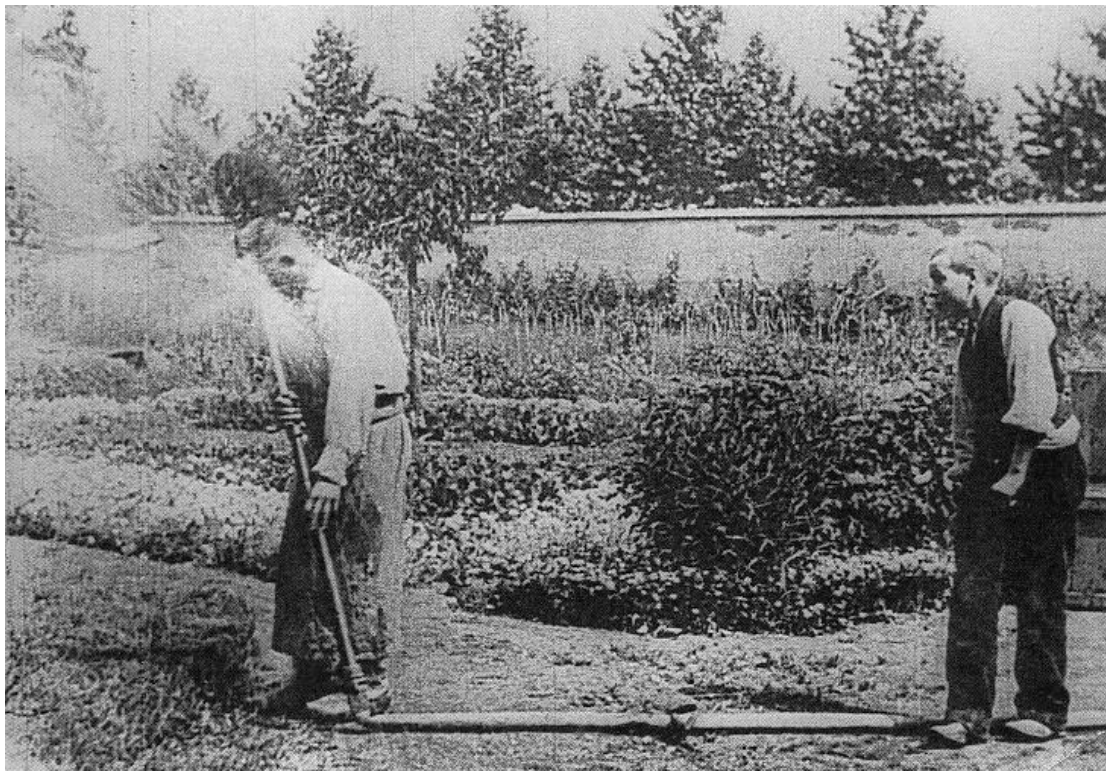


Earliest archive entry

L'Arroseur Arrosé

(lit: "The Hoser Hosed", aka: "Le Jardinier et le Petit Espiègle", UK: "Teasing the Gardener")
France : 1895 : dir. Louis Lumière : Silent : Less than 1 min
prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:
[Le Petit Duval](#)
François Clerc

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω 8 ♀ M ☼	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Where it all began – the prankster boy stakes an early claim to the screen

Source: The Moving Picture Boy

The Cinema note:

“Almost from the beginning.. film-makers began to plan and rehearse simple little dramatic or comic scenes which would fit into the running time of their film. There were several such subjects in the first programmes of the Lumière brothers, especially the one now known as "Teasing the Gardener" ("**L'ARROSEUR ARROSÉ**") in which a small boy treads on a gardener's hose; when the gardener looks down the nozzle, the boy lifts his foot, and the gardener is drenched; he catches the boy and beats him.”

The International Encyclopedia of Film note:

“...The form which Louis Lumière gave the cinema was that of a recording device. His cinematograph recorded life as he could see it around him, a train entering a station or his brother feeding the baby in the garden. His camera-cum-projector was relatively easy to carry around and he used it with the same freedom that a contemporary still photographer would have used his apparatus. For him the novelty and interest lay in the simple fact of capturing movement. One of his early everyday scenes, "**WATERING THE**

GARDENER", opened the path to the comic film but this was not Lumière's intention. Instead of developing the dramatic possibilities of the cinematograph he decided to maintain interest by the novelty of his shots, sending his cameramen all over the world to give film shows and to bring back shots of local scenes. The use of the camera was limited too in Lumière's films: only when mounted on a moving vehicle (tram, train or gondola) did it budge."

The Moving Picture Boy review:

"The clever Louis Lumière - a manufacturer of photographic products in Lyon - didn't quite invent the movie camera: that was Thomas Edison in 1889. But Edison's Kinetoscope was only a kind of peepshow, and Lumière had the wit to devise its necessary adjunct, the film projector. In his first public show, in Paris at the end of 1895, he offered tiny home movies and one or two documentary snippets: a train arriving at a railway station (the audience flinched as it steamed towards them), workers leaving the Lumière factory. There was also a half-minute joke (rather a venerable one) called **"L'ARROSEUR ARROSÉ"**, or **"LE JAR-DINIER ET LE PETIT ESPIEGLE"**. The little rascal in question was thus the screen's first child actor, perpetrator of the screen's first prank.

Assisting a gardener who is watering the flowers, the gardener's boy slyly puts his foot on the hosepipe. The flow of water stops, the gardener peers into the nozzle to see what can be blocking it, the boy withdraws his foot, the gardener is drenched, the laughing boy is scragged.

In medium shot, as in most early movies before the heyday of the close-up, we get no clear impression of the rascal's face. But this crop-headed, skinny kid in shirt sleeves and corduroys already offers a potent image of the Labouring Lad as well as of the Mischief-Maker and Menace. The gardener's boy was played by a young apprentice from the Lumière factory in Lyon. With a less common name than Duval, he might even have been traceable. The gardener (a genuine one) was another Lumière employee, François Clerc."

[no listing in "Classics of the Silent Screen", "A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen", "Silent Movies: A Picture Quiz Book", "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "Bloomsbury Foreign Film Guide", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times incidental note:

"...The first ever thriller was, according to Lawrence Hammond, author of *"Thriller Movies"*, the Lumière brothers' 1895 silent short **"JARDINIER ET LE PETIT ESPIÈGLE"**, in which a gardener looks down a hose while a boy stands on it. This, as Alfred Hitchcock himself would later show, is the epitome of suspense: we all know the water will come squirting out, but when?..."

Needless to say, this is the earliest title in the archive. The Lumière brothers gave their first public performance of moving pictures at the Grand Café, Boulevard des Capucines, Paris, on December 28th 1895. London saw the same in February 1896. Contemporary TV commercials are mega-budget epics by comparison with these modest little 20 and 30 second shorts from the dawn of film-making. There's little really to add to the plot synopsis given above, which tells the story entire. Le Petit Duval is the cinema's first true saboteur – the word being derived from the *sabots*, or wooden shoes he and the gardener are shown wearing.

It's amusing to note, though, that the first film ever made featured a boy in an acting role (slice-of-life documentary glimpses might feature children in their busy street scenes, or at the beach) and had a peremptory spanking as its punchline. This rather bears out Kincaid's eccentric thesis in his (overwrought) book *"The Child Lovers"*: that the mischievous, huggable, *spankable* child is a deeply-ingrained Western icon, roundly celebrated in the

cinema. Children must not only be cute, but they must *err*, so that we may spank them. Not a widely-held view these days, you will grant, but there is a definite case to answer. The author would no doubt have been delighted to find this seminal piece of evidence (if he'd researched his argument better). The very first child actor in the cinema gets his bottom slapped within seconds. What else are boys good for?

The same rudimentary naughty-boy-and-gardener's-hose story was replayed elsewhere - early cinema, like Elizabethan theatre, thrived on out-and-out plagiarism. In 1898 James Williamson, a British cinema pioneer, produced the similar "**TWO NAUGHTY BOYS UPSETTING THE SPOONS**" and "**TWO NAUGHTY BOYS TEASING THE COBBLER**", employing his own sons. See "**OUR NEW ERRAND BOY**" (1905) from the same maker.

See subject index under [CORPORAL PUNISHMENT](#) for other thoroughly-deserved smackings, [RASCALS & SCALAWAGS](#), and under [SILENT CINEMA](#) which, in the first decade of the 20th century, produced more films about naughty children than romances, Westerns or thrillers.