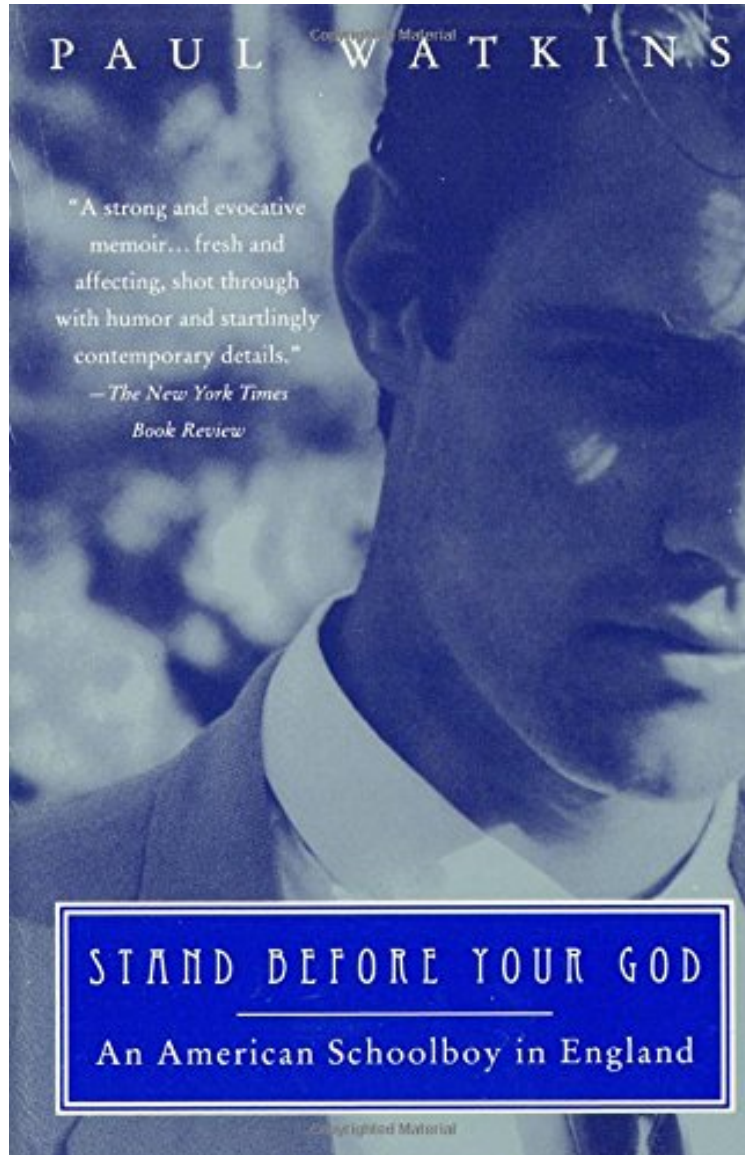


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Stand Before Your God: An American Schoolboy in England

Paul Watkins

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Paul Watkins : Stand Before Your God: An American Schoolboy in England before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Stand Before Your God: An American Schoolboy in England:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. RecommendedBy Primrose Hill This book is not just for those educated in private schools, for teens, or for males. This book is about one man's unique experience, but most readers

will find aspects of his story that relate to and illuminate aspects of their own stories. I stumbled into this book by chance, and am glad that I read it. It's a quick read, and holds your attention throughout. At the end, I was crying, and to me that's a sign of a good book. There is a blurb on the back of the book from a Vogue magazine review, calling the writing "taut and muscular", and I agree with that description. It's definitely from a male point of view, and though I'm a single female with no brothers, I could empathize with much of it, even if I wasn't too interested in some of the particulars (team sports, military practice, European war cemeteries). I am an American who lived in England for 11 years after I became an adult, and I recognized many of Watkins' references and agreed with most of his perceptions. What I found poignant was his realization at the end of the book that, even though his parents were from the United Kingdom, and even though he'd lived in England from age 7 to 17, and even though he was in the most in-group of the in-group in terms of his educational experiences, he still realized that having been born in the US and raised there from birth through age 6 made him an alien in the UK, and that this would never change, no matter how much he knew about the inner workings of their society or fitted in with the ultra-elites. This observation is simultaneously depressing and liberating, as one can live there for ages and wonder "why don't they like or accept me?", but knowing that there is an inevitable rejection of foreigners, even the youngest, WASP-yish, and most elite, in England/the UK provides some comfort. To me, this book argues against sending children to private ("public") schools in the UK. I know they've changed a little bit since Watkins was a lad. I also know that they produce a certain kind of special person who is multi-layered, often well-educated, socially well-versed, and deeply aware of power, status and class and their machinations and manipulations, and that they frequently provide their students with a social group and set of friends and alumni connections that can be a ticket to a very cosy, privileged lifestyle. However, they also seem to cause the child to develop an ice-cold inner core, a mistrust of nearly everyone, a utilitarian view of the worth of other people (especially those who come from outside that world), and a stunted and bizarre approach to relationships with the opposite sex. Again, I acknowledge that these institutions have changed since Watkins' time, and some have both boys and girls now, and most don't have corporal punishment, fagging, and all the rest of it. But they haven't changed much. This book is moderately slim, and left out a lot of Watkins' first 18 years, including an apparent exchange program experience living with a Prussian family during high school, his concentration on German as his main subject (which apparently was his major at Yale), his relationship with his mother, his writing of a different book that was nominated for a Booker Prize (a very big deal in the UK) when he was a teen, etc. But this reads as he probably remembered it, focusing in on some situations with absolute clarity of detail and dialogue, and making very broad brushstrokes of other situations (such as his father's funeral), which gives it an authentic feel. It is what it is, and it's a lovely thing. I hope that Watkins will write another volume of memoirs, this time of his return to the US, his time at Yale, and the rest of his 20s. (Note: The facts from his teen years that are not described in the book, which I mention above, I read today on Watkins' website.) 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This is the best book I have read in years. By Peter R. Koehler This is the best book I have read in years, As I to was an American boy that one day Found that I was in an English public school and had to adapt. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Page-Turner! By Paul One of the best books I've read. Paul Watkins leaves Rhode Island to attend school in England. He is seven years old. This memoir reminds me of *A Separate Peace*.

In this enthralling and sometimes harrowing memoir, the acclaimed author of *The Promise of Light* gives us a masterly companion to such classics as *Brideshead Revisited* and *A Separate Peace*. At the age of seven, Paul Watkins was roughly transplanted from his home in Rhode Island to England's Dragon School. He was greeted by a delegation of bullies who, in time, would become his friends and whose rules would become his own. For at Dragon, and later at Eton, "there was no middle ground. You could not go here and come out not caring one way or the other. You had to stand before your God and commit." Here are the masters who paddle boys for small infractions and then offer them sweets; the seniors who pamper pretty favorites and subject all others to humiliating servitude; the deep friendships and sudden, devastating betrayals. Above all, here is the exhilaration of a boy discovering own capacities for learning and creativity, in a book that conveys with astonishing insight the pangs of growing up.

"The literature of school includes such classics as *Tom Brown's School Days* and *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*. No one has ever told it so well from the student's point of view as Paul Watkins." -- Denver Post "Strong and evocative. . . smoothly written. . . romantic." -- The New York Times Book . From the Inside Flap At the age of seven, Paul Watkins was roughly transplanted from his home in Rhode Island to England's Dragon School. He was greeted by a delegation of bullies who, in time, would become his friends and whose rules would become his own. For at Dragon, and later at Eton, "there was no middle ground. You could not go here and come out not caring one way or the other. You had to stand before your God and commit." In this enthralling and sometimes harrowing memoir, the acclaimed author of *The Promise of Light* gives us a masterly companion to such classics as *Brideshead Revisited* and *A Separate Peace*. Here are the masters who paddle boys for small infractions and then offer them sweets; the seniors who pamper pretty favorites and subject all others to humiliating servitude; the deep friendships and sudden, devastating betrayals. Above all, here is the exhilaration of a boy discovering own capacities for learning and creativity, in a book that conveys with

astonishing insight the pangs of growing up. From the Back Cover "The literature of school includes such classics as Tom Brown's School Days and Goodbye, Mr. Chips. No one has ever told it so well from the student's point of view as Paul Watkins." -- Denver Post "Strong and evocative. . . smoothly written. . . romantic."--The New York Times Book .