

## GLOBAL RHETORICS PODCAST

### Episode 3: From Sweden to the World with Frida Buhre and Erik Bengtson, part 2

Transcription by Jason Michálek

Frida: It was a rhetoric gameshow, so it was, umm...

Collin: What? Rhetoric gameshows exist in Sweden?

Erik: Yeah, think *American Idol*, then rhetoric.

{Intro music plays}

José: Welcome to Global Rhetorics. I'm José Quintero.

Collin: And I'm Collin Bjork. This is the podcast that aims to amplify the work and networks of rhetoricians around the globe.

José: Hey Colin!

Collin: Hey José.

Jose: Welcome back!

Collin: Glad to be back in this second part of an interview with Frida Buhre and Erik Bengtson at Uppsala University in Sweden.

José: If you haven't listened to the first part of the interview, make sure you do that. And while you're at it subscribe to our podcast.

Collin: Yeah, I'm excited to dig back into our conversation with Frida and Erik today.

José: So we've talked about Frida and Erik's research, and their dissertations. What are we going to talk about today?

Collin: Today, we're going to talk about the role of rhetoric in Uppsala, then the role of rhetoric in Sweden, and lastly, Frida and Erik's efforts to work with rhetorics on a global scale.

José: Well why don't we get started with graduate study in Upsala. How does it feel to be a PhD Student there? and what kind of institutional support do you get?

{Musical interlude}

Frida: As you reach the Ph.D level there's a strong institutional support: you have a salary; you have full insurance; and parent leave. All of these things are included in your education, so it's a more secure environment than if you were on a stipend, for example. You're not really considered a student. I mean, you are of course taking classes and you have your advisers and all that, but you're very much a fundamental part of the department's research and its identity.

Erik: One of the best ways to describe this is more like a trainee job, or something like that. You're really involved in everything in the department and in discussions about future research and everything. But of course, everybody knows that you're also there to learn.

Frida: We're selling Sweden now! But I think that this also applies to the international postdocs—the institutional support for the postdocs coming into Sweden is also very good. They can often bring family and they get enmeshed in the security systems—or the welfare system of Sweden—immediately, which means the salary and the security and the healthcare and all of that is sort of part of the deal. And again, I think there are fairly good opportunities to come here as an international postdoc. I mean, it's tricky to find the application systems, but once you have, then your chances are pretty good.

José: So let's say I actually found a postdoc. Can I bring a project I'm already working on? How does the funding work?

Collin: All good questions. And people might be wondering, too, about the language. Let's check into Frida and Erik and hear what they have to say.

Erik: One of the barriers that has been the case is the language. Swedish is the main language for teaching and has been a requirement for Ph.D positions, as well. But that is somewhat changing.

Frida: You can basically come here with your own project, for some of them/

Erik: There are external funders—like foundations and stuff—who want to support internationalization of Swedish research. So there is funding for us if we want to go abroad, and there's funding that one can apply for to stay at a Swedish University, and then you should have a contact at that University to make you come join the argument that it's a good place to be.

Frida: So if any of our listeners are looking for a job...

Erik: ...Please email Frida.

Frida: Yeah, please email Frida... *or* Erik. But yeah, please do. We cherish opportunities to have international postdocs coming in.

Collin: Sounds like a really great opportunity for postdoctoral study at Uppsala.

José: If you want to learn more about it and get in touch with our speakers, look for their emails in our episode description.

Collin: Now let's transition, Jose, and learn a little bit more about rhetoric at the undergraduate level.

José: I've been curious about that because in the last episode we talked about how interdisciplinary the study of rhetoric is in Uppsala.

Collin: Yeah, in fact, its origin story is what makes it so interesting.

Erik: Could you tell them about Kurt Johannesson?

Frida: A little bit yes! Well it was part of a pragmatic decision. It seems like a lot of students want to take classes in speech and speech-making debate. That type very practically oriented aspect of rhetorical pedagogy. "Let's make a small, brief class on that and see how it goes." And it turned out to be very, very popular and a lot, a lot of students. So that sort of grew into, "Okay, let's do two classes, then." And it became a full semester. The education system here is usually such that you sign up for one full semester. I can do political science this one semester and the next semester I can either continue on to the next level of political science, or I can choose something else. But if you want to do a major in rhetoric, then you have to do three semesters in rhetoric. So that was not possible in the beginning, of course. You could only do it also one of your minor sub-fields. But it grew into like a full semester class, and then two semesters, and then an MA program started. I wonder if there was an MA program, but the Ph.D program started in... 2003?

Erik: I don't remember but I've heard of one of the arguments for starting a Ph.D education was that if we're supposed to uphold university quality in this lower rhetoric courses, then we need, like, some experts. So we needed this Ph.D program to be able to hold these rhetoric courses for a long time. So that's why I studied Plato and you studied Hannah Arendt: So that we'd be able to teach rhetoric for bachelors students.

José: Building a program like that from the ground up sounds like a gigantic endeavor.

Collin: Yeah, it's hard to imagine how long a project like that might take.

Frida: It takes such a long time to build institutions, and to create conditions where it's possible to have like a sustainable pedagogical environment.

Erik: The first course was in the eighties, right?

Frida: I think

Erik: Yeah I think like in the beginning of the eighties: that's where the rhetoric interests re-emerged within the Swedish university system.

Frida: Yeah, you mentioned Kurt Johannesson. He was a professor here at Uppsala, and he was very much into the study of literature from a historical prospective, but also that sort of that pragmatic, compositional, pedagogical focus in his teaching, so he was in there much of a mix of those, too. And he was the one starting these classes in eighties.

Erik: Yeah, and I think scholarship in rhetoric in Scandinavia maybe, but in Sweden, at least, it has also been very much focused on the classical terminology. That's been kind of like a core: to use and to learn these words that open up this new understanding of communication. So a lot of these early books, it's about explaining. There are a lot of Greek terms everywhere.

Frida: And Latin, just mixed in there.

Erik: It took some years until I learned to differentiate between Latin and Greek words.

Collin: What fascinates me about that story is that there seems to be a kind of ground-up public demand for speech, which then necessitates a kind of theoretical study of rhetoric, which then leads to the doctoral and postdoctoral total program... It's just a fascinating way of telling the history of rhetoric at Uppsala University.

José: It makes me wonder what the relationship is between the Swedish public that demanded this major and rhetoric.

Erik: There's been a change: that rhetoric used to be a word that was mostly used in “mere rhetoric.” Y'know, as in something you talked about politicians in a negative way.

Frida: Like, empty words and just... “polished.”

Collin: “Deception”

Frida: “Deception!”

Erik: As “deception. So then even when I began my university studies in 2004, I faced that kind of comments a lot. But that has changed recently, I think. One of the examples is the TV show. Frida, here, was in the jury of a Swedish TV show. Can you tell us about that?

Frida: Yeah, it was a gameshow. So it was kids, schoolchildren coming in and competing in speech. So it was a speech competition. It was very much like Idol, or something like that. But they were giving speeches and doing debates, and it was televised. They would win a prize at the end. And they went through all of the different rhetorical genres, and different topics—both historical and contemporary. I guess I was part of a symptom: the fact that they could do a show like that.

Erik: With rhetoric in the title of the show.

Collin: In the title?!

Frida: Yeah, it was called “The Rhetoric Game.”

Collin: What?! My mind is blown.

Frida: Yepp. Retorikmatchen. I mean, it was a game, so it was sort of like a sport or a competition, sort of. Part of it was there in the name, but it was rhetoric.

Collin: Was it publicly funded?

Frida: Yeah, so it’s part of the national public TV.

Collin: So they didn’t have to worry too much about “selling it”? They have to make sure somebody's going to watch it. But I guess they put children on it, right? So you’re gonna watch it if you’re kids and you’re in school, and it’s your friend.

Frida: Yeah, I mean. It was both the TV show and a radio show. And the radio show is actually very popular. People listen to radio quite a lot. But no, I mean it’s a symptom—that they could use the word “rhetoric” in the title or in the name of this game show—that it's not a negative term in the same way. Actually, a lot of our students—a lot of the Uppsala students that were taking those classes in the eighties—they became, sort of rhetoric experts and they were commenting on the game show. So you would invite political scientists, and I don't know... somebody commenting on something else as an expert. And you would have a rhetorician who would comment on like communication, of politicians, mostly. And they've also done I think a good job. I mean, not always good. But they do a very important work in establishing rhetoric as a word that can be used in more contexts. Whenever there's a royal wedding, they are invited to comment on the speeches, and so on. So they form, and rhetoric forms, a sort of ceremonial and political function in in public discourse.

Collin – It’s so fascinating to me, José, how rhetoricians get invited to comment and speak publicly on issues like this in Sweden.

José: I mean, yeah. When was the last time you going to call from the US media to comment on something?

Collin: Never for me. How about for you?

José: No, never! So what do you think it is about the relationship between academia, the media, and the Swedish public that make space for this kind of interaction?

Collin: I'm not sure. Let’s go back to Frida and Erik

Erik: I would say first that a lot of these rhetoric experts, they act in the public because they are consultants. So they do that to get publicity for their own...for their own courses that they sell. So I think that in Norway, we have another situation where we have two or three professors or

senior scholars who have a really high level of impact in the media. In Sweden, we don't have that situation... yet. So I think there is a challenge to be taken up by us and by now other rhetoric scholars to take a more active position in the public life. But of course, we look at other areas. We have a lot of political scientists and stuff that has filled that role... And actually I was invited to comment on that in an interview with two candidates for the prime minister position, and it was me and political scientists. And I had gotten the questions beforehand. And one of the questions was, "Could you grade the rhetoric from 1 to 5?" And I told the journalist beforehand that, "You can ask me that question if you want to. But if you do, I will say that I will only do that if you first ask the political scientists to grade their politics on a scale from 1 to 5."

Collin: That's brilliant.

Erik: Yeah, I wish I wouldn't have told them beforehand. I could've just said it to them live.

Collin: It would've been a perfect pull quote!

Frida: But yeah I think that the role of the expert has been very prominent in Swedish media and I guess it's partly due to the position of nationally funded public TV that has the resources to invite people. And also, as a scholar, you know that if I participate in this 30-second interview in the national news then two-, three-, four- million people are going to watch it. And Sweden is made of 10 million, so almost everyone is going to watch it. It's a good chance to get your opinions or voices or research results out there—even if even if the format often requires you to be very quick, and some something smart very briefly. I think that's part of the reason why experts can be invited in and also participate.

Collin: You said "the resources." Do the scholars get paid? Or is it just a matter taking time to interview? Or do you actually get compensated in some way for commenting on a quick interview?

Erik: We put it on our CV. We have three requirements as scholars in Sweden: we are supposed to teach, and we're supposed to do research, and we're supposed to collaborate with the society around us. But actually, it's often discussed that this third requirement is not as prioritized when people get positions and stuff. But still, you're supposed to talk about what you have done to collaborate with the society around you when you get a position.

Collin: For me, José, this is one of the really terrific things about practicing rhetoric at Uppsala it's the way that they bring together the academic world and the public sphere

José: Rhetoric is a public-facing field and this pragmatism really gets to shine in uppsala

Collin: Okay, let's now transition to the more global aspects of this interview

José : you mean the International Rhetoric Workshop?

Collin: That's right! It's where we met.

José: And Frida and Erik are two of the founding members.

Collin: Indeed they are! And I understand, José, that you are part of the planning committee for the next one, is that right?

José : Yeah I'm planning to 2021 Workshop in San Luis Potosí, Mexico.

Collin: I'm excited to apply.

José: So I'm real interested in how this whole thing got started.

Frida: I was a visiting at Northwestern in 2013, and there was a conversation about how it would be cool to cooperate more globally. I mean this was sort of phrased within an American context, because the students there were curious about rhetoric in Scandinavia, Sweden, and Europe in general, but also other locations. And we started talking about how hard it is to know—and get to know—of other institutions besides the ones that everybody knows of. Just finding them and get to know scholars from around the globe

Collin: So a conversation. You were at Northwestern in 2013, and there was a conversation about a desire to connect more global people working in and around rhetoric.

Frida: Yeah, because there's a power relationship here, right? Where most rhetoricians are in the US, most institutions are there, and the conferences and the journals are there, as well—at least the ones that many people aspire to join and to publish in. And nonetheless, or regardless of that power hierarchy, there's so much work being done outside of it that I think the two Americans in the founding team—David Molina and Rob Topinka—were very curious about to learn of (and we were of course as well) to learn of everything outside of Europe and the US. So we started looking into what could we do and decided it was better to connect with younger scholars. Partly because we were younger scholars, but also because that's how to build a long-term relationship. Actually, my experience is that it's much better to talk with junior scholars to build longer working relationships because people are going to be around for a long time. They do have an interest in developing something new, and going somewhere where they haven't been before, and trying to see if somebody's interested in writing a joint research proposal somewhere. Everybody's in it to do all these things.

Erik: And a few years, suddenly you know the senior faculty in a lot of places.

Frida: I mean, you get invited to give interesting talks somewhere. I mean, a lot of these conferences feel slightly industrial, in the sense that you go there, and you deliver your talk, and get a little bit of feedback, and there's a lot of work put into it. But the actual collaboration happens when you meet for dinner, or a drink, or hang out at the coffee shop somewhere before or after these presentations. So we wanted to explore alternative ways of organizing. If not a conference, then a workshop, where people could actually develop their work. To have sort of a middle ground between just an informal conversation with an interesting scholar and a more

formal conference presentation. So we did like round tables and had people read each other's work and comment on it. So it's like a different than your average... well, the format was different.

Erik: Yeah, and it's particularly those small workshop sessions. I think that's one of the core issues: first, to bring people from around the globe as much as possible, and also to have a small sessions—perhaps five, six, seven people—where everybody has read everybody's papers beforehand, and they come there and they just start talking about the research immediately. And also, I think if you go to a conference, one of your dreams to go to senior scholar (or any scholar) and talk to them. And then maybe someday they will read my research. Why not plan that ahead? So we also had these senior faculty members at the workshop who were supposed to lead that these discussions in the small groups/

Frida: And they do extraordinary work! Because what we asked them to do is to come to a workshop, read a lot of other people's work—they hardly present their own work at all, actually—and just facilitate the discussions. That's what we asked them to do.

Erik: And we don't pay them.

Frida: And we don't pay them. And everyone we've asked, I think, has accepted.

Erik: For the first workshop.

Frida: Yeah, I mean, the enthusiasm from senior faculty has been one of the more beautiful aspects of scholarship in academia: that people are willing to give of their time and their knowledge and experience to contribute to these types of things. I mean we're very thankful to the ones who have participated in the workshops. But I mean, the workshop, it takes place every second year.

Erik: The first one was in Uppsala, and then we had one in Ghent.

Frida: In Belgium. The next one is coming up in Mexico.

José: let me interject here. Actually, because of the Coronavirus pandemic, we've had to move the workshop to the summer of 2021.

Frida: Yeah, so we're excited about this opportunity to expand it to Mexico. They have a lively rhetoric community, and an interest in rhetorical scholarship—both in Central and South America; both in the Spanish and Portuguese speaking areas. So this is thrilling that we're moving IRW there next time.

Erik: And also to work with this conference. We were in the planning committee for the first one, and other people have taken on and planned for the second and are planning for the third. But to work with the first conference, for me, was really, really inspiring, And I took it upon myself to... Because, to get Scholars to come from Europe and from North America, that was no

problem. So I took it as one of my jobs to try to find rhetoric scholars on the African continent, and also to work with funding in that way. And that's really opened up, for me, a new area of a rhetorical scholarship where a small, but vibrant field of rhetorical scholarship—which I have continued to work with. And now Uppsala has a close collaboration with the University of Cape Coast in Ghana, where we have students and teacher exchange. And we're working on research collaborations, which is a result of this International Rhetoric Workshop job.

Frida: We spent a lot of time looking for... Googling “rhetoric.” Trying to find ways. I mean, this was all about going through communications, political science, history journals that were not located in the US. I did that with Asia: like “South Asian Communication Journal.” Going through to see if anybody mentions rhetoric, and see if they have interest or concepts that'll sort of align with rhetorical scholarship, broadly defined. And we tried to find scholars who are doing rhetoric but who might not just come up in your average search with the normal keywords. And then we almost harassed them. I emailed so many people saying, “I found you. You seem to be doing work that is oriented towards rhetorical theory or scholarship, broadly defined. What's your network? Are there other people doing it? Do you have students? Do you have Ph.D programs? Can you spread the word about this? *{to Erik}* You did the same very successfully: located like a bunch of rhetoric hubs in Africa. The we managed to get to Uppsala. But we found, like in Iran: three participants coming in from Iran. They wanted to come also for the second one, or at least a few of them wanted to come. But we're hindered due to the sanctions—which is another part of this the whole infrastructure of doing this, because some scholars will be from countries where it's hard to travel for them—I mean for them to be allowed visas. And some people or scholars might also come from countries where the visa application process takes a long time. So one of the aspects that we wanted to do with IRW was to make sure that we had that time for them. And that we were very much helping them through the visa process to smooth it as much as possible, which was a lot of work. And we also managed to secure travel stipends for students coming in from areas with low or middle income.

Collin: That's impressive. That's terrific.

Frida: Yeah, to make them come. Because otherwise it's going to be very hard: it's too expensive to visit a conference.

Erik: Our vision was that we should have maximum 1/3 from the United States and maximum 1/3 from Europe and... oh, no maximum! The problem is not to have more than 1/3 of Americans and 1/3 of Europeans.

Frida: I think we actually succeeded in doing that. I mean, it was an interesting process in terms of understanding the labor that it takes to go outside of your established sort of references in like who to call, who to email, and who's an important senior faculty to invite as a keynote. And also as the participating faculty members. And also to locate—I mean, sometimes I also emailed grad students randomly. Like individual grad students I had never met. And a lot of them would refer me back to American scholars and say, “This person has a very good network.” And I was like, “Okay, but sure: I've already emailed that person. But tell me also about a your national context.” And, for example, Argentina turned out to be also a very interesting one. They have a rhetoric

community that's doing super interesting stuff. And unfortunately most of it is in Spanish, so I can't read it, but just talking to the Spanish scholars made me realize so much more. They also do work on temporality, some of them—which made me excited.

José: So these are some of the challenges that we're still facing when planning the third iteration of the International Rhetoric Workshop.

Collin: Yeah, I imagine that's really difficult, but I also hope that it's rewarding.

José: It certainly is. So I'm also curious to hear what Erik and Frida have to say about the challenges—but also the opportunities—that come out of these global networks of rhetoricians.

Erik: I think that one of the obstacles is that we can't fund people flying around the globe—everybody—for a lot of reasons. Of course, the International Rhetoric Workshop has a really important function that will last into the future, I hope. But we also need other ways to connect people, and I think this podcast is one way to let people know what's out there without always flying everywhere. And I also think that one of the challenges that remains is the translation issue. Of course one of the solutions is that English is becoming the academic language in many ways. Like we are both Swedish, but we're writing most of our research in English. But I don't think that that should be the only way ahead. So I think, as rhetoric scholars, we should build networks of translators, and help each other to tap into those local other language spheres, and the research being done there. There's, of course, research in Spanish and in French and in German and... I'm sure a lot of countries that I don't have access to by proxy even. So that's something that we should do. Like the Scandinavian field. There's a lot of research in Scandinavia, in Swedish, but if you find an article, you'd read an English abstract, and find, "This is in Swedish but I can't read it." Then you should contact one of us and we will help you to understand what's in there.

Collin: So it seems like the possibilities of doing rhetoric on a global scale could really go on forever. But this podcast has to end sometime.

José: I know what that means: we get to ask a final question.

Collin: That's right.

José: So what else can we do in Uppsala, Collin, once we're not doing rhetoric?

Frida: Well I mean Uppsala is a beautiful town. It's not very big, it's small. But it's historic and has loads of beautiful, quaint buildings that you just wander around in and have a coffee. But you could also visit the university museum, which features the history of the university, with lots of strange artifacts that you can ponder on. And also an anatomical theater.

Collin: Can you explain what that is? It's pretty fantastic.

Frida: Yes, I know you saw it today, right? It's a place where they used to dissect human bodies for students of medicine. But it's also open to the public, and you can go in there and see the table there where the bodies used to lie, and it's a very sort of scary chilling atmosphere. You can imagine what it would have been like back in the days. So that's an option, if you wanna get freaked out.

Erik: Yeah, and it's really like you're sitting around it, and it's like a coliseum, but really tight.

Frida: So it's claustrophobic, but also very open and high up with lots of windows.

Erik: In a tower.

Frida: Well I'm also very much, I mean... if you just in Sweden, more broadly, I think sort of... making use of the access to nature that we have here. So we have the right to public access to beaches, forests, mountains, islands, anywhere you want to go. I mean, there's private lands, but you can—the ownership of that land can't prohibit you from visiting it. Which means you can go anywhere, visit any place you want, pick berries, pick mushrooms, and the like. Which mean that nature is very accessible here, in that sense. Even in Stockholm or any of the capital or larger cities. You can go out into the archipelago and hang out by any of the small, cute little islands without...

Collin: Without fear of someone saying, “No! Get off! That's mine!” That's incredible!

Erik: You're only allowed to like... fence your own garden.

Collin: So when it comes to exploring nature—

José: —or global networks of rhetoricians—

Collin: —there are no fences for the Swedes.

José: This has been *Global Rhetorics*. I'm José Quintero.

Collin: And I'm Collin Bjork. Thanks for listening!

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José: If you like what you heard today, tell your rhetoric friends. You can also find more information about our podcast on our website, [www.globalrhetorics.com](http://www.globalrhetorics.com).

If you're on social media, you can follow us on Twitter @GlobalRhet. That's @-g-l-o-b-a-l-r-h-e-t.

And we encourage you to share a link to this episode on your favorite rhetoric Facebook page.

If you want to learn more about the International Rhetoric Workshop visit [internationalrhetoric.com](http://internationalrhetoric.com). We will update this website later this summer with information on how to apply to the 2021 IRW.

Next up, we will be recording a special episode, where instead of an interview, Collin and I will be speaking about the challenges and opportunities that come about when starting a podcast like this one. We will talk about our commitment to amplify the works and networks of underrepresented rhetoricians around the globe--not just in our interviews, but also as part of the Global Rhetorics team.

The transcription for this episode was done by Jason Michálek and it's available on our website.

Thanks again to Frida and Erik for making the time for this interview. And if you want to reach out to them, you can find their contact on this episode's description.

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José: And a big shoutout to the Global Rhetorics production team!

Anneli: Anneli Bowie at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa.

Collin: Collin Bjork at Massey University in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Jelte: Jelte Olthof at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands.

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Erik: Erik Bengtson, Uppsala University Sweden.

Joanna: Joanna Chromik at Indiana University in the United States.

Jason: Jason Michálek at Indiana University Bloomington.

Rebecca: Rebecca Ottman, Indiana University Bloomington.

José: And José Quintero at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. Our theme song is by my band, *1815*. {whispers} Check us out!