This thesis focuses on Edmund Spenser’s sonnet cycle the *Amoretti* with the aim of highlighting the manner in which its treatment of the Lady of the Sonnet (in this case inspired by Spenser’s second wife Elizabeth Boyle) differs from the common tendencies exhibited by other Petrarchan sonneteers – specifically, that she is allowed to play a comparatively more active role in the cycle’s narrative and engage the speaker more directly, that her personality and opinions are defined with greater clarity, and overall that she displays an atypical amount of independence, considering the genre she appears in. For the purposes of proving this point, two other works were selected for comparison: *Canzoniere* (also known as *Rime sparse*) by Francesco Petrarch, the so-called “Father of the Sonnet” whose poetry established numerous defining traits of the love sonnet tradition, and *Delia* by Samuel Daniel, whose cycle excellently illustrates the conventions eventually understood as “Petrarchan” in Elizabethan England (which originated from Petrarch’s successors as often as from the man himself).

Crucial claims this paper discusses are, firstly, that the Lady as Spenser portrays her does not defy her admirer primarily through her “heart of flint” and passive refusal of his advances (as was the standard approach), with her destructive “power” stemming largely from the emotional turmoil she causes in the lover and his inability to stifle or satisfy his own passions. Elizabeth is shown to intentionally utilise various kinds of subterfuge or – should that fail – even direct and violent actions against the *Amoretti*’s speaker. These situations are often described through the manipulation of relatively common conceits. These scenes, while not exactly flattering, result in fashioning a Lady with a decidedly more defined character than either Laura or Delia.

And secondly, the lover and the beloved do eventually manage to negotiate relationship terms which are acceptable for both of them, upon which they consummate their relationship and agree to marry. While there have been numerous attempts to reform or
transcend Renaissance Petrarchism, Spenser’s solution appears to be relatively unprecedented, as he joins his characters in what is repeatedly stressed to be a companionate and harmonious relationship based on “mutual good will”. Spenser’s portrayal of this supposedly thoroughly reciprocal bond is not without its faults, as significant part of it still hinges on the “taming” of the Lady and enforcing the speaker’s artificial superiority, yet the effort itself seems very much sincere. Several sonnets even concern the Lady’s own worries, such as her fear that marriage will only be a prison for her, or her anxieties about her own fragility and impermanence. And while Spenser’s portrayal of this is once again imperfect, it also once again, suggests that the Lady in the Amoretti is truly viewed as an essentially a complete person, with her own joys, anxieties and opinions.