The loves, rages and jealousies of Juno
A series of prints by Giulio Bonasone
Margaret Sheehan

The Baillieu Library Print Collection at the University of Melbourne holds a series of engravings by the Bolognese printmaker Giulio Bonasone titled Amori sdegni et gielosie di Gianone (The loves, rages and jealousies of Juno). The prints illustrate episodes from the mythology of the Roman goddess Juno (Hera in Greek mythology), queen of the gods and wife and sister of Jupiter (Zeus). They combine pagan imagery and narrative with an underlying Roman Catholic moral message, and help to shed light on the life of their elusive creator.

Very little is known about Giulio Bonasone. He was born towards the beginning of the 16th century and possibly began his artistic career as a painter, although no surviving paintings are attributed to him.¹ He is known principally as an engraver, studying with the renowned printmaker Marcantonio Raimondi. His style was influenced by Raphael, Michelangelo and Correggio, and he was closely associated with Parmigianino, who entrusted Bonasone with making copper engravings from his drawings.²

Bonasone worked for several years as an engraver in Rome, evidenced by prints he made of Roman subjects between 1544 and 1547.³ It is not clear exactly when he returned to Bologna. In 1556 a Bonasone is listed as the auditor of the Bolognese Compagnia delle Quattro Arti.⁴ If this is the same Bonasone, then presumably he returned at least a year or two before this date.

Achille Bocchi, a Bolognese writer, bureaucrat and lecturer in law at the University of Bologna, commissioned him to produce illustrations for his Symbolicarum questionum de universo genere, first published in 1555. Such an undertaking would have taken two or three years to complete.⁵ The date of Bonasone's death is unknown, but his last known print, of Michelangelo's Last judgement, is dated 1574.

The link to Achille Bocchi is possibly significant in understanding the series of 22 prints by Bonasone, of which the Baillieu Library Print Collection holds a complete set. Each of the illustrations is accompanied by a short Italian verse. The text and images appear to be of Bonasone's own invention, as attested by his signature on each print: 'Iulio Bonasone In Ventore' or a variant thereof.

Although no documentation exists on the circumstances of its creation, the series may have been commissioned by the Accademia Bocchiana, founded by Achille Bocchi.⁶ The academy's base was the home of its founder, the Palazzo Bocchi, completed in 1546.⁷ Bonasone is known to have made two engravings of the palazzo.⁸ The mythical protectors of the Accademia Bocchiana were Minerva, goddess of wisdom and war (the Roman equivalent of the Greek Athena), and Mercury (Hermes), the messenger god and patron of merchants and marketplaces. Their statues adorned the roof of the Palazzo Bocchi.⁹ These are the same gods found in the frontispiece of The loves, rages and jealousies of Juno (illustrated right). The motto of the Accademia Bocchiana was Sic monstra domantur (Thou the monsters are tamed).¹⁰ This phrase is echoed in the verse accompanying the print Hercules killing the snakes Juno sent to destroy him, showing the infant Hercules strangling two snakes in his crib: 'Quivi fanciullo il domator di mostri ...' (Herein the child tamer of monsters ...). If the series was commissioned by the Accademia Bocchiana, this may be an allusion to its motto, and aligns the organisation with the revered hero.

It is difficult to pin down exactly when the series might have been commissioned. If one accepts the proposal of the Accademia Bocchiana as the commissioning body, the strongest argument seems to be
between Bonasone’s return from Rome after 1547 and Achille Bocchi’s death in 1562. The accademia seems to have been formed only after the completion of the Palazzo Bocchi in 1546, and Bonasone’s other associations with it occurred after his return to Bologna. Massari argues that the prints show Bonasone’s engraving technique in full maturity, indicating a date after 1560 and as late as 1568. However, such a late date would pose a problem for attributing the commission to the Accademia Bocchiana, which was dissolved when Bocchi died in 1562. Based on this fact and Massari’s argument, one could be tempted to date the series to 1560–62. Unfortunately however, as the evidence for its commission by the academy is purely speculative, the temptation must be set aside.

Given the moralising tone of the prints, it seems likely that they were created in the spirit of the Counter-Reformation. The Council of Trent first convened in Trent from 1545 to 1546, in Bologna in 1547, then continued to meet in Trent until 1563. The council was inaugurated by Pope Paul III in order to combat the Protestant Reformation that had swept across northern Europe in the early 16th century, challenging the power of the Roman Catholic Church.
The Church had been criticised for corruption, extravagance and alienating laypeople from their religion. The Protestant Reformation had seen the Bible translated from Latin into vernacular languages and gave the average believer licence to read and interpret the Bible according to their own conscience. The expense and display of the Catholic liturgy were often eschewed in favour of simplicity. One of the most important issues for the Council of Trent was the translation and interpretation of the Bible. The council decreed that the Bible was not to be translated from Latin, and could be read and interpreted by the clergy only, as the task of understanding scripture was beyond the layperson.

One of the most interesting things about Bonasone’s series is the way in which it combines pagan imagery and narrative with a Catholic Counter-Reformation message. Several of the prints make reference to the dangers of attempting to grasp what is beyond the understanding of normal humans. *Ixion embracing a cloud, thinking it is Juno* illustrates the story of Ixion, who fell in love with Juno and attempted to rape her. In revenge, Jupiter sent a cloud in the shape of Juno to couple with Ixion. The phantom Juno bore Ixion a son, Centaurus, father of the centaurs. Jupiter gave Ixion an elixir to make him immortal and tied him to a burning wheel to suffer in the Underworld for eternity. The verse accompanying the image explains that with desire Ixion vainly embraces the air, believing it to be Juno, and that his punishment is like that which often comes to those who attempt to grasp what is too far from human sensation.

Tantalus is another being damned to eternal suffering in the Underworld (*Tantalus speaking to Diana*). He was invited to dine with the gods on the condition that he not reveal their secrets to mortals. When he broke his promise he was condemned to spend eternity in a pool of water that would recede whenever he tried to drink, and above his head would be suspended fruit that would jump from his grasp when he tried to pluck it. The verse warns that the miserable Tantalus, because he wanted divinity, will ever be a wretch from hunger and thirst. This print is a particularly convincing allusion to the Reformation as it does not sit well narratively in the series. Although there are myths in which Juno visits the Underworld and encounters Tantalus, here it is Diana who speaks with him and not the titular goddess.

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Some of the prints in the series warn of the dangers of defying Jupiter, who was sometimes equated with the Christian god in this period. *Juno suspended in the air* is one such print. Since the birth of Hercules (son of Juno’s husband Jupiter and one of his lovers, Alcmene), Juno had been set against the baby, and sent snakes to kill him in his crib.
But the infant strangled them with his bare hands (illustrated in another print in the series, *Hercules killing the snakes Juno sent to destroy him*), and Juno orchestrated the setting of his twelve labours. She convinced Aeolus, the god of wind, to make a tempest, which shipwrecked Hercules on the island of Cos. As punishment, Jupiter suspended Juno from Mount Olympus, with an anvil tied to each foot. The verse says that here is a clear example to us from angry Jupiter of how much one must fear God, because he avenges offences.

Another print in the series, *Vulcan, Neptune, Athena and other gods making shackles to pull Jupiter from the heavens*, illustrates a plan hatched by Juno with the assistance of Minerva, Vulcan and Neptune to shackle Jupiter. The verse warns that ‘zeal and brief study’ will not withstand the strength and valour of Jupiter, perhaps a disdainful message directed at Protestant lay-readers of the Bible.

As well as having religious overtones, the series reflects an interest in Antiquity, characteristic of humanist organisations such as the Accademia Bocchiana. The 15th century saw the rise of the humanist movement, the hallmark of which was the desire to revive the civilisations of Antiquity.
All the stories in *The loves, rages and jealousies of Juno* find their sources in Classical Greek and Roman authors. One of the most popular ancient works was the *Aeneid* of Virgil. It tells the story of the Trojan hero Aeneas, who fled the burning city of Troy at the end of the Trojan War. He travelled to the Italian peninsula, waylaid on his journey by the vengeful Juno. A great number of the prints in Bonasone’s series relate to the Trojan War and Aeneas’ plight. It was not uncommon during the period of the prints’ creation for Italian nobles, like the nobles and emperors of ancient Rome, to attempt to trace their lineage back to the Trojan heroes who had found their way to Italy, Aeneas primary among them.\(^{14}\)

Juno was a supporter of the Greeks in the Trojan War. Her hatred of the Trojans stemmed from her loss in the judgement of Paris. Juno, Minerva and Venus asked Paris, son of the Trojan king, Priam, to decide which of them was the most beautiful. Paris chose Venus, who promised him Helen—the wife of the Greek Menelaus—as a bride. The prince’s decision had a lasting effect on the goddesses’ loyalties: Venus supported the Trojans in the war and Juno and Minerva the Greeks. Bonasone’s *Judgement of Paris* was strongly influenced by the depiction of this scene by his teacher, Marcantonio Raimondi (above). Marcantonio’s print was made after a lost drawing by Raphael and became a touchstone for many later works (perhaps the most famous being Edouard Manet’s use of part of the composition in his painting *Le déjeuner sur l’herbe* of 1862–63). The focus of Marcantonio’s composition is the seated Paris, living as a shepherd and identified by his Phrygian shepherd’s cap and staff, with a dog at his side. He holds an apple out to Venus, bestowing his favour on her. The goddess of love is accompanied by her young son, Cupid. An angel flies to place a wreath on the victorious goddess’s head. To the right of Venus, the form of Athena vertically marks the centre of the composition. She is disrobing, her armour lying at her feet. On the other side of Venus stands Juno, identified by her peacock, and behind her Mercury runs to herald the news of the judgement.

It is this focal part of the composition that Bonasone has borrowed for his own version of the myth. His *Judgement* (illustrated right) is a mirror image of the relevant section of Marcantonio’s. He has swapped the figures of Athena and Juno, to make Juno more prominent in the composition.

Paris’ sheepdog has migrated into the decorative border of the print. The verse that accompanies Bonasone’s image explains that human judgement often errs. Paris has turned the world upside down for the sake of a beautiful face.

In the century or so following Bonasone’s death, his prints were highly collectable.\(^{15}\) They continued to be sought after by collectors and are documented in several catalogues of his work and of printmakers more broadly. One such catalogue is particularly interesting concerning one of the prints in *The loves, rages and jealousies of Juno*. Adam von Bartsch published his catalogue of Old Master prints between 1803 and 1821. The university’s own catalogue entries for Bonasone’s prints are taken from Bartsch’s catalogue. *Juno persuading Athena to nurse the young Hercules* is the title that Bartsch gave to one of the prints in the series (illustrated page 22). But this title is inaccurate. In order for the mortal Hercules to become divine, he had to be nursed by Juno. Juno, however, had declared herself an enemy of her husband’s child. Athena, a supporter of Hercules, tried to persuade Juno to nurse him. In another version of the myth Jupiter attached Hercules to Juno’s breast while the goddess was sleeping. Juno awoke enraged.

and her milk was spilled, creating the Milky Way. The title seems to confuse the roles of the two goddesses. In the image, Athena in her armour strides in from the right, gesturing towards Juno who is nursing the infant Hercules. The opening lines of the verse accompanying the image are grammatically ambiguous. They read, ‘Persuade Giunon Pallade, a dar’ / Il proprio latte al gran figliuol di Giove’. Translating the first part of these lines is difficult without knowledge of the associated myth. The lines may translate as ‘Juno persuades Pallas (Athena), to give / her own milk to the great son of Jupiter’, or ‘Pallas persuades Juno, to give / her own milk to the great son of Jupiter’. All the verses in the series were most likely written by Bonasone himself and are ‘not very well constructed’. Of another of Bonasone’s series, The loves of the gods, George Cumberland in 1793 suggested that the verses were of Bonasone’s invention, and were ‘very lamely composed’. Given Bonasone’s limitations as a poet, this incorrect title seems to be the result of mistranslation.

The loves, rages, and jealousies of Juno is an interesting example of the synthesis of pagan imagery and Christian message to be found in art of the mid-16th century. It provides valuable insight into the life and work of its enigmatic creator.
Giulio Bonasone, Juno persuading Athena to nurse the young Hercules, c. 1547–68, engraving, 13.2 x 10.2 cm. Reg. no. 1959.2329, gift of Dr. J. Orde Poyton, 1959, Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne.

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Items from the Baillieu Library Print Collection are available for viewing by prior arrangement. The catalogue can be searched at www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/special/prints.

3 Massari, ‘Bonasone, Giulio’.
4 Cirillo, Giulio Bonasone, p. 9.
5 Cirillo, Giulio Bonasone, p. 11.
8 Massari, Giulio Bonasone, pp. 52–3.
9 Maylender, Storia delle accademie, p. 452.
10 Maylender, Storia delle accademie, p. 452.
11 Massari, Giulio Bonasone, p. 115.
12 Maylender, Storia delle accademie, p. 454.
15 Cirillo, Giulio Bonasone, p. 17.
16 Cirillo, Giulio Bonasone, p. 124.