

The Solitary Sin

US : 1919 : dir. : Silent : ? min
 prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:
[Gordon Griffith](#)
 Adult cast unknown

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω □ € Z ⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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The Moving Picture Boy entry on Gordon Griffith:

"This athletic fellow entered the movies around 1913. With Paul Jacobs, he became one of the leading "Keystone Kids", and was in several of Chaplin's 1914 comedies. Like Wesley Barry (whose "PENROD" he would later appear in) he had kid parts in the "Ham and Bud" series.

Gordon was no tender flower. Under the headline "A Little Too Much Realism", a 1914 reporter penned a vivid account of the rough-and-tumble in "LITTLE SUNSET". In this baseball story, the eponymous hero "licks the Apache's former bat-boy in a fair fight, and becomes bat-boy himself. Unfortunately, the boy chosen for the defeat didn't want to be licked, and furthermore he didn't propose to be licked as long as his two fists held out. Gordon Griffith, who plays "Little Sunset", had no intention of being downed either, especially as the play demanded that he win out. The fight did not go according to schedule... Holding the boys apart by main strength, Mr Bosworth explained that it was only make-believe. "But I kin lick him easy!" howled the other boy. "Can't either!" yelled Sunset, and they were at it again..."

Griffith could claim to have been the screen's first Tarzan - several minutes ahead of Elmo Lincoln - in "TARZAN OF THE APES" in 1918. "Gordon Griffith," wrote a critic, "a youthful actor of uncommon gifts, impersonates Tarzan as a boy. He is a fit subject for a sculptor, as he climbs through the trees in the company of the apes, his naked body showing its grace of line in every move. The same could hardly be said of the grotesquely barrel-chested Lincoln. Gordon

swung again two years later in the serial "SON OF TARZAN".

He would soon be seen as Tom Sawyer in the 1920 "HUCKLEBERRY FINN", but meanwhile must have swallowed hard before signing up for a moral propaganda film of 1919, which did not belie its title: "THE SOLITARY SIN". This was "a study of sexual abuses on the part of young men, through neglect on the part of their parents. It follows the careers of three boys. One was taken in hand by his father, while still very young, and profited by learning the secrets of nature and sex. The other boys were allowed to grow up in ignorance; one contracts syphilis and is not allowed to marry, the other goes insane from self-abuse."

It is a relief to hear that Gordon was the one "taken in hand by his father" in the nick of time. (The other, less fortunate principals were tactfully left uncredited.) One imagines that masturbation had a lean year or two following this hair-raising sermon.

"JUNGLE TRAIL OF THE SON OF TARZAN", released in 1923, was simply a cut-down version of the 1920 "SON OF TARZAN". Griffith had another lead in "THE STREET OF TEARS" (24), and went on acting till the mid-Thirties. Then he moved into assistant directing and producing with various companies."

[no listing in "Classics of the Silent Screen", "Hollywood in the Twenties", "A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen", "Silent Movies: A Picture Quiz Book", "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", ""The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "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"]

No further information currently available. Hilarious! Holmstrom does not reveal whether the film is still extant, but I for one would dearly love to see it. It may be unique in cinema as a dire warning on the *Evils of Masturbation*, and anticipates by forty years the first hysterical propaganda films on the *Scourge of Marijuana*. Interesting too that, since Gordon Griffith was just 12 in 1919, the film did not choose to displace adolescence – as cinema continues to do to this day – into the mid to late teen age range. Of course the Victorians too had been greatly agitated about masturbation in youth sapping the moral fibre of the nation, and the tabloid writers of the time peddled tales of hair growing on the fingers, lycanthropy, insanity. The Boy Scout movement was founded very purposefully to distract boys from such temptations of their own flesh by channeling their excess energies into “healthier” outdoor pursuits.

Masturbation has always been identified as a male pursuit, and the true horror of parents and educationalists was not that it would lead to libertinage or lycanthropy, but to group activities among the boys, and sodomy. Consider the present, when adolescent and teen mating rituals are the staple diet of television soaps, and when scores of similarly hysterical films have *Exposed the Truth* (as they see it) about incest, paedophilia, teenage prostitution and other latterday “evils” – there still remains an absolute silence on that most enduring of puberty’s hobbies, strangling the snake in the bed. Was the subject ever mentioned once in all the cumulative hours of “**Leave it to Beaver**”?, “**My Three Sons**”?, “**The Wonder Years**”?, “**Silver Spoons**”?, “**Second Noah**”?, “**Home Improvement**”? I think not. Masturbation is the last great unmentionable subject, all of which makes this title a fascinating item of curiosity.

See subject index under **SEX & SEXUALITY** and **SILENT CINEMA**.