

My Mother Told Me

"My Mother Told Me" originates from *Egil's Saga*, a 13th-century Icelandic saga chronicling the life of Egil Skallagrimsson, a Viking warrior, poet, and farmer. This stanza captures the adventurous spirit of the Viking Age, reflecting the cultural importance of exploration and seafaring.

Historical Context

- Egil's Saga:** One of the great Icelandic sagas, it narrates the life of Egil, a fierce and cunning Viking who exemplified the ideals of the Viking Age: strength, wit, and a yearning for adventure.
- Viking Exploration:** The Vikings were renowned for their maritime expertise, sailing to distant lands for trade, raiding, and settlement. The stanza encapsulates their connection to the sea as a gateway to opportunity and self-discovery.

Original Stanza

Old Norse:

"Móðir mín sagði mér
að mér skyldi kaupa skip
standa á kjöl og sigla í haf
sigla til Íslands."

English Translation:

"My mother told me
I should buy a ship
Stand at the prow and sail across the sea
To Iceland."

Key Themes

- Maternal Wisdom:** The mother serves as a symbol of guidance and ambition, encouraging the protagonist to embrace his destiny as a sefarer.
- Adventure and Opportunity:** The stanza reflects the Viking ideal of venturing into the unknown, with the sea as both a challenge and a promise.
- Connection to Iceland:** The mention of Iceland highlights the Viking colonization of the island, which became a hub for Norse settlers.

Literary Style

- Poetic Form:** The stanza follows *fornyrðislag* ("old story meter"), a traditional Norse poetic style characterized by alliteration and a strong rhythm.
- Oral Tradition:** Such verses were part of the oral storytelling culture, preserving history, values, and ideals across generations.

Historical Legacy

The stanza embodies the Viking spirit of exploration and resilience, offering a glimpse into the cultural ethos of Norse society. It remains a timeless reminder of the Vikings' profound connection to the sea and their unyielding pursuit of adventure.