

**Harvard University Indo-European Workshop**  
**November 21, 5:00 – 6:30 pm**  
**Boylston Hall Room 335**

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***Old English Dithematic Names and the Reliability of Sieversian Metrics***

According to the traditional analysis, Old English dithematic personal names receive secondary stress on their second elements only if these are disyllabic or inflected. Thus, the prosodic structure of dithematic names is different from that of true compounds, whose second elements are always assumed to be secondarily stressed, irrespective of their number of syllables. For example, *-gār* is analyzed as unstressed in *Hrōðgār* and as the recipient of secondary stress in *Hrōðgāre*, while it is believed to receive secondary stress both in *frum-gār* and *frum-gāre* because *frum-gār*, unlike *Hrōðgār*, is a true compound, not a personal name. The rationale behind this interpretation is that, according to the tenets of Eduard Sievers's theory of Old Germanic versification, personal names and true compounds evince different metrical behaviors in Old English poetry.

In an essay published in *Journal of English Linguistics* in 2003, Thomas A. Bredehoft questioned the validity of this interpretation. He argued that the previously unexamined evidence furnished by secondary patterns of alliteration and manuscript presentation proves that the second elements of dithematic names, like those of true compounds, are always secondarily stressed, regardless of whether they are disyllabic. Consequently, Bredehoft reasoned, Sievers's metrical theory, upon which the traditional interpretation of dithematic names is predicated, must be defective, and so it should not be relied upon for linguistic analysis. In my presentation, I will take issue with Bredehoft's arguments. I will demonstrate that he did not consider all the evidence that is pertinent to his case, and that, as a result, he failed to test his hypothesis correctly. An analysis of all the relevant evidence confirms that, as has traditionally been maintained, dithematic personal names and true compounds possess different prosodic structures. I will conclude by offering a number of arguments that will show that, contrary to Bredehoft's belief, Sieversian metrics is fundamentally correct, and that it therefore constitutes a dependable tool for research into the linguistic structure of Old English.