
Character Biography Brodda

By Himring

In the published *Silmarillion* and in the *Children of Húrin*, Brodda appears as one of the Easterlings who occupied Dor-lómin after the Fifth Battle, the Nirnaeth Arnoediad. These Easterlings were survivors of Ulfang's tribe who had betrayed Caranthir and the other Sons of Fëanor to Morgoth during the battle. They were not in Dor-lómin by their own design, for they had expected to be rewarded for their role with access to "the rich lands of Beleriand which they coveted."¹ Instead they found themselves confined to Dor-lómin, which is described as relatively poor, compared to more southern parts of Beleriand, due to its climate.² The tribe of Ulfang had also lost their original leaders, because Ulfang and his sons had fallen in the battle. The social upheaval among the Easterlings at this time is also reflected, I believe, in the names of the later Easterling leaders—although besides Brodda only Lorgan is mentioned by name—as they do not appear to begin with *Ul-*, which suggests that they are not related in any way to Ulfang. The oppression of the surviving Edain of Dor-lómin, who had lost all their fighting men in the battle, by the Easterlings, whose rule was foisted on them by Morgoth, is described by Tolkien in the starkest terms.

After Húrin, lord of Dor-lómin, was captured after the battle and imprisoned in Angband, Brodda is the Easterling leader described as most closely involved with the relatives of Húrin: Morwen, his wife, Aerin, his kinswoman, and Túrin, his son. Brodda is described as essentially an upstart, not one of the established Easterling leaders, not even one of leaders of apparently lower rank who survived the Fifth Battle. These leaders (it is suggested) preferred not to tackle the estate of Húrin, where he had resided, which was situated in southern Dor-lómin near the stream of Nen Lalaith, because that was where the most resistance could be expected. Brodda, on the other hand, was ambitious enough to undertake it, even though he shared a superstitious fear of Elves with other Easterlings (he calls them "whitefiends"³) and in consequence also feared Húrin's widow, Morwen, who had some resemblance to the Elves both in appearance and in character, as she was a scion of the house of Bëor (Brodda calls her "witchwife"⁴). Brodda therefore had courage of a kind: Tolkien describes him as "bold."⁵

Despite Brodda's distinctly negative characteristics, he appears largely motivated by his own interests; that is, unlike the Easterling leader Lorgan, who appears in the tale of Tuor and also in the tale of the wanderings of Húrin,⁶ he is never portrayed as acting with Morgoth's interests in mind. Brodda's fear of Elves is presumably to be interpreted in connection with Brodda's Easterling background and the Easterlings' earlier betrayal of their alliance with the Elves, but probably also has negative significance beyond this. (Compare Gollum's instinctive dislike of elves, expressed in *The Two Towers*.⁷)

Brodda, we learn, occupied Hurin and Morwen's estates, stole their goods and cattle, enslaved Húrin's people, and took Aerin to wife by force. This last can surely be read as a move in his bid for rise to power in Dor-lómin. Marrying a close relative of Húrin would be a way of backing up Brodda's claim to Húrin's estates, to the extent that the Easterlings acknowledged previous ownership of land in Dor-lómin, but also to the lordship of Dor-lómin, if Brodda could ever gain enough influence to back that wider claim against Lorgan or other Easterling leaders. The narrator does not quite spell it out, but that must be what is implied in "he [i.e. Brodda] hoped to make himself a lordship in that country."⁸ Brodda's hopes for an heir are also mentioned, but the narrator has dodged the implications of this comment. Apparently, Tolkien was not prepared to deal with the complications the birth of a son to Aerin and Brodda would have posed—or indeed to acknowledge the birth of any other children of mixed Easterling and Edain descent. Such ambitions on Brodda's part, however, would have made Brodda extremely dangerous to Húrin's young son Túrin, the legitimate heir of Dor-lómin, and it is this danger and considerations like these that would persuade Morwen to send Túrin to safety in Doriath as soon as possible.

Tolkien has also added a problematic comment here, as explanation for the choice of Aerin: "there were few women amongst his own [i.e. Brodda's] following, and none to compare with the daughters of the Edain."⁹ Trying to reason text-internally, this could be taken as a reflection of Brodda's original low status—and scarcity of women among the Easterlings might be explained by their forcible removal to Dor-lómin by Morgoth. However, the comment suspiciously resembles a negative comment about Easterling women that occurs as a stray footnote to the story of Tuor, in which it is said that he had experienced Easterling women as "proud and barbaric" as well as cruel.¹⁰ However explicable Tuor's view of Easterling women might be by his experience as an oppressed slave, Brodda would certainly not share such views unless Tolkien is suggesting that despite his clearly expressed contempt for the Edain, whom he calls "Strawheads",¹¹ a contempt which extends even to their language,¹² he is supposed to be responding on some instinctive level to an inherent superiority in their women. Such an assumption is not impossible; there are some similar undertones in the account of the ancestry of Tal-Elmar in a late narrative of Tolkien's.¹³ The various descriptions of the Easterlings—although clearly driven by plot and also partly reflecting Tolkien's presumed source material—are among the most troubling when one considers the impact of racist clichés on the *Legendarium*.

Violence in the marriage between Brodda and Aerin is not confined to its beginning; later we are told that he often beat her.¹⁴ Aerin's feelings about Brodda and her marriage are expressed indirectly; however, it is clear that Brodda is unable to gain her loyalty, but she fears greatly to oppose him openly. She has to maintain contact with Morwen and aid her behind his back. Nevertheless it seems that eventually she is able to exert a very limited amount of influence on him, as she manages to keep a house more open for destitute wanderers and dependants than elsewhere in Dor-lómin, with his grudging tolerance.

Meanwhile, Brodda's oppression rests heavily on the remainder of Húrin's people. He keeps them in thrallhood and confines them to a stockade, reminiscent of slave compounds in

historical plantations in the south of the U.S. and elsewhere. This stockade is next to his new hall, to the north (generally an ill-omened direction, in *The Silmarillion*) of Húrin's house. That Brodda builds a new hall, instead of taking over Húrin's residence, is in the first instance due to Brodda's reluctance to confront Morwen directly enough to drive her out of her home, but also symbolizes the break in continuity and legitimate ownership that Brodda represents. As with Aerin, he gains no loyalty among Húrin's people, who try to resist him secretly, especially by escaping the stockade to aid Morwen,¹⁵ but fear to provoke him.

In this way, Brodda lords it over southern Dor-lómin for more than two decades, without any sign of mellowing. Towards the end of this period, Morwen and her daughter Nienor secretly depart, fleeing Brodda's oppression, which has apparently increased rather than lessened. It is unclear how soon Brodda became aware of her disappearance—his later bluster may hide embarrassment at his lack of better surveillance—but he seizes the opportunity to plunder the house and appropriate Morwen's remaining goods.¹⁶

One year and three months after Morwen's departure, Túrin returns to Dor-lómin himself, on his deluded quest after the fall of Nargothrond to find his mother and sister, and finding his ancestral house empty and plundered, enters Brodda's hall. Túrin's tendency to hasty conclusions and precipitate decisions may at this stage be reinforced by a spell of Glaurung's lies that lies heavy on him. Although Túrin is warned by Sador, his informant, to be cautious, for Aerin's sake and his own, he is at once provoked by pride and resentment into confronting Brodda. He demands a hearing, claiming kinship with Aerin, and asks Aerin urgently for news of his mother and sister.

Brodda's response shows clear signs of a violent and dangerous temper, although Túrin's behaviour itself is challenging and provocative, questioning Brodda's status and exacting standards of courtesy he is hardly living up to himself. Brodda is also apparently drunk, probably suggesting habitual intemperance. Brodda insults both the status of Morwen and the Edain of Dor-lómin, but, in a skewed parody of marital loyalty, he angrily defends Aerin's honour as his wife's when the stranger, Túrin, questions her word. The irony of this is that she is in fact lying, when she denies knowledge of Morwen's plans, and lying out of fear of Brodda.

Brodda threatens Túrin with hanging—not only death, but shameful death—and Túrin responds by taking him hostage. Túrin gains his answers from Aerin, only to realize how much he has been deceived by Glaurung, but then quickly loses control of the situation. An Easterling is apparently about to assail Túrin while he is distracted by his anguish, and he abandons his plan, throwing his hostage across his own table and into the face of his assailant. That this act breaks Brodda's neck can hardly be the result of design, but his resulting death is clearly nevertheless intentional, as Túrin declares that he will kill Brodda before he is killed himself to avenge the result to Morwen. Brodda dies in his own hall, despite his disputed claim to the land it stands on, killed by a stranger who originally claimed treatment as a guest; on both sides it is a situation that subverts all the laws of traditional hospitality.

In the subsequent fight in the hall, the aged retainers of Dor-lómin come to the aid of Túrin and Túrin survives, despite heavy losses among the retainers. Aerin speaks sharp words to Túrin, accusing him of rashness and says that, although her life had been harsh before, she now expects that she as well as any others who were involved will be killed by the Easterlings in revenge. However low Brodda's original status among other Easterlings, Aerin expects immediate violent retribution for the insurrection that led to his death. She expresses neither relief nor grief at the death of Brodda himself, but when Túrin looks back from a distance during his flight, he sees that Brodda's hall, the hall Brodda built for himself two decades ago, has been fired and Asgon explains to him that this is clearly the work of Aerin: Aerin's final comment both on her marriage to Brodda and her situation in Dor-lómin.

Brodda is clearly an unsympathetic character with little to redeem him. Perhaps it is a little beside the point, considering the rest of the circumstances, to consider whether the failure of Brodda's ambitions also implies a verdict on the pursuit of social mobility on the part of Tolkien. We know, in any case, that Tolkien was socially conservative, despite the sympathy he often shows for the lowly and humble.

Brodda is so strongly associated with Easterling oppression that it comes as a surprise to realize that in the earliest drafts of the story he was not an Easterling at all and that it is the theft of Morwen's goods for gain that was the original story element. In the version in the *Book of Lost Tales*,¹⁷ he was indeed a friend and relative by marriage of Mavwin's (the original name of Morwen), to whom Mavwin had entrusted her goods and cattle before she left and he had betrayed her trust by embezzling them. He had gained his rule by the consent of the people and his marriage to Airin (Aerin) was apparently lawful, although he is already depicted as a quarrelsome drunkard who mistreated his wife. This Brodda is beheaded by Turambar (Túrin) on considerably less provocation than in the later versions of the tale, in an act transgressing even more clearly against the laws of hospitality (which also leads to Turambar slaying one of his own kin in the ensuing fight), but Airin (Aerin), who is secretly relieved to be rid of Brodda, judges Turambar's case so skilfully that he is permitted to go free, although exiled and forfeiting his right to Morwen's goods. Despite the persistence of some core elements, this is clearly a very differently story—not a story of foreign occupation and general violent oppression, but mean-spirited theft and domestic cruelty—although in either case it ends in sudden violent death, as so many episodes in the tale of the Children of Húrin do.

Works Cited

1. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Fifth Battle."
2. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Beleriand and its Realms".
3. *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Departure of Túrin."
4. *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Return of Túrin to Dor-lómin."
5. *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Departure of Túrin."
6. *The War of the Jewels*, "The Wanderings of Húrin."
7. *The Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers*, "The Taming of Sméagol."
8. *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Departure of Túrin."
9. *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Departure of Túrin."
10. *Unfinished Tales, Of Tuor and his Coming to Gondolin*, footnote 31.
11. *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Departure of Túrin."
12. Apparently the "old tongue", also called "fair tongue" by Sador or "serf tongue" by Brodda, must be Adûnaic, although alternatively it could be Sindarin, which would make an even more likely target, because it is Elvish and therefore suspect, but in any case the Easterlings are apparently imposing usage of their own language, of which little is known (see *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Return of Túrin to Dor-lómin").
13. *Peoples of Middle-earth, Tal-Elmar*.
14. Sador says so (*Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Return of Túrin to Dor-lómin").
15. *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Departure of Túrin."
16. The following discussion closely follows *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*, "The Return of Túrin to Dor-lómin."
17. *Book of Lost Tales II, Turambar and the Foalókë*.

About the Author

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