Early modern Europe was newly concerned with diplomacy as a representative art. Medieval diplomatic messengers gradually gave way to ambassadors acting in the ongoing interests of sovereign states. The introduction of the permanent embassy is symptomatic of this transition from a series of communications to an art and practice of representation. Literature is also an art and practice of representation – and the parallel was not lost on early modern diplomatic theorists. Their understanding of the ambassador as a faithful and persuasive representative of his sovereign, in word and deed, placed diplomatic theory in conversation with theories of rhetorical, poetic and dramatic representation. As many theorists noted, the Romans called ambassadors oratores, or orators, and early modern diplomatic treatises repeatedly ask how to use words well. This rhetorical approach was rooted in the broader literary and philosophical concerns of Renaissance humanism, which also shaped the period’s literature and poetics. From the composition of Ambaxiator Brevilogus in 1436 to the 1680 publication of L’Ambassadeur et ses fonctions, European treatises on embassy engaged with many of the same rhetorical and representational considerations as contemporary European literature. These crossovers between literature and diplomacy were equally clear to literary authors. European writers as wide-ranging and influential as Torquato Tasso, Luís de Camões and Pierre Corneille drew on the analogies between literary and diplomatic representation.

This essay traces one exceptionally important and previously unstudied instance of this dialogue between diplomatic theory and literary representation. It examines the personal and intellectual exchange that took place between the diplomatic theorist Alberico Gentili and the poet, diplomat and literary theorist Sir Philip Sidney in early modern England. Gentili was an Italian civil lawyer and professor at Oxford University,
and he was without question the most important and influential diplomatic theorist to work in England in this period. He is generally considered to have founded the field of international law alongside the Spanish scholar Francisco Suárez and the Dutch lawyer Hugo Grotius. Sidney, meanwhile, was famous as both a courtier and a poet, and his poetic treatise, the *Defence of Poesy*, stands among the most important works of English literary theory. The intellectual exchange between these leading theorists emerged from direct discussion between them: Gentili not only dedicates his 1585 diplomatic treatise *De Legationibus Libri Tres* to Sidney but also credits Sidney with a formative role in its theory of embassy. This dedication has often been noted as passing evidence of Sidney’s intellectual interests and patronage, but the implications of Gentili’s acknowledgments to Sidney have never been pursued. This chapter illuminates the intellectual exchange between Gentili and Sidney and, through them, the conceptual interface between diplomatic and literary theory in early modern England. I argue that these two influential theorists share a conceptual understanding of representation that underlies their thinking on both literature and diplomacy.

The interrelation of early modern literature and diplomacy has recently begun to attract critical attention, as the introduction to this volume observes, but much remains unknown in this significant field. Timothy Hampton suggests that we might seek a diplomatic poetics: he has in mind both a way of reading literature that is attuned to its diplomatic implications and a way of reading diplomacy that ‘would take into account its fictional and linguistic dimensions’. In this chapter, I use ‘poetics of embassy’ to indicate both a theory of literature informed by diplomatic ideas and a theory of diplomacy informed by literary-theoretical concerns. I do so with the awareness that what we now know as literary theory and poetics was, to early modern writers, the study of the intersecting, even inseparable, arts of rhetoric and poetry, grounded in classical rhetoric and poetics, and incorporating moral philosophy.

My broader point is that junctures of literature and diplomacy – when diplomatic theory draws on literary theory, or ambassadors and embassy feature in literature – raise considerations and concerns about the art of representation. This brings diplomacy into conversation with the philosophical and literary-critical ideas surrounding mimesis – a term that Sidney defines as the ‘art of imitation’ and then glosses as ‘a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth’. I draw consciously on the long Western philosophical tradition of theorizing literary and artistic representation as mimesis, from Plato and Aristotle onward, when I describe diplomacy as a mimetic art in this chapter. This would have made sense to early