

# Witman Boys (Witman fiúk)

Hungary | 1997 | 99 minutes

## Credits

<b>Director</b>	János Szász
<b>Screenplay</b>	János Szász András Szeredás Géza Csáth (story)
<b>Photography</b>	Tibor Máthé
<b>Music</b>	Miklósné Miklós
<b>Cast</b>	
<b>Mrs. Witman</b>	Maia Morgenstern
<b>János Witman</b>	Alpár Fogarasi
<b>Ernö Witman</b>	Szabolcs Gergely
<b>Dénes Witman</b>	Lajos Kovács

## In Brief

In this haunting Hungarian drama, the Witman brothers are scarred by their mother's neglect. Searching for warmth and meaning, they find it in a local brothel. Though they may appear innocent, the boys' morbid perversions ultimately drive them to despicable deeds. Set in a small Hungarian village just before the onset of WWI, this atmospheric tale of alienated youth is smartly directed by Janoz Szasz, with exquisite cinematography by Tibor Mathe, for which he won a Silver Hugo at the 1997 Chicago Film Festival....faultless in style and psychological validity.

*Kevin Thomas Los Angeles Times*

A fascinating period drama with highly stylized visuals and an emotional punch worthy of Russian literature, *The Witman Boys* is a welcome discovery for fans of foreign cinema constantly looking in the cracks for challenging movies to watch. Part period piece, part horror, and part sexual psychodrama, the film follows the emotional maturation of a pair of boys who clearly haven't received enough love in their lives. Transpiring in 1914 Hungary, the Witman family is a seemingly well-to-do family with everything together on the outside but with a seemingly turgid home life.

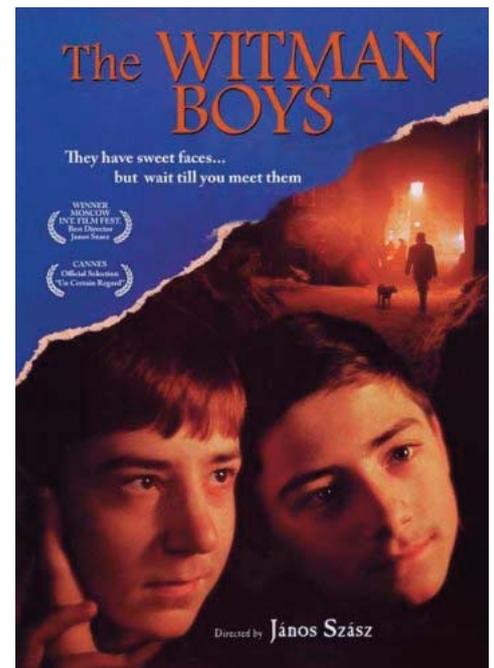
After what is probably a normally terse dinner, Mr. Witman suffers the unfortunate fate of dying from a heart attack in front of his wife and boys. The boys', Janos and Erno, rather blank reaction to his passing should clue one in to how much time all three spent together. They are more interested in what will happen to his dead body than whether or not he is in a better place or not. Teenagers with Janos being the elder, the Witman boys live out their days in school and at home, developing a particularly strong interest in biology especially when it comes to dissections. Soon enough their mother accepts the advances of another man and the boys are left to fend for themselves, finding release in unexpected and macabre activities.

Animals mysteriously begin disappearing from town as both Janos and Erno indulge their 'scientific' interests and begin killing and dissecting various victims, likely as a means to come to grips with death in a way that makes sense to them emotionally if not morally correct. In addition, through chance, Janos comes into contact with a prostitute that works out of the local brothel. Feeling genuine warmth for the first time, Janos confuses her sexual advances for emotional intimacy and soon becomes hooked on her as someone to provide the very sort of nurturing denied to him and Erno by their mother. Director Janos Szasz handles these sequences with delicacy as both boys achieve a sort of sexual awakening; beginning to act on their impulses without fully knowing what to do, and using the prostitute as a surrogate mother.

Janos especially hardens as the film progresses, turning from a somewhat disaffected teenager to a defiant personality willing and open to challenge those in his way. It's odd to watch how both he and his younger brother develop a sort of shared sociopathic mindset, as though we are watching a pair of Hannibal Lectors or Ted Bundys develop before our very eyes. The convergence of the brothers' disaffection for their mother, their deep if misplaced love for their prostitute, and the growing interest in vivisection at any means leads to a tragic if not entirely shocking denouement.

To say *The Witman Boys* is a heavy piece of work is an understatement; from the stylized, emotionally overwrought lighting which bathes everyone and everything in either deep shadow or dark browns and reds to the puzzling storyline, the film holds the majority of its power in suggestion rather than shock. Rather than showing an animal be gutted, it is spoken about or merely implied which transfer the horror visually from the screen into the viewer's imagination which almost always proves to be more potent. In addition, this strategy of suggestion ensures also that when action is finally taken it registers with the full shock that it deserves. Chock full of realistic performances and a certain dark humor, *The Witman Boys* is an unorthodox gem for sure but one that's certain to stay in your memory for some time.

*Todd Konrad*



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