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SINGING *CHRISTMAS CAROLS*: THE DICKENSIAN MUSICAL VS. THE DICKENSIAN MEGA-MUSICAL

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Abstract

Adaptation theorist Thomas Leitch has studied the various children's films

based on Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* as potential 'entryways' into the Dickens canon, drawing particular attention to the potential for musical adaptations to captivate young viewers while capturing the unbridled emotionalism of Dickens through the spectacle of song. There are many different musical genres, several of which are associated with specific cultures: the integrated 'book musical', which seamlessly incorporates songs into the narrative, is associated primarily with American musical theatre, while the operatic 'mega-musical' is a European variation on the American form. Leslie Bricusse's *Scrooge* (1970) and Alan Menken's *A Christmas Carol: The Musical* (1994) are especially important examples to consider in this context, as contrasting these two musical variations of the Dickensian source allows for a clearer understanding of what these different musical genres can and cannot achieve. Bricusse's adaptation employs the conventions of the American integrated musical despite the fact that Bricusse is English, while Menken's adaptation employs the conventions of the European mega-musical despite the fact that Menken is American. Ironically, it is by utilizing the American format of the book musical that Bricusse is able to emphasize the Englishness of his source, for the integrated format allows him to place specific emphasis on Dickens's characters and the traditional roots of the story. Menken's mega-musical approach sacrifices some of these traditional elements for the sake of a larger spectacle, reducing the Englishness of the adaptation but simultaneously allowing for a 'global' appreciation of the story's transcendent morals.

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