



**Gerald of Wales**  
***The History and Topography of Ireland***

‘A certain people ... is accustomed to appoint its king with a rite altogether outlandish and abominable.’



‘From an old and evil custom they always carry an axe in their hand as if it were a staff. In this way, if they have a feeling for any evil, they can the more quickly give it effect.’

‘It is only in the case of musical instruments that I find any commendable diligence in the people.’



***Strongbow. The Story of Richard and Aoife by Llywelyn, Morgan, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-274-0, pp 102-3***

This is the princess Aoife of the Red Hair,’ said Dermot Mac Murrough. He was proud of her. His eyes told me.

There was soot on her face and her clothing was stained with mud and cinders, but Aoife was like a bright light in that dark place. She was tall and strongly built for a girl, and in her face was the pride of kings.

I was very pleasantly surprised. In marriage a man takes what he gets, because marriage is arranged to unite powerful families or to make new allies, and the daughters of important men are often plain. I hadn’t expected anything more of this one.

But one thing was more important to me than her beauty.

Dermot had told me I would be his heir, I would succeed him as King of Leinster. Under English law, my marriage to his daughter made that certain. His crown would pass to me, I thought, and he had given me Aoife just as he would give me the crown. The two went together. Or so I thought.

I didn’t know anything yet about Irish law.

Having seen and admired my bride-to-be, I began talking with Dermot Mac Murrough. The tall red-haired girl stood between us for a few moments, then added her voice to ours. Her Latin was just as good as mine, I was startled to discover.

‘Why are you discussing my marriage as if I weren’t here?’ she wanted to know. ‘I haven’t yet said I would marry this man, Father.’

‘Of course I’ll marry her,’ I told Dermot over her head.

Aoife stamped her foot. ‘But I mightn’t marry you!’ she said directly to me.

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. How could a woman refuse to marry the man her father selected for her?

I looked at Dermot Mac Murrough. He wouldn’t meet my eyes. ‘What is this?’ I asked.

My uncle coughed. ‘Ah ... there’s something you should know, Richard. About these Irish.’

‘What is it?’ I asked impatiently. My men were staring at us.

‘A woman must give permission to the marriage, you can’t force her,’ my uncle told me.

I was astonished. That was like asking a cow’s permission before you bought it!