

**A SONG FOR EUROTRASH: STANCES AND COVERAGE OF THE
EUROVISION SONG CONTEST IN *THE GUARDIAN*, 1967-2008**

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Tiivistelmä <p>Pro-gradu tutkielmassa tutkitaan isobritannialaisen <i>The Guardian</i> sanomalehden uutisointia ja asenteita Eurovision laulukilpailua kohtaan. Tutkielman lähdeaineistona käytetään <i>The Guardianin</i> vuosien 1967–2008 välisenä aikana julkaisemia artikkeleita, ja hyödyntää tutkimusmenetelminä diskurssianalyysia ja lähilukua. Tutkielma selvittää artikkeleiden kautta, minkälaista uutisointi Eurovision laulukilpailuun oli <i>The Guardianissa</i> ja minkälaisia asenteita on havaittavissa. Myös Iso-Britannian menestys ja epäonnistumiset Euroviisuissa, mediapersoona Terry Woganin vaikutus Euroviisuihin Isossa-Britanniassa ja näiden tekijöiden mahdolliset vaikutukset uutisointiin ovat osana tutkimuskysymyksiä. Näiden kysymysten kautta tutkimus tuo uutta näkökulmaa euroviisuista lehdistön ja brittiläisen ympäristön kautta. Tutkimuksessa on nähtävissä selkeitä asenteita Euroviisuja kohtaan, jotka ovat pääosin negatiivisia. Uutisoinnin sävy on useimmiten joko kyynistä tai sarkastista, jolloin Euroviisuja ei nähdä musiikillisena tapahtumana. 2000-lukuun tultaessa myös politiikka vaikutti uutisointiin, minkä kautta perusteltiin Iso-Britannian huonoa menestystä Euroviisuissa.</p>	
Asiasanat: Eurovision laulukilpailu, The Guardian, Iso-Britannia, Terry Wogan, sanomalehdet, mediahistoria, diskurssianalyysi	
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ABBREVIATIONS

BBC = British Broadcasting Corporation

EBU = European Broadcasting Union

EU = European Union

OIRT = Organisation Internationale de Radiodiffusion et de Télévision

RAI = Radiotelevisione italiana

RTÉ = Raidió Teilifís Éireann

UK = United Kingdom

1. INTRODUCTION

The Eurovision Song Contest is one of the biggest TV shows in the world, hosted by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), its first show dating back to 1956. It has turned into a phenomenon not only in Europe, but also in Australia, and spin-off shows have been made for Asian and Turkic countries, the United States, and kids in Europe as well.¹ Artists like ABBA, Celine Dion, and Måneskin have launched their international careers at the Eurovision Song Contest.

The United Kingdom has competed in the Eurovision Song Contest since 1957 (except in 1958), having won the contest five times and placing second sixteen times (as of 2024). The UK has also hosted Eurovision nine times, the latest occasion occurring 2023 in Liverpool on behalf of Ukraine due to the Russian invasion of the country. Even though the contest has gained popularity in Europe, it has had mixed reactions from British viewers. These views turned more negative after the end of the Cold War, which saw the expansion of the contest to Eastern European countries. Euroscepticism and the poor reputation of the contest from a musical point of view have been seen as some of the reasons for the Eurovision Song Contest's inferior reputation in the United Kingdom.

This master's thesis aims to explore and analyse how *The Guardian*, the British daily newspaper founded in 1851, has covered the Eurovision Song Contest and what stances towards the contest *The Guardian* has had during the years. *The Guardian's* news articles were chosen as a primary source because their news coverage fits the research topic best, as *The Guardian* has covered culture and music news widely for years. However, it should be noticed that, unlike tabloid newspapers such as *The Sun* or *Daily Mail*, *The Guardian* is not read as widely. In a comparison of sixteen British newspapers' average circulation per day in 1980, *The Guardian* placed 14th with 377,000 sold

¹ ABU TV Song Festival, Türkvizyon Song Contest, American Song Contest, and Junior Eurovision Song Contest respectively.

newspapers per day. In comparison, the subsequently discontinued *News of the World* had the highest number of copies sold, with 4.3 million newspapers per day.²

This should be noted, as the British views shown in *The Guardian* are very likely more elitist than those in a tabloid newspaper. But compared to the “yellow press”, *The Guardian* also has sensational articles, with a Eurosceptic and mocking tone towards the contest. But it also contains deep, analytical, and contemplative articles on the Eurovision Song Contest that do more than just deal briefly with the United Kingdom’s bad or good success.

The title of the thesis, *A Song For Eurotrash*, comes from an episode of Eurotrash, a show that Channel 4 in the United Kingdom broadcasted from 1993 to 2007. Eurotrash’s idea focused on reports on popular culture around Europe, with a humorous and bizarre twist, hosted by two French nationals: Jean Paul Gaultier and Antoine de Caunes. One episode that was released in 1998 (which also had a same-name compilation album) was dedicated to Eurovision, with artists doing covers of Eurovision entries.³ Even though the show and episode did not have a negative tone, the title fits the idea of a cynical and Eurosceptic United Kingdom at the Eurovision Song Contest, as the Eurotrash was used by British people as a degrading term for the European Union (EU), in which public opinion of the EU has been claimed to be politically connected to the Eurovision Song Contest after the Cold War.⁴

1.1 Research questions

The focus on the research questions is on attitudes towards the Eurovision Song Contest and on what occasions (e.g. UK’s results) have or have not affected these attitudes and

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https://web.archive.org/web/20070928073311/http://www.mmc.gov.uk/rep_pub/reports/1985/fulltext/190c02.pdf (accessed 1.3.2023)

³ Vuletic, *Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest*, 155.

⁴ Vuletic, *Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest*, 155-156.

the coverage of the competition. The hypothesis is that the reactions were mainly harsh, and that they would correlate with the United Kingdom's placements (coverage was less harsh in years when the UK won and much harsher if the UK "failed" to gain a good placement). There is also a possibility that the coverage during the 90s was much serious and maybe even somewhat patriotic, as both the UK and Ireland placed almost every time in the top three, let alone Ireland's four victories during that decade. In the early 2000s when dominance of Eastern European countries started to occur, public voting was introduced to replace jury voting, and the UK achieved its all-time worst results, it is likely that more negative articles began to appear, focused on things like political/neighbour voting, the reputation of the contest and Euroscepticism.

One of the research questions focuses on Terry Wogan, an Irish-born TV presenter who commentated Eurovision Song Contest for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) from the 1970s until 2008. He was viewed as one of the influential people in the so-called Eurovision "bubble" and was also seen as the voice of Eurovision in the United Kingdom. His views on the contest started to become more conservative and Eurosceptic in the 1990s as after the fall of the Soviet Union, newly independent Eastern European countries started to participate in the contest. This increased from 1998 onwards after the televoting was introduced, leading Wogan to think contest's main purpose was for Eastern European countries to vote for themselves. This is why it is also interesting to see whether Wogan had any effect on views towards the contest and whether this can be seen in *The Guardian's* coverage.

In short, these are the research questions for the thesis:

- What stances and attitudes on the Eurovision Song Contest can be seen from *The Guardian* over the years 1967-2008?
- How has the UK's success (and lack of success) affected the attitudes and coverage towards the contest?
- What was Terry Wogan's influence on British views on the contest? And how was he viewed in *The Guardian*?

1.2 Sources and research literature

Articles from *The Guardian* will work as the primary sources. The timeline of these articles is from 1967 to 2008. The timeline has been selected as the first major news articles from *The Guardian's* database were found from 1967 (which was also the first year when the UK won the contest). The timeline ends in 2008, as the United Kingdom placed last for the second time in its history and Terry Wogan was the BBC's Eurovision commentator for the last time.

Most of the articles from *The Guardian* are either news or opinion articles. With the keyword "Eurovision Song Contest" there are over a thousand articles from *The Guardian's* database, which is why the number of articles used in the thesis must be limited. This concerns especially the articles published from the '90s and '00s, as they constitute most the search results. Thus, such search results as newsflashes or TV guides were not included, as they mostly do not contain useful information for the thesis. The remaining articles were then either left out or used in the thesis, depending on their relevance and value. For example, an article from the '60s, which interviews songwriters and briefly mentions that they wrote the winning entry for Eurovision that year is not sufficiently relevant, as it does not reveal more about the contest or describe the songwriter's feelings about the victory or the Eurovision Song Contest. Also, more specific keywords were used to limit results, which helped in finding more relevant articles (e.g. Terry Wogan AND Eurovision Song Contest).

Previous research on the topic is especially limited regarding the United Kingdom and its participation in the contest. There are, however, some studies that focus on the United Kingdom. These include Dean Vuletic's *"Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest"* (2019), Judie Kalman, Ben Welling & Keshia Jacotine's *Eurovisions: Identity and the International Politics of the Eurovision Song Contest* (2019) and *Performing the 'New' Europe: Identities, Feelings and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest* by Karen Fricker and Milija Gluhovic (2013). All of them mainly have Euroscepticism as a main point, but

they also cover different themes: Fricker focuses in one of the chapters about Terry Wogan, Kalman, Welling, and Jacotine have one chapter on British identity and a short history of Britain at the Eurovision Song Contest, whilst Vuletic has a small but comprehensive section on UK's Euroscepticism in Eurovision.

Some other previous studies with a Eurovision-theme are: Paul Jordan's *The Modern Fairy Tale: Nation Branding, National Identity and the Eurovision Song Contest in Estonia* (2014) which discloses how Estonia's identity and its aims to join the European Union were affected by the Eurovision Song Contest; Julie A. Cassidy's "Post-Soviet Pop Goes Gay: Russia's Trajectory to Eurovision Victory" (2014) on Russian domestic policy and how Russian success at Eurovision has affected the LGBT community there; and Alexander Badenoch's journal article "'In what language do you like to sing best?' Placing popular music in broadcasting in post-war Europe" (2013), which compares the Eurovision Song Contest to another (now discontinued) music competition, the European Pop Jury, and analyses how these two contests have influenced Western Europe through pop music. Even though academic research on the Eurovision Song Contest at the political and cultural levels is not very broad, these examples can be seen as only the tip of the iceberg in : there have been a dozen master's theses published in Finland that focus on the Eurovision Song Contest, including the political aspect of Finland competing in both the Eurovision and the Intervision Song Contest and the song translations shown on the Finnish broadcast.⁵ These theses, however, do not fit the research subject of this thesis and are thus not used.

Compared to the previous studies the master thesis will differ from its point of view. None of the mentioned studies that focus on the United Kingdom and its participation to the Eurovision Song Contest examine the topic through media, but rather from general perspective or through certain people or communities.

⁵ Anni Haapalainen: "'Tyhmäkin biisi alkaa yhtäkkiä elää': kääntäjän rooli ja tekstitysnormien rikkoutuminen Euroviisujen suomenkielisissä tekstityksissä" (MA thesis, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, 2017); Tuomas Lassinharju: "Kaksi viisukilpailua ja Suomi: Suomi ja Yleisradio Eurovision ja Intervision laulukilpailuissa" (MA thesis, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, 2018)

1.3 Methodology and structure of thesis

Close reading and discourse analysis are the main methods used in the thesis, as they are the best fit for research focused on coverage in newspapers. Media history is also one of the points of view used in researching a newspaper. Media history as a method is diverse, making it possible to research different points of view.⁶ Media history is used to determine *The Guardian's* position in the United Kingdom's media field by its circulation, political stance, and its history during the timeline of the thesis.

Close reading plays an important role in finding all relevant information from the articles. Briefly, close reading means a way to read closely and to make discoveries from different perspectives with each reading of a text. I have used close reading in a slightly modified way to make it fit the thesis's theme and to spend my time rationally. In the first reading, I aimed to categorize the articles by which chapters are useful and what different perspectives can be found in them. The rest of the readings (ideally 2-3 more) focused on the themes found in the articles, trying to find different perspectives with every reading.

Discourse analysis is the core method of the thesis. As a method, it is very broad and can be described as the analysis of the significance of texts, speeches and other similar forms of expressions. The thesis relies specifically on prevailing formation of information: it sees discourses being built through societal and institutional factors. The questions about this formation lie on sociocultural and institutional conditions. Thus, a question like "How does a certain period or political system affect the discourse" is a good example of how this formation seeks to find answers through discourse analysis.⁷

⁶ Kortti, *Mediahistoria*, 31.

⁷ Ihalainen and Valtonen, *Sanat siltana menneeseen*, 42-43.

In the thesis, the formation is useful, as the objects researched fit perfectly into the theme. Eurovision as a theme is emphasized in institutional questions, and at the same time it can be seen building the discourses that are included in the thesis and the research questions. In the same way, we can see *The Guardian* as an institutional factor that has impacted on building the discourses in the articles that are being used in the thesis as primary sources. As the thesis focuses on the Eurovision Song Contest as a phenomenon and on *The Guardian's* coverage and stances towards it, the prevailing formation of information is one the best options to use in processing discourses and research questions.

Even though the Eurovision Song Contest is known to be popular in the LGBTQ+ community, queer history will not be included in the thesis' methods. This is since only few of *The Guardian's* articles from the thesis' timeline focus on a queer point of view (and in most cases the focus lies on the first transgender Eurovision winner, Dana International).

The first chapter, "*Puppet on a String: General view of Eurovision Song Contest*", will cover the public image of the contest in Britain generally. This includes how the contest was viewed, what reactions different songs and winners (excluding UK entries) got, and topics that heated debate among people, especially political voting after televoting was introduced in 1998. The second chapter, "*Love Shine a Light: Royaume-Uni Douze Points*", mainly focuses on the UK's success in the contest, such as hosting the contest, positive views of Eurovision and the UK's victories, including how British winners were received in the United Kingdom. The third chapter, "*Cry Baby: downfall and the hate towards Eurotrash*", centres on the downfall of the UK and the negative views of the contest. This includes the miserable results of the UK (e.g. nul points in 2003), Terry Wogan and his negative attitude towards the contest, and Euroscepticism. The concluding chapter goes on the conclusions found in the thesis and what relevance this study brings on academic research of the Eurovision Song Contest.

The titles of the chapters are song titles of the UK's Eurovision entries, and their results in the contest reflect in one way or another on the chapter's topics: "Puppet on a String" from 1967 was the first British entry to win the contest, "Love Shine a Light" from 1997 is (as of 2024) the last winning entry from the United Kingdom, and "Cry Baby" was the first entry from the UK to place last and finish with zero points. It is also somewhat part of British "Eurovision culture" to name things after their (winning) entries, e.g. the BBC has headlined some of their national selections and Eurovision documentaries with the UK's former entries.⁸

⁸ From 2004 to 2006 BBC hosted a national final called *Eurovision: Making Your Mind Up* which was named after the Bucks Fizz's winning entry from 1981. For the 50th anniversary of the Eurovision Song Contest the BBC released a 2005 a documentary called *Boom Bang-a-Bang: 50 Years of Eurovision*, which was also named after a former Eurovision-winning entry by Lulu from 1969.

2 PUPPET ON A STRING: GENERAL VIEW OF THE EUROVISION SONG CONTEST

Eurovision as an event is broad, and so has been its coverage in *The Guardian*. Whether it was about the quality of the songs, the politics behind the competition or the predicted winner of the year's contest, *The Guardian* covered these issues. This chapter focuses on the general view of the contest, ranging from the musical aspects to politics and other elements, in the coverage of the Eurovision Song Contest in *The Guardian*.

2.1 Songs and the musical point of view of the contest

"Some of their bitter-sweet songs will last when the best of the Eurovision Song Contest entries have passed into oblivion."⁹

The quote comes from an article that reflects on the breakup of The Beatles, almost a year after Paul McCartney announced he was leaving the band. The article is not only seeing Eurovision's reputation as a music competition low, but it is also reiterating the claim by that it is unable to produce hit songs (that would gain less recognition than The Beatles' less-known songs). Most of the other articles from *The Guardian* has the same point of view, some even claiming that the competition has nothing to do with music.

In 1968, a year after the United Kingdom won the Eurovision Song Contest for the first time, which gave them the right to host the contest for the next year, *The Guardian* released an article on the 6th of April, the day Eurovision was held, that reviewed the songs competing in the contest. The article emphasized how the songs were way too melancholic. Quotes from song lyrics such as "Summer is over. Nothing else matters to me" were referred to as a compilation of "a gloomy lot", and in one case the journalist even saw the Luxembourgian entrants as not happy, even though their entry was a

⁹ "Paradise lost, reality regained", *The Guardian*, March 13, 1971.

positive song about love. Unsurprisingly or not, a bias towards the home entry can be seen as, the UK's "Congratulations" by Cliff Richard was seen as joyful and "the positive extrovert of the party".¹⁰

The article is one of the different views shown in *The Guardian*. However, it resonates with many other articles that examine the competing songs. They are mainly negative or rarely focus on showing the entries or the competition as serious entities in the music industry. In 1967, Stanley Reynolds claimed that the Eurovision Song Contest had almost nothing to do with "the real pop music world, at least with the way we see it in Britain". Reynolds continued with examples of the show, commenting that the audience looked mainly middle-aged and middle-class in their dinner jackets, and that the song performances mainly looked like early 1950s films.¹¹ Another example can be found from 1970, when George Melly (1926-2007), an English musician and critic, reviewed the year's Eurovision Song Contest harshly.

"[...] It can be treasured for its purely formal horror. [...] The main plank of its absurdity lies in the fact that it seems to take place in some form of cultural limbo. It bears absolutely no relation to pop, for instance, not even on its lowest level. [...] The Songs for Europe are middle-aged songs, sung for a middle-aged audience dressed in formal splendour. The singers are admittedly young, but relate less to the blues-based internationalism of pop proper, more to a series of dolls of all nations."¹²

Even though the article seems to be harsh, it must be noted that Melly admired the national stereotypes shown by different nations that made the competition interesting. However, the negative views still seem to echo more in the newspaper. One possible reason for this point of view was that people in the UK did not see themselves as culturally and musically same as mainland Europe. A few examples have compared the United Kingdom to non-successful Eurovision countries such as the "old Schlager

¹⁰ Christine Jade, "Sole extrovert among mourners from Europe", *The Guardian*, March 6, 1968.

¹¹ Stanley Reynolds, "Television", *The Guardian*, April 10, 1967.

¹² George Melly, "The highposts of the schmaltzfeste", *The Guardian*, March 29, 1970.

nation” Germany.¹³ The first British victory in Eurovision thus was possibly seen as a small surprise, as the contest was mainly dominated by the French-speaking countries France and Luxembourg.¹⁴ However, it should be noted that the United Kingdom was generally a powerhouse in the Eurovision Song Contest during the Cold War, thanks to having the biggest music industry in the world after the United States and benefiting from the language rule (which was removed in 1999) that did not allow countries to perform other than by their official language.¹⁵ Not only that, Reynolds’ article highlighted the conflict between the early years of the Eurovision Song Contest and *The Guardian*. The Eurovision Song Contest mainly started as a conservative family show displaying what Western Europe had to offer in terms of music and culture. It conflicted with the liberal mindset that *The Guardian* was representing, where pop music and rock’n’roll were dominating younger audiences. This was absent in Eurovision in its first decades, as most of the artists competing there did not represent newer genres that were popular among youngsters, nor was the contest trying to target younger audiences.

Other examples can be found that criticize Eurovision as not being sufficiently mainstream or representing the best of the entries of all (Western) Europe. In 1969 film director and writer Tony Palmer (b. 1941) thought it was not showcasing what it was promising:

“The Eurovision Song Contest is presumably intended to represent all that is best in pop. The No. 1 song should be tops in its field. But neither the Beatles, nor the Stones, nor Donovan, nor Jimi Hendrix has ever been entered. It’s claimed that many top artists refuse to enter because of the fear of public defeat.

¹³ Pajala, *Erot järjestykseen!* 135.

¹⁴ Between 1956 and 1966 six of the eleven winning entries were sung in French. During that time United Kingdom placed second five times, fourth twice, and once in seventh and ninth place.

¹⁵ Vuletic, *Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest*, 47.

[...] So the songs represent no one and are representative of nothing except the Tin Pan Alley tradition of instant balladeering. [...] It seems that we are at the mercy of the taste, or lack of it, of the big boys who organise it all.”¹⁶

Even though Palmer mentioned Jimi Hendrix, who was American (and thus was unlikely ever considering competing at Eurovision) he raised a good point about how Eurovision was not sufficiently mainstream pop. The Eurovision Song Contest was in its first years seen as a conservative TV product that rarely had any genre represented that was popular among teenagers (e.g. rock’n’roll), and even though ABBA rose into fame through the contest, the participants were at best popular on the national level before participating in the contest. This includes the first British winner, Sandie Shaw, who had a few hits in the UK before representing the country, yet she was still one of the biggest names winning during the contest’s first years.¹⁷ However, these views were mainly focused on the anglophone perspectives and did not count Europe’s diverse music scene, which was not as globally successful as songs produced in the UK, the US, and Southern Europe. The BBC pressured for changes to the contest (e.g. voting) so that Eurovision would appeal to young viewers after the UK’s mainstream artists, such as Cliff Richard in his two attempts, were unable to win the contest.¹⁸ The examples shown above probably did not have any impact on the BBC demanding changes or the EBU enforcing them, but it shows clearly what the ideal contest of Eurovision was seen to be in the UK: an opportunity to showcase popular music and find the best song, not showcasing different cultures to integrate Western Europe, which the BBC (and some of the broadcasters) sought to change.¹⁹ In the end, the EBU enforced changes to the voting system in 1975 (12 points for the best entry, 10 points to the second best etc.) that were used with minor changes to 2016.²⁰

¹⁶ John Gale, “With Lulu into Europe”, *The Guardian*, March 2, 1969.

¹⁷ O’Connor, *The “Eurovision Song Contest”*, 31.

¹⁸ Vuletic, *Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest*, 46.

¹⁹ Vuletic, *Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest*, 46.

²⁰ O’Connor, *The “Eurovision Song Contest”*, 62-63.

From 1981 onwards some sort of “continuity” can be seen in *The Guardian*’s reviewing of Eurovision as a contest and of its entries, as Nancy Banks-Smith (b. 1929), writer and critic for *The Guardian* started a yearly review of the contest that continued until 1999. The start was somewhat well-timed, as the United Kingdom won for the fourth time in 1981. Banks-Smith pointed out that the meaning of non-English songs got lost in translation (and this happened even to songs in English at some point) and wondered how Norwegians turned from Vikings into people singing small sweet songs.²¹

Banks-Smith’s coverage did not differ from that of other journalists, as it also had a snide tone: in 1983 she quoted Terry Wogan whether a man in the audience was sleeping due to the broadcast being overrun, and imagined how a Spanish flamenco singer was singing in agony.²² 1989 she was sure Yugoslavia won because it was the last song performing, and observed that Israel sent “12-year-old poppet and France 11-year-old moppet”.²³ She also dedicated almost the whole segment about 1982’s contest to the Finnish entry, which placed last with nil points. A humorous spirit can be seen in the quote below, which followed after Banks-Smith described the song by the looks of the artist and the meaning of the song, “Nuku Pommiin” (lit. “I Slept Too Late” or “Bomb Out”).²⁴

“The juries, who are protected from reprisals by their invisibility, may have been antagonised, I think, by the fact that it had never occurred to them to drop a bomb on Finland in the first place.

Or not till now”²⁵

Banks-Smith’s last review of the contest in 1999 was more about the show than the songs, or the contest. Titled as “You can take the earplugs out now” with the lead paragraph sarcastically thanking “another tasteful and unbiased Eurovision Song

²¹ Nancy Banks-Smith, “Zero is the hero”, *The Guardian*, April 6, 1981.

²² Nancy Banks-Smith, “Sing in the tail”, *The Guardian*, April 25, 1983.

²³ Nancy Banks-Smith, “Shooting star”, *The Guardian*, May 8, 1989.

²⁴ Nancy Banks-Smith, “Instant assessments”, *The Guardian*, April 26, 1982.

²⁵ Nancy Banks-Smith, “Instant assessments”, *The Guardian*, April 26, 1982.

Contest” that had focused mainly on the looks of the winning country Sweden’s composers, and describing last year winner Dana International, who fell while carrying the trophy, which Banks-Smith described as so big that “you could have flattened a phalanx of Philistines with one blow”.²⁶ Banks-Smith also described the voting as “the traditional back-scratching” where neighbours voted for each other, and ended the article somewhat thanking the end of the language rule (and thus allowing other countries to send songs in English), as she jokingly said that previously you had to guess whether the lyrics were lunatic.²⁷ This article continued the same approach that Banks-Smith had taken in previous years, ridiculing the competition, taking a both snide and sarcastic approach to reviewing the year’s contest and ending it by criticizing the neighbour voting (of which you can find more examples in section 2.3.)

2.2 Behind the scenes of a televised song contest

Covering the Eurovision Song Contest was not just about the music or how neighbours voted for each other. It also was about hosting the Eurovision Song Contest in an obscure small town, about the pre-favourites to win the whole thing, and about the future of the televised contest.

Organizational logistics and difficulties were on focus in 1993 when Ireland hosted the contest in Millstreet, a town with 1500 inhabitants, making it the smallest town to host the Eurovision Song Contest. *The Guardian* published an article about the reasons for hosting the contest in Millstreet and interviewed the man behind the idea, Noel Cornelius Duggan, who was the owner of the hosting venue, Green Glens Arena, which was mainly used for horse show events.²⁸

²⁶ Nancy Banks-Smith, “You can take the earplugs out now”, *The Guardian*, May 31, 1999.

²⁷ Nancy Banks-Smith, “You can take the earplugs out now”, *The Guardian*, May 31, 1999.

²⁸ Edward Pilkington, “Sleepy town wakes up to sound of music”, *The Guardian*, May 1, 1993.

Sadly, the contest being held in a small town was not the main talking point, as the focus was mainly on the participation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was fighting in the Bosnian War. The country was seen as a pre-favourite in *The Guardian*, and after the show, Nancy Banks-Smith described their participants as “poor runners [who] have turned up at the Olympic Games without shoes”.²⁹ This was a good depiction, as Fazla, the band representing Bosnia and Herzegovina, had to flee Sarajevo under gunfire, whilst their conductor was not able to leave the country. In the end, Bosnia and Herzegovina placed 16th in the contest.³⁰

Going into the 1990s, *The Guardian* started to speculate more on who were the pre-favourites to win the contest. In 1994, betting predictions were openly discussed. *The Guardian* singled out Iceland as the biggest candidate to win the contest, arguing that the country had “an undistinguished track record” but possessed a secret weapon, their conductor Frank McNamara from Ireland, who had helped his home country to win in Eurovision twice. *The Guardian* also saw the United Kingdom and Germany as the other pre-favourites of the contest, whilst the Irish entry got a harsher reaction, with the newspaper claiming that most of the Irish would rather support anyone else than their entry and that Ireland would not be able to afford to host the contest for a third time in a row.³¹ In the end, Ireland won the contest, whilst the “pre-favourites” Iceland placed twelfth, the United Kingdom tenth, and Germany third.³²

Technological advancements in Eurovision were also briefly covered. In 1996 *The Guardian* released an article focusing on digital television, which in the case of Eurovision was on the 3D virtual environment which would work as the scoreboard for

²⁹ Nancy Banks-Smith, “SingalongaBosnia”, *The Guardian*, May 17, 1993; Georgina Henry, “Mediafile”, *The Guardian*, May 10, 1993.

³⁰ O’Connor, *The “Eurovision Song Contest”*, 134-135.

³¹ Andrew Culf, “Iceland becomes hot favourite as Irish turn into Euro-sceptics”, *The Guardian*, April 30, 1994.

³² O’Connor, *The “Eurovision Song Contest”*, 139.

the competition.³³ In 2000 it was covered that Microsoft's web portal MSN would live broadcast of that year's contest.³⁴

Future of the contest was also speculated upon in *The Guardian*. Some of the stories were far-fetched, however. In 1970 the Eurovision Song Contest was in jeopardy, after the result of the last year's contest. Four countries tied for the first place, and as there were no mentions of a tie-break rule in the rulebook, victory was shared among the four countries. This sparked an outcry in some of the countries, which is the likely reason five countries (Austria, Finland, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden) boycotted the 1970 contest. Only 12 countries competed, which is why *The Guardian* speculated about the future of the contest.

The Guardian theorized on the possibility that the year's contest would likely be the last hosted in Europe. The newspaper cited Fernando Pavez, who was according to the article "the most powerful photographer in Chile" and "leader" of the South American delegation. Pavez claimed that next year's contest "will be held in South America: either that or there won't be another one". The article also saw the possibility of the contest moving or enlarging to another continent, as it was broadcasted in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, and reported about rumours of the executive of the EBU cancelling the contest or changing the voting system in the next week.³⁵

However, the article had a lot of misleading information. It only cited one photographer on the possibility of a move to South America, whose knowledge of the situation was unclear. It claimed the possibility of the Scandinavian boycott was due to the reason that behind the scenes there were strong accusations of them voting for each other.³⁶ Even though there was clear proof of Nordic countries voting for each other, the only

³³ Paul Marks, "Cue the computer", *The Guardian*, May 16, 1996.

³⁴ Ashley Norris, "Microsoft is going for a song", *The Guardian*, May 4, 2000.

³⁵ Sue McHarg, "Swansong for Europe?", *The Guardian*, March 22, 1970.

³⁶ Sue McHarg, "Swansong for Europe?", *The Guardian*, March 22, 1970.

known reasons for the boycott was the Scandinavian countries' claim that Eurovision was at its end, which the result of last year's contest accounted for.³⁷ In Austria's case, there was more incorrect information: the article claimed that Austria had won the previous year and that, according to the Austrian consul Harald Brunner, the last pop song (played) in Vienna was Sandie Shaw's 1969 "The Popping of the String".³⁸ It is unknown why the article did not fact-check or correct the misleading claims, yet it does not give a credible look for the article.

2.3 Politics and political voting

Politics and political voting have been part of the Eurovision Song Contest since the contest was created in the 1950s. The EBU, a union that created the contest and is responsible for it, was established as an objection to counter the Soviet satellite states' dominant voting power in OIRT (Organisation Internationale de Radiodiffusion et de Télévision), of which Western European countries were part until the EBU was founded in 1950.³⁹ Inspiration was found from the Italian Sanremo Music Festival (orig. Festival di Sanremo) that the Italian public broadcaster RAI has aired since 1951. This created the idea of a continental song contest, which would be a suitable product for the just-founded Eurovision TV network.⁴⁰ Contrary to the popular belief, Eurovision or the EBU were not built primarily to unite and integrate war-torn Western Europe, but rather to build the Eurovision Network around the national broadcasting organizations.⁴¹

One of the political elements of Eurovision that is highlighted often is the voting. Political voting has gained more general visibility after public voting was used for the

³⁷ O'Connor, *The "Eurovision Song Contest"*, 40; Murtomäki, *Finland 12 points!* 46.

³⁸ Austria won the contest in 1966 but did not compete in 1969 due possibly to boycotting the contest in "Francoist Spain". Sandie Shaw performed "Puppet on a String" in 1967, not "The Popping of the String" in 1969.

³⁹ Vuletic, *Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest*, 23-24.

⁴⁰ Vuletic, *Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest*, 28.

⁴¹ Vuletic, *Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest*, 30.

first time in 1998, which saw neighbour and diaspora voting ascend. That does not, however, mean that political voting was not analysed or talked about during the Cold War era. In 1969, after the British entrant was chosen, *The Guardian* cited Kenneth McKellar (1927-2010), who represented the United Kingdom in 1966. McKellar placed ninth out of eighteen contestants, which did not seem to please him, as he blamed other countries for voting for each other: “It wasn’t fair [...] the Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, and Finns all voted for one another”.⁴² This was factual, as the Nordic countries were awarded boos from the audience after voting for each other and giving the highest points to Sweden.⁴³

Voting for neighbouring countries was seen as a common thing: in 1982 Terry Wogan had joked about (West) Germany probably invading Austria tomorrow for only giving one point to the German winning entry, and in 1987 one of the phrases that was used to describe Eurovision was its “blatant tactical voting of the national juries”, which was later pointed out in an article after the Greek and Cypriot juries exchanged 12 points to each other.⁴⁴ In 1998 Nancy Banks-Smith dedicated her review almost entirely to neighbour voting, claiming Israel won the contest in the end as Malta (which was tied with Israel until the last votes) received zero points from F.Y.R. Macedonia, whilst Israel was given 8 points and 12 points were given to their neighbours Croatia. She ended her analysis with: “Eurovision is politics with its false whiskers wrenched off. You soon know who your real friends are”.⁴⁵

The interpretation of the contest’s voting in the UK does not differ a lot from the overall view that is shared in Europe. Yet the British reactions may come from the idea that they do not belong to any voting blocs, unlike other European nations. This view was at least popular in the 2000s when Wogan blamed the UK’s bad result in the 2008

⁴² Tony Palmer, “With Lulu into Europe”, *The Guardian*, March 2, 1969.

⁴³ Murtomäki, *Finland 12 points!* 46.

⁴⁴ Nancy Banks-Smith, “Instant assessments”, *The Guardian*, April 26, 1982; John Peel, “Eurosongs”, *The Guardian*, May 17, 1982.

⁴⁵ Nancy Banks-Smith, “How the country with no name swung”, *The Guardian*, May 11, 1998.

Eurovision on voting blocs: “You have various blocs voting. We’ve got nobody to vote for us.”⁴⁶

The Guardian also covered the unpleasant sides of politics in the Eurovision Song Contest. In 1996, it released a full-page article on Norway hosting the upcoming contest and the atmosphere in the country. The tensions between Sweden and Norway were also briefly mentioned during the outcome of last year’s contest. Norway’s entrant Secret Garden did not get any points from their neighbouring country Sweden, which according to *The Guardian* boiled over in Sweden after Secret Garden had won: newspapers were filled with xenophobic comments, which led to Sweden’s ambassador in Oslo to publicly apologize on Swedish reactions over Norway winning the contest.⁴⁷ As there are no other mentions in *The Guardian* of this “conflict”, it is hard to say whether the rhetoric in the article was overblown or not. However, as was mentioned in the article’s ingress, people in Norway and Sweden take Eurovision more seriously than the British. This was seen in the 1996 contest, as the Norwegian hostess jokingly asked during the voting procedure whether Sweden would give any points to Norway.⁴⁸

The Guardian’s attitude towards Irish success in the 1990s was more irreverent and cynical. There are many possible reasons for it, but the most likely one is due to the British-Irish relations during the twentieth century after Ireland gained independence from British colonial rule, and the unrest that followed in British-ruled Northern Ireland, accompanied by the fact that the United Kingdom (and *The Guardian*) had viewed the competition mockingly. During Ireland’s “Golden Decade”, the country won the contest four times: 1992, 1993, 1994, and 1996. At first, it was nothing out of the ordinary, as Banks-Smith had cynically told Ireland had won as usual.⁴⁹ Then in 1993, Ireland’s victory was mainly focused on the lack of sponsors to host the next contest,

⁴⁶ Steven Morris, “Eurovision contest voting is no laughing matter, says Wogan: Veteran commentator lashes out at ‘debacle’: BBC man’s irony turns to anger at tactics”, *The Guardian*, May 26, 2008.

⁴⁷ Andrew Culf, “Nul points no more”, *The Guardian*, May 11, 1996.

⁴⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUukoZ6mV1k> (timestamp: 42:25, accessed 5.4.2023)

⁴⁹ Nancy Banks-Smith, “Music, maestro – please!”, *The Guardian*, May 11, 1992.

and RTÉ's (Irish public broadcaster) worrying about how they could host the contest, even though the Irish people (and leaders) took the victory and possibility to host the contest again joyfully.⁵⁰ When Ireland won the contest for a third time in a row, coverage was more sarcastic:

"We have done something that no country in Europe has ever done before and I don't think ever will again', said a triumphant Albert Reynolds yesterday.

Found a cure for cancer? Discovered a new solar system? Well, no, but if the Taoiseach had a tenner for every time his country had won the Eurovision Song Contest well... he'd have thirty punts."⁵¹

As in the previous year, the article speculated on how Ireland would be able to afford the contest the following year, with speculation about the possibility of hosting it in Belfast, Northern Ireland. This was, however, ruled out immediately by the head of RTÉ.⁵² In 1996, after Ireland had won the contest for the seventh time in their history, *The Guardian's* tone was almost disparaging towards Ireland. David Sharrock wrote how the Eurovision curse had struck Ireland again, how RTÉ was once again wondering how they could fund the next year's contest, how the Irish public were horrified, and how the whole victory was, according to the Irish newspaper *Sunday Independent*, a plot by "Ireland's European so-called allies".⁵³

⁵⁰ Owen Bowcott, "Eurovision win leaves Irish eyes smiling Irish coffers empty", *The Guardian*, May 17, 1993.

⁵¹ David Sharrock, "Ireland makes it three for a song", *The Guardian*, May 2, 1994.

⁵² David Sharrock, "Ireland makes it three for a song", *The Guardian*, May 2, 1994.

⁵³ David Sharrock, "Irish eyes crying as victory sees Eurovision curse striking yet again", *The Guardian*, May 20, 1996.

“For years the scam has been well-known throughout European TV stations’ said the paper. ‘Put up a lousy song, you get a three-hour TV show costing millions and you make sure the Irish patsies will take the whole thing seriously and end up paying for the next year’s gig.’”⁵⁴

It is clear to say that *The Guardian’s* coverage was not untruthful: RTÉ had financial problems over having to host the contest four times in the 1990s: 1994’s contest costed approximately £2.5 million, and the budget of the 1997 contest went up to £2.8 million; both times the RTÉ financed £1 million.⁵⁵ It even became a repetitive joke in Ireland and the United Kingdom, so that even the British sitcom *Father Ted* dedicated a whole episode to Ireland’s success. Even though *The Guardian* had a pessimistic and mocking tone of Eurovision, seeing a former colony doing better in the competition and the UK having to settle at best for second place may have led to the cynical attitude towards Irish victories, even from a liberal British newspaper.

Yet *The Guardian* also found pity for Irish misfortune, as in 2008 when the Irish novelty act Dustin the Turkey did not qualify for the final. *The Guardian* called it “a travesty of justice” and claimed that their non-qualification gave proof that “the roots of Euro-corruption run deep and that the need for constant vigilance against those who would seek to destroy democracy remains strong”.⁵⁶ This comment was likely due the fact that the same article described the entry as a “passionate condemnation” against the politics that “habitually distort Eurovision”, which also makes a mockery of the contest’s aims to promote European unity.⁵⁷

It is fascinating to notice that *The Guardian* wrote very little political about Yugoslavia and their participation in the Eurovision Song Contest. Yugoslavia was the only Eastern bloc country to compete in Eurovision during the Cold War. It even ended up hosting

⁵⁴ David Sharrock, “Irish eyes crying as victory sees Eurovision curse striking yet again”, *The Guardian*, May 20, 1996.

⁵⁵ Pettitt, *Screening Ireland*, 177-179.

⁵⁶ Lucy Mangan, “This week: Dustin the Turkey”, *The Guardian*, May 24, 2008.

⁵⁷ Lucy Mangan, “This week: Dustin the Turkey”, *The Guardian*, May 24, 2008.

the contest in 1990 at Zagreb after winning it the previous year. The only mention of Yugoslavia participating in the contest from a political point of view was in 1990 when a reader asked why Israel was allowed to compete in Eurovision, even though they are not geographically part of Europe.

“A further complication is that of Eastern Europe. Yugoslavia has always been a member of Eurovision; indeed. [...] The other countries of Eastern Europe — except Albania — have a parallel organisation called Intervision, with its own song contest.”⁵⁸

There was no other mention of Yugoslavia’s participation during the Cold War in *The Guardian*, and in other news about Eurovision, the country was treated neutrally, as if it was any other Western European country. There is no clear indication why *The Guardian* did not write analytical articles about Yugoslavia’s participation, even when they hosted the contest. It should be mentioned, however, that Yugoslavia, together with Albania, were the only socialist countries that did not cooperate with the Soviet Union, thus Yugoslavia joining EBU rather than Soviet-led OIRT was more logical.

It is also absorbing that there were no mentions of the United Kingdom losing to Spain by one point in 1968, as tensions between the two countries were high due to Gibraltar. The UK held a referendum a year before the contest, in which the citizens of Gibraltar voted to stay under British sovereignty. The situation was also seen in the voting, as, according to Dean Vuletic, the United Kingdom and Spain did not give each other any points during the 1960s, even if their entries ranked high overall.⁵⁹ This makes it more interesting that there were no mentions of Spain from a political perspective, even when the contest was held in Spain in 1969. In both Yugoslavia’s and Spain’s cases, the publication of very few or no articles at all with a political point of view was probably because the topic was seen as remote for the readers of *The Guardian*, or because there

⁵⁸ Andrew Latto, “Notes & Queries”, *The Guardian*, May 28, 1990.

⁵⁹ Vuletic, *Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest*, 69.

was no interest to view Eurovision Song Contest as a political entity before the end of the Cold War.

Eurovision as an event and as a phenomenon has gained lots of different perspectives from *The Guardian*. Most of them however are somewhat negative, focusing on ridiculousness of the competition, political voting or criticizing the musical aspect of the event. Still articles focusing on betting odds, technological advancements and so on gave also the outlook on Eurovision “outside” of the Saturday-night event. Yet the overall look is still negative, where the concept of the Eurovision Song Contest or the diverse European music culture is hard to be fitted in *The Guardian's* view set or through the British cultural mindset.

3 LOVE SHINE A LIGHT: ROYAUME-UNI DOUZE POINTS

“Puppet on a String”, “Boom Bang-a-Bang”, “Save Your Kisses for Me”, “Making Your Mind Up”, “Love Shine a Light”. These five songs have left their mark on British Eurovision history by being the only UK entries to win the contest. This chapter explores not only how these victories were received in *The Guardian*, but also how the United Kingdom managed to host the competition on its home soil and how British artists were “cheered” by the media and the public.

3.1 The five victories from the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has amassed five victories in the Eurovision Song Contest. These have chronologically been in 1967 at Vienna, 1969 at Madrid, 1976 at The Hague, 1981 in Dublin, and 1997 again in Dublin. The coverage of these victories in *The Guardian* has differed, with either wide coverage or just a small piece of news.

Stanley Reynolds, an American journalist working for *The Guardian*, had written a long analytical article on the UK’s first Eurovision victory, which also seems to be the first opinion article about the Eurovision Song Contest which can be found in *The Guardian’s* archives. In the article Reynolds was sure that the BBC and the British record companies would not “feel so desperately insecure about the nation’s singing image” and that Sandie Shaw, who won the contest, was an upgrade from past UK entries and that the winning entry stood out from most of the competitors.⁶⁰

Two years later the United Kingdom won the contest again in an unprecedented way. As the contest did not have a tie-break, four countries had to share the victory, meaning the UK’s Lulu won the contest together with the French, Dutch, and Spanish entrants.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Stanley Reynolds, “Television”, *The Guardian*, April 10, 1967.

⁶¹ O’Connor, The “Eurovision Song Contest”, 39.

Coverage of the victory was much smaller compared to 1967. In short, Lulu's performance was described as "a cheerful up-and-down song, with a great professionalism", and she was able to "look both jolly and coy, wrinkling her nose and rolling her eyes". Otherwise, the article concentrated on other winners as well, calling the French entry a sad and romantic song in a French way, the Dutch entry reminiscent of a French ballad, and describing the Spanish entrant as having given everything with her energetic performance.⁶²

After the UK's third victory in 1976 by Brotherhood of Man, the coverage was much smaller. The British victory was announced briefly in the newspaper, including the fact that France and Monaco had placed on the podium as well.⁶³ However, the British national selection of 1976 was covered in *The Guardian*, whereby the prediction of the UK's success went wrong, the article claiming that "[...] it's a nothing number which by rights they ought to hate in Europe, wherever that is. Unfortunately, there is no justice, least of all in the music business."⁶⁴ The United Kingdom received 164 points, a record that was not broken until 1986, meaning the UK won the competition overwhelmingly.⁶⁵

The UK's fourth victory in 1981 did not get as much coverage either. Even though the coverage of the year's contest was broad, the UK's victory was mentioned in just a few paragraphs. Nancy Banks-Smith mentioned the UK winning the Eurovision Song Contest once again with a performance that was seen as "chirpy".⁶⁶ Clive James was more detailed on the UK's winning act, Bucks Fizz, yet he mentioned the UK's victory very blandly: "This year's contest [...] ran true to type. Britain won and Norway got no votes at all".⁶⁷

⁶² John Gale, "Lulu's song a Eurovision winner", *The Guardian*, March 30, 1969.

⁶³ "Save your kisses wins", *The Guardian*, April 4, 1976.

⁶⁴ Clive James, "Silly songs and fine follies", *The Guardian*, February 29, 1976.

⁶⁵ O'Connor, "The Eurovision Song Contest", 66.

⁶⁶ Nancy Banks-Smith, "Zero is the hero", *The Guardian*, April 6, 1981.

⁶⁷ Clive James, "English as she is sung", *The Guardian*, April 12, 1981.

The coverage of the UK's fifth victory in 1997 was no different from the previous ones. In Nancy Banks-Smith's annual review of the contest, the UK's victory was mentioned in the first paragraph, the winning song described as "originally written to cheer up the Samaritans". Otherwise, the article did not mention the British victory, but instead did an overview of the "highlights" of the event.⁶⁸ The same goes for the other articles, which detailed the fashion shown in the contest or how Ireland was trying to avoid winning the competition for the eighth time.⁶⁹

It is also worth mentioning that none of these victories was shown on the front page of *The Guardian* the following day the newspaper was published. This raises a question about the importance of the Eurovision Song Contest for *The Guardian*, the newspaper's audience or the British people if the victories did not get much attention, at least in the twentieth century. The examples shown suggest that the interest may have not been high, while *The Guardian's* ridiculing tone of the competition may have influenced how Eurovision was covered.

3.2 Good evening, Europe! Hosting the contest

As of 2024, the United Kingdom has hosted the Eurovision Song Contest nine times, more than any other country. In 1968, when the country hosted the competition for the third time (and for the first time after winning the contest), *The Guardian* released an article consisting of a preview of the upcoming event. Apart from the usual mocking tone of the competition, it also focused on the organising point of view. 250 foreign journalists, and dozens of "managers and television and record people from each of the 17 singers" following the event live with the audience, joined by an estimated 150 million people watching it from 23 different countries.⁷⁰ This did not end here, as *The*

⁶⁸ Nancy Banks-Smith, "Norway takes a pointless record", *The Guardian*, May 5, 1997.

⁶⁹ David Sharrock, "Europap puts fear into the Irish", *The Guardian*, May 3, 1997; James Pretlove, "Eurovisions", *The Guardian*, May 7, 1997.

⁷⁰ Christine Eade, "Sole extrovert among mourners from Europe", *The Guardian*, April 6, 1968.

Guardian started to cover more background of the competition, especially if the United Kingdom was hosting it.

This followed in 1971 when the contest was held in Edinburgh. *The Guardian* released an article that focused heavily on aspects from “behind the scenes”. These included Austrian PR having “a sad little story” of their artist having to leave her dog in “the mountains or wherever”, and the Irish PR representative handing out key rings with the picture of the Irish singer. The article also mentioned the public waiting outside the Caledonian Hotel in Edinburgh, the hotel in which most of the competing artists apparently stayed during the contest.⁷¹ *The Guardian* also released an article of an incident in which a man was arrested after allegedly scattering a noxious substance “on the floor beneath the feet of the audience”. The article did not mention any possible motives, and apparently there were no follow-up stories on the case.⁷²

In 1977 the BBC again had the privilege to host the contest after winning the previous year. However, the BBC ran into problems after the cameramen and the technicians went on strike. The BBC asked the EBU to host the contest outside of the UK three weeks before the contest was initially meant to be televised.⁷³ *The Guardian*’s coverage of the situation was not numerically big (five articles), but it was broad compared to the articles about the contest released in the 1970s. News coverage was mainly neutral: *The Guardian* mentioned the Dutch broadcaster withdrawing their intention to host the contest after the Dutch workers supported the BBC cameramen in their strike, and the prospect of the contest being postponed, with the possibility of a different location.⁷⁴ In the end, the strike was resolved and the contest was held in the United Kingdom by the

⁷¹ Colin Smith, “Contest the telly didn’t show”, *The Guardian*, March 20, 1972.

⁷² Peter Fiddick, “Incident at song contest”, *The Guardian*, March 27, 1972.

⁷³ Peter Chippindale, “BBC sings sound of silence”, *The Guardian*, March 12, 1977.

⁷⁴ “Dutch back out of song contest offer”, *The Guardian*, March 16, 1977; “Front Page 2”, *The Guardian*, March 25, 1977.

BBC on the 7th of May 1977 in the same venue (Wembley Conference Centre) as planned.⁷⁵

The broad coverage of the strike and possible cancellation of the contest was an anomaly in *The Guardian's* coverage, as they did not provide much coverage during the Cold War about other difficulties the Eurovision Song Contest ran into. These included hosting the contest in 1969 in Spain ruled by the fascist dictator Franco, security concerns of Israel hosting the 1979 Eurovision Song Contest or finding a host country for the 1980 contest after Israel refused to host the contest for the second time in a row. These issues were either mentioned briefly or not at all, but there was no article dedicated to them. It is very likely that since the 1977 contest was meant to be hosted in the United Kingdom, this made the strike topical for British readers.

After the United Kingdom won the competition in 1997, *The Guardian* covered the interest in hosting the upcoming competition from different cities. Manchester was interested in submitting a bid, with Marketing Manchester, which helped the city to get the rights to host the 2002 Commonwealth Games, saying the discussions towards hosting Eurovision “would start straight away”.⁷⁶ Birmingham, which the article dubbed the “Venice of the Midlands, was also interested in hosting the contest”. The same article wrote that Cardiff was also bidding for the task, and the estimated costs for the competition could go all the way up to 5 million pounds, as last time, which would be divided between the host broadcaster and the EBU. Yet if Birmingham were to be selected to host the contest, the city would have to bear costs for policing et cetera, which the city’s taxpayers were likely to pay.⁷⁷

In the end, Birmingham was selected to host the 1998 Eurovision Song Contest, which *The Guardian* analysed would give the city international exposure, “needed money from

⁷⁵ O'Connor, *The "Eurovision Song Contest"*, 69-70.

⁷⁶ Gary Younge, “Manchester makes one more push for international stardom”, *The Guardian*, May 5, 1997.

⁷⁷ Sarah Ryle, “Venice of the Midlands ready to pick up Eurovision baton”, *The Guardian*, July 24, 1997.

tourism”, and boost Birmingham’s chances to host other major events. The article also mentioned that Birmingham was selected from among 13 other “towns and cities” applying for the hosting rights.⁷⁸

1998’s contest was widely covered compared to the previous times the UK hosted the competition. During the Eurovision week, *The Guardian* published a two-page interview with Ulrika Jonsson, who hosted the contest with Terry Wogan.⁷⁹ *The Guardian* also covered the Israeli entrant Dana International, as she was one of the pre-favourites and gained huge publicity during the week by being the first transgender contestant.⁸⁰ The other articles ranged from reviews of the year’s contest to the politics behind the event and analyses of why the competition was not as popular as it used to be.⁸¹

Compared to the coverage of the British victories, the coverage of the United Kingdom hosting and organising the event was much more extensive. This was especially the case in 1998. The likelihood for a broader news coverage may be due to the enlargement of the contest compared to 20-30 years prior. There were more countries competing and media coverage the competition gathered was larger than previously when the UK hosted the competition in 1981.

3.3 Cheering for the United Kingdom

On a few occasions, *The Guardian* has covered the UK entrant from a positive point of view before the show, even though in most of the cases it used a cynical tone.

⁷⁸ “Birmingham singalong: There could be a silver lining in that song”, *The Guardian*, August 11, 1997.

⁷⁹ Jim White, “Eureka! It’s Ulrika”, *The Guardian*, May 6, 1998.

⁸⁰ Sharrock, “Singing out for Israel – and for gays”, *The Guardian*, May 9, 1998.

⁸¹ “Where Eurovision scores highest”, *The Guardian*, May 9, 1998; Jonathan Freedland, “Viva la mediator! And you thought Eurovision was just tasteless trivia”, *The Guardian*, May 1, 1998; Stuart Jeffries, “More fizz than bucks”, *The Guardian*, April 24, 1998.

Just before the United Kingdom won the contest in 1969 alongside three other countries, *The Guardian* released an article that had a mocking tone not only towards the competition, but towards the UK entrant as well, even though it was somewhat optimistic of UK's chances. The song, "Boom Bang-a-Bang" was described as "there's something wonderful about that" and compared satirically to as if "someone had reported a major breakthrough in television".⁸²

In 1974 the United Kingdom were mentioned briefly for being a clear favourite to win the year's Eurovision Song Contest according to the bookmakers, the entrant Olivia Newton-John having odds 4-1.⁸³ In the end, Olivia Newton-John placed fourth, and the competition was won by the Swedish band ABBA.⁸⁴

In 1979 *The Guardian* mentioned the high publicity of the UK's entrants, Black Lace, in Jerusalem, where the competition was held that year. Black Lace's record company had "plastered" stickers all over Jerusalem, highlighting that the UK would be the "No. 1 for Europe". Just by the "marketing", the article guessed that by publicity alone the United Kingdom would be the favourites to win the contest, yet also speculated that the world professionals in "Shepherd's Bush" would not share the same view.⁸⁵ Black Lace placed seventh out of 19 contestants and would later emerge as a household name in the British music industry.⁸⁶

The Guardian had not forgotten the previous winners from the United Kingdom. In 1983, a year after Bucks Fizz won the contest, the band was covered in *The Guardian* as they were performing their gig in the Apollo Victoria Theatre. The article described their audience as "a curious religious cult", where pensioners and young married couples were jamming. The journalist was sitting close to two "Def Leppard fans" who were

⁸² Tony Palmer, "With Lulu into Europe", *The Guardian*, March 2, 1969

⁸³ "Favourite", *The Guardian*, April 6, 1974.

⁸⁴ O'Connor, *The "Eurovision Song Contest"*, 59.

⁸⁵ Eric Silver, "Sugar beat", *The Guardian*, March 31, 1979.

⁸⁶ O'Connor, *The "Eurovision Song Contest"*, 78-79.

primarily there just to see one of the band member's legs. The article ended with the point that their performance would fit better in a cabaret club than "on the large stage of the Apollo", where the performance looked rather flat and dampened.⁸⁷

In 1990, *The Guardian* released an interview with Sandie Shaw, 23 years after bringing the Eurovision victory to the United Kingdom for the first time. Most of the interview was not about Eurovision, but rather about her career and life. Yet at the end of the interview, she was asked for her thoughts on her winning entry, which the article described it as "the awful Eurovision Oompah Oompah song that haunted her for many years".⁸⁸

*"On reflection it wasn't so bad, it was a very commercial move. I think I've exorcised it. I might be able to get away with singing it now. Ironically. For lots of money."*⁸⁹

The title of the interview also paid "homage" to her Eurovision entry, "Puppet On A String", the title being "Nobody's Puppet".⁹⁰

Overall, the coverage was either neutral or negative depending on the theme. Most of the articles about the UK's victories were reserved, and rarely hyped the British success in the competition. In terms of hosting *The Guardian* released lots of articles of the competition that focused more on behind the scenes rather than as the 2-3-hour TV event. And in case of the 1998 hosting duties, the coverage was much broader and positive. In terms of coverage of their artists, most of it seemed to be. Apart from the neutral articles, the tone seemed to be sceptical of the artists and their songs, even if they had won the competition. And in case of Lulu in 1969 (who would in the end be one of the winners that year) even though the article seemed positive about her chances, it

⁸⁷ Mick Brown, "Bucks Fizz", *The Guardian*, December 31, 1983.

⁸⁸ Susan Jeffreys, "Nobody's Puppet", *The Guardian*, May 5, 1991.

⁸⁹ Susan Jeffreys, "Nobody's Puppet", *The Guardian*, May 5, 1991.

⁹⁰ Susan Jeffreys, "Nobody's Puppet", *The Guardian*, May 5, 1991.

had a somewhat a mocking tone. This is a continuation of the attitude *The Guardian* has had of the contest overall and does not greatly differ from how they would cover the competition.

4 CRY BABY: DOWNFALL AND THE HATE TOWARDS EUOTRASH

When Tony Blair's Labour Party won the general elections with a somewhat euro-positive message in 1997, the United Kingdom won the Eurovision Song Contest for the fifth time, whilst in 2003, when Blair's government joined the Iraq War together with the U.S., the United Kingdom recorded its then-worst placement in Eurovision. The results were conjoined with the UK-Europe relations, as was the British euroscepticism towards the European Union and the Eurovision Song Contest.⁹¹ This chapter goes through the reaction of 'nul points' in 2003, the euroscepticism and how the BBC's long-time commentator for Eurovision, Terry Wogan, was viewed in *The Guardian* during the 2000s.

4.1 2003: United Kingdom, nul points

24th May 2003 was a day that left a huge mark in the history of Eurovision. Turkey won its first Eurovision with a very close margin, beating Belgium by two points and the internationally known Russian duo t.A.T.u. by three points.⁹² However, what shocked the British people was their result in the contest. The pop-duo Jemini had placed last in the contest, which for the United Kingdom was the first last place in their history. Their entry, "Cry Baby", was also unable to get any points, meaning Jemini broke the record by being also the first British entry to get 'nul points'. From winning the contest for the fifth time in 1997 and placing third the previous year, the United Kingdom had faced its all-time low in the contest. The national embarrassment was so huge that *The Guardian's* coverage of the contest of 2003 was much higher than in the winning year of 1997.

⁹¹ Vuletic, *Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest*, 155-156.

⁹² O'Connor, *The "Eurovision Song Contest"*, 175.

The last place was seen as a fiasco. One of the articles (which was very satirical) questioned the British stature in Europe and its cultural attitudes. Not only had the British attitudes towards mainland Europe and jokes about the Belgians “backfired”, but the article also jokingly asked whether the British would be able to joke about Norway or would the Germans dominate the pool-side deckchairs in the upcoming holiday season, whilst the British would stand behind in shame. The article even concluded that the failure could be part of the fact the UK was seen as part of the United States rather than Europe, until the last phrase admitted the possibility that the song was “crap”.⁹³ The satirical article showed not only British “humour” but also a strong attitude towards Eurovision in the UK. No matter the situation, you can always approach it with “dismissive” satire.

Serious articles were also written. Different reasons for the failure were brought up in one of the articles. Louis Walsh called the whole entry disgraceful, saying the song was the worst one he had ever heard, and that the singers were so out of tune he compared it to asking a shop worker whether they could sing or not and selecting them even if they said no. The creative director of the year’s contest blamed the performance, and some placed the blame on the selection process that did not gather as much popularity and viewing audience as Pop Idol, for example.⁹⁴

In the same article, some of the people wanted to direct the blame to geopolitics. Jeremy Corbyn, then MP for Labour, had blamed the war in Iraq, in which the UK was participating together with the United States and other countries, for the last place. He admitted that the song could have been just awful yet affirmed that there was possibly a deeper story behind it. He also argued that the rest of Europe was fed up with “Britain’s over-close relationship with the United States”. The people behind the entry were thinking the same: the author of the song, Martin Isherwood, said that the country was politically “out on a limb” and paid the price of it. One of the singers of Jemini, Chris Cromby, also said after arriving home from the contest that the result was unfair and

⁹³ “Nul point of no return: Britain hits a wrong note in Europe”, *The Guardian*, May 26, 2003.

⁹⁴ Matt Wells, “Nul points – UK out of tune with Europe”, *The Guardian*, May 26, 2003.

was likely due to non-musical reasons. The debate went on to the point that Peter Hain, a cabinet member, had to defend the government from the blame, saying the song could have just not been good enough.⁹⁵

Culture journalist Rupert Smith went on to a long list of why the United Kingdom failed to gain a single point. Not only were the singers off-key, and one of the singers was during the whole performance “like a rabbit in headlights”; the British lacked allies that would vote for them, even the “supposed allies” in the Iraq War left Jemini with no points. Smith also wondered how a song that was “a bloody awful song” was unable to gain points, yet entries from Austria or Poland gained points easily. Smith called them with derogatory terms, such as “an apparent cretin” or “hormonally challenged Lulu”, respectively.⁹⁶

However, not everyone identified the anti-British sentiment in Eurovision, neighbour voting, or the Iraq War as the reason for the bad result. Zoe Williams argued that the last place indicated the United Kingdom’s indifferent reaction to the contest. The British could send a good pop song if they wanted to, but they would not. “We are the prom queen who won’t wash her hair when it’s only family”, as Williams provocatively argued.⁹⁷ For a country (and a newspaper) that claimed they did not take Eurovision seriously, unlike other countries, the failure to gain a single point seemed to hurt their national pride.

The last place forced the BBC to act, and at the end of the year, *The Guardian* covered the upcoming changes for the national selection, learning from the success of Pop Idol and making it into a big-budget Saturday night special. One of the sources from the BBC said in the article: “The British public might have secretly loved the fact we got nul points

⁹⁵ Matt Wells, “Nul points – UK out of tune with Europe”, *The Guardian*, May 26, 2003.

⁹⁶ “On a sea of tat, no one would throw Britain a lifeline”, *The Guardian*, May 26, 2003.

⁹⁷ Zoe Williams, “Completely pointless”, *The Guardian*, May 27, 2003.

last time, but we think the joke would wear a bit thin two years in a row”.⁹⁸ This did not age well, as the United Kingdom would next place in the top 10 in 2009, getting three bottom five placements before that.

4.2 Why do we even bother? The British downfall in Eurovision

The Guardian's coverage of Eurovision became more politically loaded and pessimistic in the 2000s, as the UK had to settle for bottom places, something that had been unheard of even a decade ago.

In 2004 the UK's 16th place was explained with “Britain's current unpopularity” and with the claim that the entry, “Hold On To Our Love”, was not good to the point where the journalist provocatively said he wanted to shoot himself.⁹⁹ Politics were also blamed for the results. “The usual disgrace” was the description of the voting, blaming European countries for voting depending on how close their neighbours were.¹⁰⁰

The blame-shifting towards the UK's stances to geopolitics was also used in 2005, this time more in a tongue-in-cheek approach. The United Kingdom would not win due to their stance on the war in Iraq, as it “has so much to do with songwriting ability”, and the only thing that would boost the UK's chances would be if Tony Blair would appear as a surprise performer whilst doing multiple things, such as dancing in a monkey costume while singing “I was wrong, you were right”.¹⁰¹ The article also made a mockery of neighbours voting for each other, while also claiming that the United Kingdom had no one who would vote for them:

⁹⁸ Matt Wells, “BBC tries to expunge Eurovision shame”, *The Guardian*, December 31, 2003.

⁹⁹ Sam Wollaston, “G2: TVreview: Lost in translation”, *The Guardian*, May 17, 2004.

¹⁰⁰ Sam Wollaston, “G2: TVreview: Lost in translation”, *The Guardian*, May 17, 2004.

¹⁰¹ Anna Pickard, “Eurovision 2005: minute-by-minute”, *The Guardian*, May 21, 2005.

“22.32.: So let’s face it. Everyone votes for their friends. We have no friends. The United Kingdom – Billy-no-mates of the blandpop world. Well feh – who needs friends? And who wants to be their friend anyway? [...]”¹⁰²

This was written minutes after Ireland awarded the United Kingdom eight points, which Pickard celebrated before continuing with a gloomy, cynical view.

Blame-shifting towards Blair’s government continued as well in 2007, as one reader wrote that Blair’s legacy would be the impossibility to win the Eurovision Song Contest ever again.¹⁰³ Tony Blair seemed to be, at least for *The Guardian* and its readership, the main political reason for the British misfortune in Eurovision.

The success of Eastern European countries was not blamed for the UK’s misfortune as much, yet it was also covered. In 2004 *The Guardian* published an article focusing on migration to Ireland and Irish-EU relations, one of the interviewees claimed Ireland’s inferior result that year was an outcome of a changing continent where Eastern European influence was getting more and more evident. The interviewee also asked rhetorically how long Brussels would continue to be the capital of Europe at this rate.¹⁰⁴ Terry Wogan meanwhile claimed in 2008 that Russia won the competition for political reasons and suggested a possibility of a musical iron curtain, where the Western European countries would leave the contest away from their “eastern rivals”.¹⁰⁵

In *The Guardian*, euroscepticism has not influenced their coverage much, apart from a few examples, but their coverage has rather been affected by how the United Kingdom was viewed from Europe through the political actions made by Tony Blair’s government. This may well be due to pro-EU stance that *The Guardian* has held for

¹⁰² Anna Pickard, “Eurovision 2005: minute-by-minute”, *The Guardian*, May 21, 2005.

¹⁰³ Helena Coulston, “Reply: Letters and emails: Serbia wins at last”, *The Guardian*, May 14, 2007.

¹⁰⁴ Angelique Chrisafis, “Ireland is on the move – but where to?”, *The Guardian*, May 28, 2004.

¹⁰⁵ Steven Morris, “Eurovision contest voting is no laughing matter, says Wogan: Veteran commentator lashes out at ‘debacle’: BBC man’s irony turns to anger at tactics”, *The Guardian*, May 26, 2008.

decades. It supported the UK's entry into the European Community in the 1970s and favoured remaining in the EU during the Brexit referendum in 2016.¹⁰⁶ *The Guardian* also covered Tony Blair's government's participation and position in the Iraq War negatively, which was reflected heavily in the Eurovision coverage.¹⁰⁷ The United Kingdom's series of bad results coincided with the unpopularity of Tony Blair and the UK in Europe, strengthening the idea that the results were politically connected, even if at the same time it was admitted that the United Kingdom did not send their best or even above average entries to the contest.

It should also be pointed out that not all the views of the contest were negatively political in *The Guardian*. In 2005 one reader argued that the UK should just focus on sending better entries and that most of the so-called political blocs were also cultural blocs that have "shielded from Anglo-American music for decades by party apparatchiks and with a common folk music tradition that underlies their home-grown pop music."¹⁰⁸

When looking at the United Kingdom's foreign policy, the political connection between the popularity of Blair government and the British Eurovision results cannot be dismissed, as Dean Vuletic, for example argues.¹⁰⁹ Yet there have also been arguments that the nature of British Euroscepticism, in which the world is seen through the dominant English narrative to explain its place in the world compared to "Europe", is the one point that underlies the views and reactions towards Eurovision through the decades and not only in the 2000s.¹¹⁰ Thus the reactions to the bad results generally (and not just in *The Guardian*) may rather be part of the changed stature of the United Kingdom and the realisation that the UK is not politically (and in some cases culturally)

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jan/08/the-guardian-view-on-brexit-the-government-has-failed-its-time-to-go-back-to-the-people> (accessed 16.7.2024)

¹⁰⁷ Abbasian, "UK Media Coverage", 5.

¹⁰⁸ "Letters: Tunnel Eurovision", *The Guardian*, May 23, 2005.

¹⁰⁹ Vuletic, Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest, 155-156.

¹¹⁰ Wellings, Jay and Strong, 'Making Your Mind Up', 69.

the global power it used to be, with the blame then shifted towards things that were unpopular in Europe (Tony Blair in this case).

It is also more likely that the unpopularity of Tony Blair and the British participation in the Iraq War correlated with the UK's poor results but were not the cause. The bad results were more likely due the fact that the United Kingdom did not send its best (or the "best artists" did not want to compete in the first place) and that the British public had a different view than the rest of Europe of what they saw culturally as good for Eurovision.¹¹¹

4.3 Terry Wogan: the (antagonistic) face of Eurovision

When trying to understand the cynical aspect of Eurovision from the British point of view, it would be a disgrace not to mention Terry Wogan. He commentated on the competition for BBC since the 1970s and was the face and voice of Eurovision for many British people.

Wogan had since the start of his "Eurovision career" a ridiculing, satirical approach to the contest, portraying the contest as similar to accidentally finding a strange foreign ritual, which he and the audience were observing from a safe distance.¹¹² There was a certain distancing of British and European music, which was shown by Wogan's comments during voting, either wondering how a certain song had gained so many votes or criticising the musical taste of Europeans.¹¹³

This turned more critical after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, as more countries joined, whether they were former Soviet satellite states or former parts of the

¹¹¹ Fricker, "It's just not funny anymore", 73-74.

¹¹² Fricker, "It's just not funny anymore", 62.

¹¹³ Fricker, "It's just not funny anymore", 62.

USSR. One of the effects of the expansion was the success of the new countries, while “powerhouses” of the Cold War era, such as the United Kingdom, placed lower than before. This led to Wogan’s commentary being more conservative and disapproving of the contest.¹¹⁴ Wogan started to view the contest as a joke, where it is failing to unite diverse cultures and people and is in fact separating them. He also dismissed the idea of cross-cultural exchange in the contest, proclaiming that a Turkish jury, for instance, would not be able to judge a Swedish song.¹¹⁵ His commentary on competition became more nostalgic towards the pre-1990s, and he started to heavily criticise “political” or “diaspora” voting when it came from a non-Western country (e.g. according to Wogan Latvia won in 2003 due to “a triumph of Baltic bloc voting”).¹¹⁶

These views resonated in *The Guardian*. In his interview in 2001, Wogan claimed he was the biggest fan of Eurovision, yet admitted his cynical view of the contest.

“I like to think I’ve taken the British public with me in this ironic stance, but I get a lot of stick from people who think it really is a song contest, like some of the Nordic commentators’ he says.

*“They say, well, if you don’t like it, why do you do it? But I love it. I like it more than them! Although halfway through, when I’ve only had a couple of Bailey’s Irish Creams and I get to song 11 and I know there’s 12 to go, you can’t help but feel a little angst”.*¹¹⁷

The interview was just one of many examples of Wogan’s attitude towards Eurovision. At the start of 2004’s final, he said the competition was “the most exciting Eurovision I’ve ever taken part in” while meaning the opposite, according to *The Guardian*. Booze was mentioned only 44 minutes after the show’s start, and the article claimed Wogan

¹¹⁴ Fricker, “It’s just not funny anymore”, 64.

¹¹⁵ Fricker, “It’s just not funny anymore”, 65.

¹¹⁶ Fricker, “It’s just not funny anymore”, 66.

¹¹⁷ Oliver Burkeman, “Wogan’s run”, *The Guardian*, May 3, 2001.

summed up the competition nicely: “Somebody please explain why we’re even bothering”.¹¹⁸

Wogan’s run as a commentator ended in 2008 after Russia won the competition. When coming back to the UK after commentating on the competition in Serbia, Wogan claimed the UK had a disadvantage in not being part of any of the voting blocs, of which there were several from all around Europe. Wogan also defended the UK’s artist that year, Andy Abraham, who came joint last, saying Britain had a good song and a very good singer and that the competition was nowadays only about national prejudices instead of songs.¹¹⁹

Wogan’s claims received backing, as in the same article Bruce Forsyth and Simon Cowell mentioned the competition being either political or pointless competition. Even an MP from the Liberal Democrats tabled a motion in the House of Commons claiming the voting in Eurovision as a joke and suggesting the BBC should withdraw from the competition until there was a fair voting system.¹²⁰ Wogan’s views were also challenged; one reader argued that the Eastern European countries take the contest seriously and that “Wogan has to accept that Eurovision is no longer solely a west European competition”.¹²¹

Terry Wogan was certainly not the only person in the United Kingdom who was criticising Eurovision but was likely the most influential one due to his role as a Eurovision commentator. As argued in case of the British public in subsection 4.2, his more critical opinions of the contest during the start of the twenty-first century were not just due to the bad results of the UK (whilst former USSR countries prevailed) but

¹¹⁸ Sam Wollaston, “G2: TV review: Lost in translation”, *The Guardian*, May 17, 2004.

¹¹⁹ Steven Morris, “Eurovision contest voting is no laughing matter, says Wogan: Veteran commentator lashes out at ‘debacle’: BBC man’s irony turns to anger at tactics”, *The Guardian*, May 26, 2008.

¹²⁰ Steven Morris, “Eurovision contest voting is no laughing matter, says Wogan: Veteran commentator lashes out at ‘debacle’: BBC man’s irony turns to anger at tactics”, *The Guardian*, May 26, 2008.

¹²¹ Simon Gamble, “Reply Letters and emails: East-west divide over Eurovision”, *The Guardian*, May 27, 2008.

also part of the decaying glory of the now-dead British Empire. Whilst decolonisation started before the first contest of Eurovision was broadcast, Wogan became nostalgic about times when the UK was seen as a global (and European) power, which “perished” in Eurovision after the Cold War ended. He even claimed in 2009 that the Europeans were punishing “the UK for centuries of military history”.¹²²

Eurovision seemed to bring lots of emotions when the United Kingdom started to gain bad results on repeat. Compared to other centuries, the tone in articles released in the 2000s seemed to be more colourful and cynical. The poor results from the United Kingdom are the main reason for the tone shifting more towards negative and cynical approach. Tony Blair, his Labour government and the British involvement in the Iraq War was scapegoated as a result for the bad results in Eurovision, even though some of the views took a sarcastic approach or were against the idea that the UK’s foreign policy had anything to do with poor placements. Eurosceptic views were rarely shown either through Terry Wogan’s or someone else’s opinions, which was likely due to The Guardian’s positive views on the Europe and European Union. Yet political reasons were rather seen as a result for the UK’s bad results in the 2000s.

¹²² Fricker, “It’s just not funny anymore”, 68.

5 CONCLUSION

The attitudes and stances *The Guardian* has had on the Eurovision Song Contest have been pretty much one-sided. In the 1960s and 1970s the coverage was somewhat harsh, as the contest was seen as mainly as a conservative family tv show that showcased different music cultures around Western Europe, which conflicted with both *The Guardian's* liberal stance and the British stature in the music industry. Apart from the British entries, the contest showed little influence from the British music industry among its winning entries. Even though in later years liberal values and “mainstream pop” became more common in the Eurovision Song Contest, there were other elements of the contest that were criticised by *The Guardian* and the British public. Neighbour voting (which “escalated” after televoting was introduced in 1998), “kitschiness”, or simply the ridiculousness of taking the contest seriously were common themes in *The Guardian's* coverage across the decades.

While *The Guardian* declared that the other countries took Eurovision seriously, unlike the United Kingdom, there were times when newspaper seemed to take the contest seriously. Even though Ireland's five victories in the 1990s were covered sarcastically and mockingly, compared to other victories this coverage was broader and more attacking, which was likely due to the (violent) history between the two countries. The United Kingdom's last place and the first zero points in 2003 also created broad coverage, in which the failure to gain a single point was written about in both a sarcastic and a serious approach.

The Guardian's attitudes towards the Eurovision Song Contest were not affected much by British success. Even though some of the victories created a broader and different coverage for the upcoming competition (as they were held in the UK), with speculation about host cities and the release of much wider articles and interviews of the contestants or the hosts, the victories were not celebrated much, and the overall coverage of the contest did not have a positive effect from it. When coming to the 2000s and the British “downfall” in terms of results in the competition, there were more

articles that tried to find connections between the British Eurovision success and the popularity of Tony Blair's government abroad. When looking at the lack of success in Eurovision, there seemed to be a change of attitude in *The Guardian's* coverage, yet it cannot be considered a significant change, as *The Guardian's* coverage of the Eurovision Song Contest was overall mainly negative. Euroscepticism did not affect much the coverage as much as was predicted at the start of the thesis. This may have had to do with *The Guardian's* pro-EU stance.

Terry Wogan's views have been circulated in *The Guardian* over the decades. Even though almost all the examples shown in the fourth chapter were from the 2000s, thanks to Wogan's role as a commentator, his words and views were quoted in articles to describe the event, mainly from a sarcastic perspective. His views got a lot of coverage during the 2000s, as the United Kingdom's stature in the contest "fell" after the abolishment of language rule and the implementation of televoting (which was seen to help Eastern European countries). These views were mainly covered due to Wogan's influential position in the Eurovision scene, to the point that viewing figures of the Eurovision were (still) high despite the UK's lack of success, which was attributed to Wogan's commentary.¹²³ His opinions of Eurovision resounded with the British public, making it very likely that his commentary had a huge effect on the British attitudes towards Eurovision.

When compared to previous research on the Eurovision Song Contest, this thesis gives a new point of view that is solely focusing on British mindset through a newspaper. It gives an insight on how *The Guardian* covered Eurovision through decades, and specifically how the themes, negative/cynical attitude and British political environment had an effect how the competition was covered or viewed in *The Guardian* and in the United Kingdom.

¹²³ Fricker, "It's just not funny anymore", 69-70.

Further research questions rise from outside of this thesis' research questions and timeline. The Brexit referendum of 2016, which saw the United Kingdom leave the European Union, would generate interesting questions of how British views on the lack of success were connected to Brexit.¹²⁴ The second place achieved by Sam Ryder in 2022 could also provide engrossing material on how Ukraine's victory or the UK's humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine were connected as a possible reason for the UK's success, or whether the 2023 contest in Liverpool affected the image of the Eurovision Song Contest in the UK positively.

¹²⁴ The highest placement the United Kingdom achieved between the years of 2017-2021 was 17th. During that time the UK placed last two times, getting 0 points from both the jury and the public vote in 2021.

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