Dr Paul McNamara

List of topics for thesis defence exam

1. Describe the historical processes which led to Old English supplanting the Celtic and Latin languages during the Early Middle Ages. Did anything of these languages remain?
2. What effect did the Christianisation of Britain have on the English language during the Early Middle Ages?
3. Describe some of the earliest works written in the English language, in terms of content, themes and the language itself.
4. What effect did the Viking invasion of Britain have on the English language during the Middle Ages?
5. Describe the historical origin of place names in Britain, referring to the Celtic, Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Norman periods.
6. What effect did the Norman invasion of Britain have on the English language after 1066?
7. Describe some works written in Middle English, in terms of content, themes and the language itself.
8. Describe how Middle English changed over time to become recognisably more modern than Old English
9. Describe how Middle English was enriched by a large number of French and Latin borrowings
10. Describe how introduction of printing and the translation of the Bible into English helped standardise spelling in the late medieval and Early Modern periods
11. Describe the influence of William Shakespeare and the King James Bible on the development of English
12. Describe the controversies which existed during the period of the 16th-18th centuries regarding the issue of ‘correct’ or standard English
13. What was the impact of the publication of Samuel Johnson’s dictionary on the English language?
14. How comprehensible is the English of Jane Austen to readers in the 21st century and what does this tell us about the development of the English language in general.
15. Why is classic English literature of the mid-19th century (Dickens, Melville and Twain) often more difficult to understand than that written in the early 19th-century (Austen, Wordsworth, Thackery), and what does this tell us about the development of the English language?