbourne with her partner, child, dog and three chickens.

## IN-CLASS DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- **Book's Title:** What is the difference in meaning between the words *hallowed* and *unhallowed*? In one word how might you describe each meaning? How does the use of the word *unhallowed* in a title influence your expectations about the tone, themes, or setting of a story?
- **Book's Cover:** Do the colours used on the book's cover, along with its images of the gothic castle, bolts of lightning and sliver of moon add to or detract from this expectation?
- **Epigraphs:** Why do you think Lili Wilkinson chose to include the three quotes as epigraphs? Look closely at each quote and see if you can find any clues about the coming story.
- **Opening Sentence:** The opening sentence, '*What did you do?*', immediately raises questions about the story about to unfold. How does this sentence create intrigue and set the tone for the book? What assumptions or expectations does it prompt you to make about the characters and the events that might follow?

### Genre

- The description of the story on the back cover, also known as the book's blurb, mentions that this will be a 'gripping dark academia fantasy'. What is dark academia? What other novels have you read that could be described as dark academia?
  - Read the first chapter of the book and make a list of the people, places and things that happen that could be described as 'dark academia'.
  - Why do you think dark academia has become popular in recent years?

### Characterisation

- '*I feel like Catherine Morland arriving at Northanger Abbey. Or Jane Eyre approaching Thornfield Hall.*' Page 10.

What does this quote tell us about the book's narrator, Page Whittaker?

- *'The thing about books is that they're complete. When you read a book, you know the whole story will be contained within its pages. All the information the author wanted to convey is there. Not like human minds or memories, which are weak and unreliable. Books don't change. They don't forget. They don't start screaming whenever they see you.'* Page 31.

What does this extract tell us about Page (note the name the author chose to give her narrator)?

- Extension: Is this passage an example of indirect characterisation? Why/why not?

### Classical Education

- The curriculum at Page's new school is focused on Ancient Greek and Roman philosophical teachings. Make a list of as many references to these teachings as you can, starting with the name of the school itself.
  - Write a paragraph about Sophocles, Plato and Aristotle.
  - What is 'Socratic Learning'?
  - Page's friends call themselves The Knights of Empedocles. Who was Empedocles? What was his concept of metempsychosis? How does Lili Wilkinson play with this concept as the story progresses?

### Animus Supra Corpus/Mind Over Body

- So much of *Unhallowed Halls* involves the battle between the human soul and body. How does Lili Wilkinson explore this idea in each of the following characters: Page, Oak and Gideon?
  - Do you think the battle is settled by the end of the book? In your opinion, is one or the other shown to be more important?

### Good Versus Evil

- How does Lili Wilkinson subvert the traditional ideas of good versus evil in her novel? In your answer address the portrayal of:

- The demon/goddess
- Page's curse/gift
- The original/new Knights of Empedocles

### Ending

*'It's the zero card in the deck,' Oak explains. 'Which means it can come either at the beginning or the end. The Fool is innocent, an optimist, stepping blindly into the unknown. There are dangers ahead, challenges to face. But none of it matters. The Fool joyfully embraces the future, whatever it might bring.'* Page 444.

- How does Page's drawing of the tarot card at the end of the novel reflect the transformation she has undergone since arriving at Agathion?