

Vice Versa

UK : 1947 : dir. Peter Ustinov : Rank / Two Cities : 111 min
 prod: Peter Ustinov & George H Brown : scr: Peter Ustinov : dir.ph.:
[Anthony Newley](#); [Petula Clark](#)
 Roger Livesey; Ernest Jay; Kay Walsh; David Hutcheson; James Robertson Justice;
 Kynaston Reeves; Patricia Raine; Joan Young

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	⌘	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Abandon hope all ye who enter here! – Yes! it's a boys' boarding school again, and Bultitude the father, in his son's quivering body, is all set to enjoy once more the "happiest days of your life"...

Source for all stills unless otherwise indicated: Collins Film Yearbook c1947



Have a care what you wish for, lest you end by getting it. The Garuda Stone does its mischief on the Bultitudes.

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001 review:

"Entertaining comedy about Victorian stockbroker Livesey and his schoolboy son Newley, who change places after wishing on a magic stone. Parts of it are silly, but much of it is inspired and hilarious. Justice is great as a hypocritical headmaster; Ustinov also wrote the script. Predates the father-son "comedies" of the 1980s. *** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review – identical to above, adding:

"...In some ways resembles the later Disney film "FREAKY FRIDAY"."

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"A magic stone enables an unhappy Victorian boy to change places with his pompous father. Funny moments can't disguise the fact that this overlong comedy is a bit of a fizzle, its talented

creator not being a film-maker. A pity, since British films have so rarely entered the realms of fancy. From the novel by F. Anstey. * "

"A repository of English oddities"
– John Russell Taylor

Film Review 1947-48 – vol.4 – review:

"Peter Ustinov adaptation of the famous F. Anstey comedy story about a man and a boy who changed places."

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

"Peter Ustinov wrote and directed this tale of an Edwardian identity switch between father and son. Fascinating to see Petula Clark and Anthony Newley (who both have leading roles)¹ as teenagers."

¹ Newley is the co-star. Petula Clark has a small featured role.

Pre-transformation, dodgy uncle Marmaduke regales Dick's father with the legend of the stolen Indian relic. Shades of Indiana Jones...



Post-transformation, and with pater packed safely off to school, Dick gets frisky with the housemaid. She takes the offer of a raise with some alarm.



Bultitude's physician is summoned. He can detect a certain difference about his patient's demeanour...



Collins Film Yearbook c1947 synopsis:

"There are some magical charms which have the power of granting a wish to their owners, but which soon leave them rueing the day that they ever meddled with magic. The Garuda Stone was one of these desirable but dangerous gems. Everybody who wished on it quickly regretted it.

At present, the possessor of the stone was the glib-tongued but thoroughly disreputable Marmaduke Paradine, who had stolen it from an Indian temple. When he heard the dire history of the jewel, he performed the solitary generous action of his life. He presented it to his very staid and stuffy brother-in-law Paul, a typically severe Victorian father (for this odd affair happened in Victorian times). Mr Paul Bultitude was astonished, but he was busy - in fact, he was seeing his son Dick back to school - and he put the stone in his pocket and thought no more about it.

Yes, he was indeed staid and stuffy. When Dick confided to him that he loathed the idea of going back to Dr Grimstone's horrible school, he said fatuously that there was nothing that *he* would like better. In fact he wished he were a boy again.

In the twinkling of an eye, the Garuda Stone granted his wish. There he was a boy again! And Dick, having got his hands on the stone, wished to be a man like his father. And he did!

Dick, wearing the body and voice of his father, was now the head of the household. Mr Bultitude, in Dick's body and clothes, could do nothing when his "father" told the butler to take him off to Dr Grimstone's.

So Mr Bultitude had his wish and went back to school again. There was a minor sensation when he appeared at the railway station smoking a cigar and offered one to Dr Grimstone, a terrifying man with a ferocious black beard. Even the tyrannical Grimstone was astonished at the change in "young Bultitude" when the lad insisted on sneaking on his schoolfellows.

The other boys naturally resented the change. Bultitude had always been a bit of a scapegrace and popular with all of them. This term he had suddenly turned into a pompous, patronising

prig. They did not forget to take it out of him in the dormitory; and when they got him on the football field, well, there seemed to be some doubt whether he was the ball or not.

Meanwhile, at home in London, the real Dick in his father's body was having a great time. He amazed the butler by ordering dozens of bottles of lemonade, ginger beer and sherbet, for one thing. And there were plenty of other things.

But there were drawbacks from Dick's point of view as well. At first it was great fun having all the power of a grown-up, but presently the snags began to appear. For instance, he got into serious trouble with a fire-eating cavalry officer who challenged him to a duel in Kensington Gardens. Dick was terrified out of his wits. When he saw Lord Gosport parading for the duel with his fellow officers at his back, he realised that he had bitten off very much more than he could chew. He ran for his life.

Lord Gosport saw in Dick, not a fourteen-year old boy, but a man of his own age who was afraid to face him. He chased him. There was a regimental band rehearsing in a nearby bandstand, and Dick made for it. He crawled through the legs of the bandmen as they were playing. Lord Gosport crawled after him, but Dick, though he had the body of a middle-aged man, had the quick wits and agility of a boy, and he got away.

He was very glad to get home. He was beginning to wonder if this grown-up life was everything he wanted. And then inevitably the infamous Marmaduke Paradine turned up again. Inevitably, he had a wildcat scheme in which he wanted his brother-in-law to invest money.

In this case, the venture was connected with a new invention called the "horseless carriage", that is to say the motor car. Dick was delighted with the idea and wasted no time in putting his money (that is, his father's money) into Uncle Marmaduke's company, which was going to build a factory to make motor cars.

What was the astonishment at Grimstone's when Mr Bultitude arrived at the school to visit his son in one of these strange new "horseless carriages", accompanied by Uncle Marmaduke. Dr Grimstone called the car "this explosive device", and was horrified. Poor Mr Bultitude,

still in the body of his son and unable to do anything about it, was horrified to see the way Dick was squandering his money at the instigation of the thoroughly unreliable Marmaduke. He determined to run away and rescue his son, and he did.

By the time he arrived in London, the pleasures of being an adult were wearing very thin indeed for Dick. He agreed immediately when his father offered to change back again



Above: at Dr Grimstone's school, Dick's currying favour with the masters does not go down a treat with the other boys – even if the “boy” in this case is Peter Jones (of “Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy” fame) and looking ludicrous in a schoolboy uniform...

Below: Dick, the respectably married 14-year old, takes rather a dim view of the forward manners of Dr Grimstone's daughter (Petula Clark).



into their own bodies – on the strict condition that he would not have to go back to Dr Grimstone's.

So the Garuda Stone was once again called into service. Father and son resumed their own bodies – and very glad they were to do so! And what happened to the Garuda Stone? Well, if it's lying about anywhere, I think I might like to test it out, in spite of its sinister history. What do you think?"

[no listing in "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", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

No further information currently available. It's surprisingly absent from the majority of published film guides, even the UK ones.

One of the stated aims of this archive is to focus on the adult view of children and childhood as expressed in film, and perhaps no film betrays those attitudes more tellingly than one in which adult and child switch places and experience the world through the body of the other. This is a comedy of course, so we mustn't over-tax the analysis, but Livesey plays the 14-year old boy in his father's frame as a buffoon, while the adult man in the boy's body finds it impossible to get anyone to take him seriously, and is despised by his peers for fawning to authority. Our language is still littered with the same assumptions about children, even while we affect to place them on a pedestal – "act your age", "don't be so childish", "boy's toys"...

Although the public wearied quickly of a glut of body-swap films, all were played to a greater or lesser extent for slapstick. It would be more intriguing to see the F. Anstey story re-cast as a psychological *what-if*, without easy comedy pay-offs. The cinema has actually presented us

with a number of serious “adult-in-a child’s-body” dramas – that is to say, portraits of sobre, articulate, purposeful children who view the world without illusions or naiveté. Such children are invariably described as “precocious”, for expressing qualities deemed inappropriate to their years. There *are* no precocious children, just as there are no precocious adults, only children who show more insight and complexity than others. They seem to us more “mature”.

Petula Clark was 15, her debut film being “**MEDAL FOR THE GENERAL**” in 44. She made several titles in the kitchen-sink **HUGGETS** series, but also “**MURDER IN REVERSE**” (45) and “**LONDON TOWN**” (46). Her last film appearance of note was as Peter O’Toole’s innamorata in the musical remake of “**GOODBYE MR CHIPS**” (69).

See subject index under **BOARDING SCHOOL / PUBLIC SCHOOL, COMEDY, HISTORY** and **TWINS / LOOKALIKES / SWITCHED IDENTITIES**.