

Dramatic Themes in John Eccles's 1707 Setting of William Congreve's *Semele*

Robert T. Kelley

2003

Introduction

Anthony Rooley (2002) has asserted that “Eccles awaits the searching light of unbiased study and, particularly, informed performance.” In this talk, I attempt to engage in such a study of Eccles's *Semele*. This opera is rich with interpretive possibilities and subtext, and I will present an analysis of the music that supports a view of the opera as a dramatically unified whole. This supports Rooley's musicological contention that “Here Congreve and the composer John Eccles worked very closely together, as they had for over a decade, and must have discussed at endless length their combined approach to creating this piece of music theatre.” In an analysis that highlights the relationship between Congreve's text and Eccles's music, I will discuss musical connections that can help listeners uncover this opera's dramatic fusion of text and music. The first manner in which the music supports the drama is in the Baroque figures that accompany certain themes or dramatic situations in the opera. The second way that the music supports the text and stage action is through the work's key scheme. According to the Baroque doctrine of affections, different keys are associated with different passions. The qualities of the keys, which are highlighted by the

tuning of the Baroque keyboard instruments accompanying the ensemble, serve to highlight character development throughout the opera. This study reveals subtle dramatic subtext that is enhanced by the musical setting of the text and that suggests interpretive possibilities in the staging and musical performance.

1 Dramatic and Musical Themes

I will now briefly summarize the dramatic themes of *Semele* so that we may explore their musical manifestations. To begin, Stanley Sadie's synopsis of Handel's *Semele* will serve to introduce the main ideas of the plot:

The marriage of Semele to Athamas is being celebrated in Thebes. Semele seeks to postpone the ceremony, for she is in love with Jupiter. It is interrupted [by Jupiter] and Semele is carried off to Cithaeron. In her palace there, Semele revels in the love of Jupiter, who brings her as companion her sister Ino. Juno, enraged by her husband's infidelity, calls on the god of sleep to arouse Jupiter with a dream so erotic that he can refuse no request that Semele might make; then, in Ino's guise, she counsels Semele to demand that Jupiter come to her not in mortal form but as the Mighty Thunderer—only thus, she says, can Semele secure immortality. This Semele duly does when Jupiter, eager for her embrace, approaches her. Bound by his oath to comply with her request, he has to obey; inevitably, she is consumed by his fire. The people of Thebes mourn her but celebrate the birth from her ashes of a new deity, Bacchus.

Semele is a moral story, designed to offer wisdom through demonstrating truths about the shortcomings of human nature. Within the complexity of the drama lie several important subplots, each with its own dramatic intrigue and message to the audience. Perhaps the most obvious theme is Semele's all-consuming ambition to become immortal, which becomes

her undoing. Morally, this story speaks of ambition as the heart of human frailty. Semele is not the only member of her family who is ambitious, however. Ino has always lived in the shadow of her older sister, and is jealous of Semele's success and, most of all, her betrothal to Athamus, Prince of Bœotia. It is not clear whether Ino's secret desire for Athamus is fueled by her resentment of her sister, or simply enhanced by it, but as Semele's own plot unfolds, Ino's frustrations are relieved. In Congreve's dramatic presentation of Ino's character, we see the aspect of her situation that is manifested in despair. She is grief-stricken that she cannot marry the man whom she loves. Athamus is woefully ignorant of any such sibling rivalry, and only knows that Semele has tried to delay their wedding once before. Even when Ino speaks to him about her feelings, Athamus does not figure out on his own what is going on. Athamus, as are many of this opera's characters, is blinded by love.

The gods, too, display character development and thus offer their own moral message to the audience. Jupiter is blinded by his passion for his own creation, and cannot resist the temptation to experience the pleasures of the lust and love of mortals. He is ignorant that he is being used as a tool for a mortal's ambition. Juno is jealous of Jupiter's paramours and is furious about his ceaseless philandering. Her disregard for the lives of others (viz. mortals) while she ekes out her revenge is yet another example of one character using another to obtain her desires. [Juno's handmaid, Iris, is capable of seeing all things; and, while Juno uses Iris to spy on her unfaithful husband, Juno is bothered by Iris's voyeuristic thrill and titillating insinuations about Jove's extramarital activities. The results of Iris's investigations in the story make it thus clear that gossip can only lead to more adversity.] The demi-god Somnus is stricken by pain over his lost love, and aims to drown his misery in endless sleep, until Juno offers him the promise of finding his nymph again. There is no indication in Congreve's retelling of the tale whether Somnus's story is resolved, or whether he is still forsaking sleep in search of his only love, Pasithea. (He, too, is blinded by love.) Like the others, Somnus's character is designed to hold a mirror up to the human condition for inspection by the

audience. All of these characters have been blinded by love, ambition, or jealousy.

The stock musical figures in Eccles's setting of the drama can serve to clarify some of these dramatic themes by providing them with a musical identity. First, Figure 1 shows several instances of a chord progression (I IV ii V) that tends to accompany manifestations of Semele's ambition. The sequence tends to end on an unresolved dominant chord when it accompanies Semele, perhaps implying that she will never be satisfied (and thus return to her tonic home) until her ambition is fulfilled. The first two instances of this harmonic gesture occur in Semele's first aria, Act I, Scene 1, where she is torn between the choice of—on the one hand—satisfying her father's desire that she be married, or—on the other hand—refusing to go through with the ceremony in hopes of continuing her affair with Jupiter. The different manifestations of the progression given here show the ever-varied presentation of this progression as Semele's conditions and emotions change. In Figure 1(a) the progression uses a major secondary dominant, V/V, in place of the minor supertonic, and ends on a minor dominant chord, showing the hopelessness of her situation. (The minor dominant could never return to tonic in a convincing tonal cadence.) In Figure 1(b), Semele's fear of the consequences of her refusal is depicted by a move to the relative minor key area with the last chord of the progression.

The third example of the “ambition progression” in Figure 1(c) is the most straightforward, as it accompanies a depiction of Semele simply protesting Jove's inattention. The occurrence of Semele's harmonic gesture in Figure 1(d), in association with her reminding Jove that he created her as a mortal woman, seems to indicate that she is not satisfied with this fact. She comes back to this idea in the following recitative (shown in Figure 1(e)) and expands upon it, insinuating that she is not happy being simply a mortal. At the point of Jupiter's first comprehension of her ambition in the same recitative, he picks up her chord progression upon realizing that he must control the situation and distract her “lest she too much explain”. However, Jupiter's attitude toward—and handling of—her ambition is exem-

plified in his treatment of the chord progression, as it is terminated by an abrupt return to the tonic. Semele won't be swayed by this harmonic treatment of her ambition, however: She becomes so distressed that Jupiter has stopped paying attention to her in order to think for a moment, that her final complaint transforms her progression into a chromatic bass ascent, using V_5^6/V to press her point harder.

The second musical gesture we will examine is less convincingly tied to one dramatic theme. Eccles's use of heavy dotted-rhythm melodies with almost obsessively repeated notes is indicative of grief or despair. Several examples are given in Figure 2, the first of which immediately precedes Ino's first outburst of misery in the wedding ceremony in Act I. Figure 2(b) is the music that accompanies Jupiter's foreboding admonishment in Act III that Semele will be harmed by her request of him. The final two examples of the grief idea, in Figure 2(c) and 2(d), come from the musical interlude accompanying the scene change before Semele's death, and the musical depiction of the reaction of the mortals (Cadmus, Athamus, and Ino) to their witnessing her death.

Another Baroque gesture that seems to be connected to a dramatic theme is the turn-decorated scale patterns that appear in many places in the opera. Although this gesture is extremely common in Baroque music, it tends only to be used in this work in association with dramatic events in which the actions of the gods affect the lives of mortals. This figure, which I will associate with the theme "divine intervention in human affairs", appears when Jupiter disrupts the wedding ceremony with a storm (in Figure 3(b)), when Cadmus enters to report Semele's abduction (in Figure 3(c)), when Juno enters (disguised as Ino) to manipulate Semele (with the aid of a magic mirror) (in Figure 3(d)), and when Apollo announces the future influence of the newly-born Bacchus on mortals' lives (in Figure 3(e)). However, its first appearance, in Figure 3(a), is in the bass line throughout Athamus's first aria. At this point in the drama, Athamus is under the mistaken impression that Semele's sighing is indicative of her love for him and her acceptance of their marriage. He is indeed

misinformed and ignorant, especially of the divine intervention which had already taken place and which caused Semele's sigh. (Semele wants Jupiter to whisk her away again.) Although this first unclear manifestation of the "divine intervention" gesture does not establish a clear precedent for the significance of all the other presentations of this gesture, its interpretation in terms of the dramatic meaning of later presentations of these turn figures brings into relief the dramatic subtext at play in the first scene of the drama.

Although there are many more such connections in the opera, the final—and most obvious—dramatic theme that we will examine is "Somnus's river of sleep". In his first aria (seen in Figure 4(a)), Somnus calls upon the river Lethe ("why does thy lingering Current cease?") to lull him back to sleep with its murmuring, a sound which is imitated by the use of muted strings and text painting.

Because of Somnus's character transformation, through the inveiglement of his lost love Pasithea, Somnus sings his second aria in the parallel major (as shown in Figure 4(b)), using the same imagery and the same melody for the opposite purpose: He calls upon the "soft purling Stream . . . to sooth me awake." The melodic idea, then, evokes the river itself in its different roles in Somnus's dramatic change.

Figure 1: Examples of the gesture associated with “Ambition”

(a) 4 Arioso, “Ah me! What Refuge”, Act I, scene 1

Semele

Ah me! What Re-fuge now is left me? How va-rious, how tor-ment-ing, Are my Mi-se-ries!

6 # (b)

(b) 4 Arioso, “Ah me! What Refuge”, Act I, scene 1

If I de-ny, my Fa-ther's Wrath I fear, If I de-ny, my Fa-ther's Wrath I fear.

#

(c) Recit before 26, “Let me not another Moment”, Act II, scene 3

Semele

Let me not an-oth-er Mo-ment Bear the Pangs of Absence, Since you have form'd my Soul for Loving, No more afflict me With Doubts and Fears, and cru-el Jea-lou-sie.

(6) 5

(d) 28 Aria, “With my Frailty don't upbraid me”, Act II, scene 3

Semele

as you made me, as you made me, I am Wo-man as you made me.

6 #5 6 #5 # #4 2 6 6 5 5 4 #3

Figure 1: "Ambition", continued

(e) Recit before 29, "Thy Sex of Jove's the Masterpiece", Act II, scene 3

Semele

Still I am Mortal, Still a Woman; And e-ver when you leave me, Tho' compass'd round with De-i-ties, Of Loves and Gra-ces, A Fear in-vades me, And con-scious of a

BC

6 (6)

Jupiter aside

Na-ture Far in-fe-rior, I seek for Sol-i-tude, And shun So-ci-e-ty. Too well I read her Mean-ing, But must not un-der-stand her. Aim-ing at Im-mor-

BC

6 5 4 #3 (6)

ta-li-ty With dan-gerous Am-bi-tion, She would de-throne Sat-ur-nia; And reign-ing in my Heart would reign in Heav'n. Least she too much ex-plain, I must with Speed a-

C

4 6 7 5 4 #3 # (6)

Semele

muse her; It gives the Lov-er dou-ble Pain, Who hears his Nymph com-plain, And hear-ing must re-fuse her.

C

Why do you cease to gaze up-on me? Why mus-ing turn a-way? Some oth-er Ob-ject seems more pleas-ing.

C

(6)

Figure 2: Examples of the “Grief/Dispair” Gesture

(a) Recit before 6, “Alas! she yields”, Act I, scene 1

BC

(b) 46b Aria, “Ah! take heed”, Act III, scene 4

Str.

BC

(c) 49 Symphony, Act III, scene 7

Str.

BC

(d) Recit before 51, “Of my ill-boding Dream”, Act III, scene 8

BC

Figure 3: Examples of the “Divine Intervention” Figure

(a) 5a Aria, “See, she blushing turns her Eyes”, Act I, scene 1

Str.

BC

(6) # (6) (6) $\frac{6}{4}$ $\frac{5}{3}$

(b) 7 Symphony, Act I, scene 1

Str.

BC

(6) (6)

(c) Recit before 13, “Ah wretched Prince”, Act I, scene 3

BC

(6) (6) 6 6 6 $\frac{5}{4}$ 3

(d) Recit before 39, “Thus shaped like Ino”, Act III, scene 3

BC

$\frac{5}{4}$ 3

(e) 51b Aria “From Tyrannous Love”, Act III, scene 9

Str.

Apollo

From Ty - ran - nous Love all your Sor - rows pro - ceed, From Ty - ran - nous Love you shall quick - ly be freed.

BC

7 6 6

Figure 4: Examples of the melody evoking “Somnus’s Stream of Sleep”

(a) 34 Aria, “Leave me, loathsome Light”, Act III, scene 1

Leads upon the instruments

Sr.

Somnus

O mur - mur, mur - mur, mur - mur, O mur - mur, mur - mur, mur - mur me a - gain to Peace.

BC

h # $\frac{\#4}{2}$ (6) h # $\frac{6}{4}$ $\frac{5}{4}$ $\#3$

Detailed description: This musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Soprano (Sr.) and contains a complex, rhythmic instrumental introduction labeled 'Leads upon the instruments'. The middle staff is for the Bass (BC) and contains the vocal melody for 'Somnus' with the lyrics 'O mur - mur, mur - mur, mur - mur, O mur - mur, mur - mur, mur - mur me a - gain to Peace.' The bottom staff is a basso continuo line with figured bass notation: h # $\frac{\#4}{2}$ (6) h # $\frac{6}{4}$ $\frac{5}{4}$ $\#3$.

(b) 36 Aria, “More sweet is that Name”, Act III, scene 1

Sr.

Somnus

to sooth me, to sooth me, to sooth me a - wake.

BC

6 6 6 6 (6) 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 5 4 3

Detailed description: This musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Soprano (Sr.) and contains the vocal melody for 'Somnus' with the lyrics 'to sooth me, to sooth me, to sooth me a - wake.' The middle staff is for the Bass (BC) and contains the vocal accompaniment. The bottom staff is a basso continuo line with figured bass notation: 6 6 6 6 (6) 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 5 4 3.

2 Key Associations and Character Development

Although the musical associations with dramatic themes that we have found so far are compelling, there is an even more unified dramatic picture painted by the overall key scheme of the musical drama. The association of keys with the various passions is certainly a common idea in Baroque music theory,¹ and its significance in musical perception is enhanced by the use of historic temperaments in the keyboard continuo instruments. Here, however, the use of keys is tied much more closely to dramatic themes and actions, and follows the characters' developments through the opera. This association of keys with dramatic themes in the opera is given in Table 1. The key scheme of the opera is presented in the multi-page Table 2. I will direct your attention to specific details in this chart as we explore the dramatic connections.

Several important character transformations in the opera are reflected in the shift from one key to another. The most obvious example of this was presented above in association with Somnus at the beginning of Act 3. This dramatic theme of love in sleeping and waking states is played out further in the first scene in Semele's palace in Act 2, scene 2. In this scene, Cupid and Zephyrs fill Semele's dreams with erotic images. The scene thus begins in the key of pleasure (A minor/major) as the audience gets the chance to see the kind of images that pervade Semele's slumber in a dance of Zephyrs. As we return to the real world the music then moves to the key of sleep. Semele awakens and mourns the loss of her sleep's "visionary joys" (just as Somnus wishes to return to sleep in Act III). Sleep imagery continues into Cupid's aria in d minor (analogous to Juno's and Iris's duet in Act III, "Only Love on Sleep has Pow'r"), and d minor is transformed into D major as Semele seeks to reclaim Jupiter ("Let me not another Moment Bear the Pangs of Absence"), much as Somnus seeks to reclaim Pasithea in Act III. Amazingly, the key of D is used for no other numbers in the opera.

One quite remarkable connection is that of the transformation from sorrow to joy at

¹For example, a description of key qualities appears in Charpentier's *Regles de Composition* (ca. 1682).

the conclusion of both Acts I and III. In Act I, scene 3, Semele has just been abducted, and Cadmus reports the tragic turn of events to Athamus and Ino in F major. When the prophecy of “doom” Cadmus expects from Jupiter’s priests and augurs is not forthcoming, the priests encourage Cadmus to “Sing Songs of Mirth and Triumph” as they transform the music into B♭ major. Likewise, in Act III, scenes 7–8, the f minor of Semele’s tragic demise is transformed by Apollo into B♭ major as he prophesies the creation of “a Sovereign Juice . . . , Which Antidote pure The sick Lover shall cure, And Sighing and Sorrow for ever prevent.” But it is revealed that Juno is at the heart of this doom, as her aria at the end of scene 6 initiates the key transformation from F to B♭ in the key of F major.

Although the first few pages of the manuscript were lost, the connection of B♭ major with joy is introduced in the editor’s reconstruction of the opening of the opera by the “joyful occasion” of Semele’s wedding. The move to g minor (the key of Semele’s ambition) in the first few numbers of the opera, then, indicates *before* it is obvious in the text that Semele is still resisting her obligation to marry Athamus. The strongest connection between g minor and Semele’s desire is in her ambition aria at the beginning of Act III, scene 2. After this point, g minor no longer appears in the opera, as Semele begins to find a way of satisfying her ambition. Her transformation is first to the key of e minor, once Juno gives Semele the means of gaining her wish in scene 3. Although this is not clear to the listener at this point in the opera, e minor will not be the key of Semele’s success. The key of e minor is, in fact, the key of all of the actions in the opera that are performed in hopes of keeping Semele from her desires, namely Ino’s outburst in the middle of the wedding ceremony in Act I, scene 1, and Jove’s providing a distraction for Semele in Act II, scene 3. Semele’s second transformation is to the key of a minor in Act III, scene 4, where she takes control of Jove’s desire (changing the key of pleasure, A major, into a minor) in order to obtain her prized immortality. Of course, her final transformation, in Act III, scene 7, is into the key of sorrow, f minor, as she “now repent[s] [her] Pride and impious Vanity.”

Juno's jealousy is depicted in G major, beginning with the opening scene of Act II and returning in Act III, scene 3. The reason that, once Juno begins to succeed in her plot against Semele, Juno returns to G major in Act III is perhaps because at this point she encounters face to face for the first time the object of her jealousy. An interesting connection between Juno's flaws and Semele's flaws is suggested by the relationship of the keys associated with Semele's ambition (g minor) and Juno's frustration (G major).

The fact that Jupiter is never associated with just one key is indicative of his all-consuming passion. Jove will cause storms in C major (at the end of Act I, scene 1), soothe Semele's bereavement in D major (in Act II, scene 3), and chase after Semele in a coy game of elusion in A major (in Act III, scene 4), all for the sake of gaining his own desires. Jove's most significant character transformation begins with a move to f# minor, in Act III, scene 4, where he foreshadows Semele's tragic demise and warns her not to press her wish. Then in scene 5 he moves to the key in which Semele succeeds in gaining his irrevocable oath (a minor), and in this key he mourns that he must destroy her. Jove's last rumbling storm where he destroys his lover in scene 7 is in f minor, the key of grieving.

It has been seen here that, through the discovery of musical relationships in association with dramatic themes, many of the motivations, traits, and flaws of the characters are enhanced in the drama by the music. The morals of the mythological tale of *Semele* are thus made more manifest in the combination of the text, staging, and music than in the libretto alone. Eccles's *Semele* is rich with interpretive possibilities that can continue to develop meaning in an informed performance through casting, staging, musical interpretation, and the reconstruction of the lost parts of the music. From this case study we can see that the musical evidence suggests that the Congreve/Eccles collaboration was fortuitous, successful, and worthy of future study.

Table 1: Key Associations in *Semele*

Dramatic Theme	Key(s)
Joy/Celebration	B \flat Major
Semele's dilemma/ambition	g minor
Jove's rage	C major
Forbidden Desire: Ino's & Athamus's attraction	a minor
Bad turn of events (for mortals) / Juno's vindication	f minor/F major
Juno's jealousy	G major
Love/Cupid's games / Semele asleep	d minor
Love/Jove's soothing	D major
Zephyrs and pleasure	A major
Jupiter's & Semele's love	b minor
Distractions from or subversions of Semele's ambition	e minor
Somnus's sleeping	d minor
Somnus's waking	D major
Forbidden Desire: Jove's frustration/Semele's "success"	a minor
Jove's warning	f \sharp minor

Table 2:

John Eccles Semele
Key Scheme

Numbers are from the edition in Musica Britannica, vol. 76. Action is drawn from the stage directions in the libretto and score and Sadie's plot synopsis.

Key	Scene	Numbers	Scene Location	Action		
B♭M?	ACT I	1-2	Bœotia, in ancient times	None (Wedding Procession for the marriage of Semele and Athamas?)		
				Priests are in their Solemnities, as after a Sacrifice newly offer'd		
gm		3	Recit - Chief Priest (Lost, reconstructed in Bb) Duet, 1st & 2nd Priest (Partially lost, reconstructed from ritornello)	Flames arise from the Altar, Statue of Juno is seen to bow, The priests rejoice in good omens.		
			Recit - Cadmus & Athamus	Sem.'s unwillingness to proceed with the ceremony is plain. Cad. and Ath. are both constrained to plead with Sem.		
			4	Aria - Semele	Sem. sighs and begs help from Jup.	
GM			5a	Aria - Athamus	Ath. (mis)construes her sighing as actuated by her love for him and calls on Hymen to assist his pleas.	
			5b			
em		Scene 1	i	The Temple of Juno	Now Ino delays the ceremony by expressing her sorrow. None of the others knows her love for Ath, and they express only puzzlement and sympathy at her distress.	
			6		Quartet- Ino, Sem, Ath, Cad	
			7		Symphony of all the instruments	Thunder is heard in the distance and rain extinguishes the fire on the altar. The priests (and Ath) implore Juno to save the ceremony from Jup's wrath.
			8		Chorus of Priests	Flames are again kindled on the Altar, and the statue nods. The fire is again extinguish'd.
CM					Recit - 1st & 2nd Priests	A loud clap of thunder is heard. The altar is thrown to the ground.
			9		Symphony	Chief Priest advises all to leave the temple.
	Scene 2		Outside of the Temple, Ath & Ino lingering	Chief Priest advises all to leave the temple.		
				Recit - Athamus	Athamus mourns the failure of his wedding.	
		10		Aria - Ino	Ino asks Ath. to avert his eyes from her in her sorrow.	
am		11		Recit & Aria - Ath.	Athamas mistakes Ino's emotion for mere sympathy.	
				Recit - Ath & Ino	Ino accidentally admits her true feelings for Ath.	
		12	Duet - Ath & Ino	Ino accuses Ath's obliviousness of her love for her pain. Ath. apologizes, saying, "love alone has [us] both undone."		
FM		ii		Cadmus returns and tells how Semele, surrounded by flames, was seized by a mighty eagle and snatched heavenward, leaving a diffusion of 'Celestial odour and ambrosial dew'.		

			13	Chorus of Priests & Augurs		Priests and Augurs enter, but the doom Cadmus expects is not forthcoming; rather, they sing of mirth and triumph and tell him to cease his mourning.	
			14	Aria - 1st Augur		1st Augur proclaims "Semele enjoys Above" with Jup.	
BbM			15	Aria - Chief Priest		All Priests & Augurs take up the "songs of mirth and triumph"	
			16	Chorus of Priests & Augurs			
GM	ACT II	Scene 1	17	Symphony of All the Instruments	A pleasant country, near Mount Olympus	Juno and Iris meet; Juno is furious and impatient	
				Recit - Juno & Iris		Iris tells Juno about the 'new-erected palace' that Jupiter has provided for Semele on Mount Cithaeron, and their relations there	
em				18		Aria - Iris	Juno is incensed at her husband's new love and swears an oath of vengeance, not just on Semele, but on all 'of curst Agenor's race'
				19		Aria - Iris	Iris warns Juno of the dragons that protect Semele's palace; Juno determines to call on Somnus, god of sleep, who can seal the 'wakeful dragons' eyes'
EM					Recit - Juno & Iris		
am			Scene 2	21	Aria - Cupid	An apartment in the palace of Semele; she is sleeping, Loves and Zephyrs waiting.	Cupid sings about Sem's dreams ('She repeats the delight!')
				22			Cup. calls on the Zephyrs to fan Sem. while he 'with Pleasure fills her dreams'
AM				23	Dance in A:# (None written)		Dance of Zephyrs
				24	Recit - Sem.		Semele, waking, calls on sleep to return and restore her erotic 'visionary joys'
dm				25	Aria - Cupid		Cupid brings Jup. in to Sem.
				Recit - Sem.	Sem. asks Jup. where he's been ('No more afflict me with ... cruel Jealousie.')		
DM		26		Aria - Jupiter	Jup. reassures Sem. and tells her to 'for joys alone provide'.		
		27		Recit - Jup., and Duet - Sem. & Jup.	Sem. responds amorously, and both sing of the joys of love		
bm				Recit - Sem. & Jup.	Jup detects a certain discontent in Sem, and she insinuates that Gods are 'inconstant'. Jup admonishes Sem to 'beware of jealousy'.		
em		28		Aria - Sem.	Sem. tells Jove 'Don't upbraid me'.		
				Recit - Jup. & Sem.	Sem. explains her discontent as the consequence of her mortal state in a world of deities. Jup. is disturbed at her dangerous aspirations to immortality and turns away to think of a diversion for her. Jup's musing makes Sem. even more jealous.		
EM			29	Aria - Jupiter	Jup. reassures Sem. again and makes a joke to lighten the mood.		
				Recit - Jupiter	As a distraction for Sem, Jup dispatches his winged Zephyrs to fetch Ino from Thebes for Sem's companionship. He then turns the scene into Arcadia for Sem & Ino to observe the Rural Sports.		

A?			30-31	Dance of Shepherds? (None written)		
dm	ACT III	Scene 1	33a-33b	Symphony of All the Instruments	The Cave of Sleep	Somnus is lying on his bed. A soft Symphony is heard. Then the Musick changes to a different Movement. Juno & Iris enter.
				Recit - Juno & Iris		Juno & Iris call Somnus to wakefulness.
			34	Aria - Somnus		Somnus is reluctant to stir.
				Recit - Juno & Iris		Juno realizes she can rouse Som. by invoking the name of his favorite nymph, Pasithea
			35	Duet - Juno & Iris		Juno & Iris sing of Love's power over Sleep.
DM				Recit - Juno		Juno renews her call, mentioning Pasithea's name.
		36	Aria - Somnus		Som. wakes and sings of his delight in the nymph	
			Recit - Juno & Somnus		Juno commands Som to instruct his attendant Morpheus to provide Jupiter with a dream 'in shape of Semele, But far more beautiful, And more alluring', to arouse his desire to such a pitch that he can refuse no favour she might ask as a condition for her love; further, Juno demands that Somnus hand over his leaden rod of sleep so that she can subdue the dragon sentinels and Ino, whom she intends to impersonate. Somnus duly complies.	
gm	Scene 2	38	Aria - Semele	Semele's Apartment	Semele, alone, remains discontent, and sings of her ambition.	
GM	Scene 3	iii		Recit - Juno (as Ino) & Sem.		Juno enters, in the guise of Ino, holding a magic mirror; she lavishly praises what she calls Semele's 'divine perfection' and wonders whether Jupiter has consented to her becoming immortal.
			39	Aria - Juno		She shows Sem. her image in the mirror, deceiving her into thinking herself far more beautiful than she is.
			40	Recit & Arioso - Semele		Sem. revels in it ('Myself I shall adore if I persist in gazing.') and cannot give up the mirror without 'one look more'.
			41	Recit & Aria - Juno		Juno advises her to take full advantage of her situation and to 'Refuse his proffer'd Flame 'Till you obtain a Boon without a Name.' (He unawares, will grant The nameless Blessing.)

			Recit - Juno	Juno tells Sem to demand that Jupiter come to her bed not as a mortal but 'like himself, the Mighty Thunderer, In pomp of majesty and heav'nly attire': only thus, she says, could Sem become immortal.	
em		42	Aria - Semele	Sem thanks Juno/Ino and promises to grace her 'with charms like mine' 'When I'm a goddess made'.	
EM			Recit - Juno	As Jup approaches, Juno retires, elated at having duped the 'vain wretched fool' into destruction.	
AM	Scene 4	43	Aria - Jup	Jupiter enters and offers to embrace Semele; she looks kindly on him but retires a little. He pleads for her love ('Come to my arms, My lovely fair'), recalling his dream in which 'you fled from my Pray'r'.	
		44	Duet - Sem & Jup	Sem insists she 'cannot comply', Jup insists she 'must not deny'	
am		45	Recit - Jup, and Duet - Sem & Jup	Jup becomes exasperated ('Oh Semele, why art thou thus insensible?'), and Sem says she never gets what she wants ('I ever am granting ... am wanting'). Jup presses her to ask anything she requires.	
AM				Recit - Sem & Jup	Sem demands that Jup swear an irrevocable oath, by the River Styx, that he will not refuse her. He does so, calling on Olympus to shake in witness; its distant rumblings are heard.
f#m		46a	Aria - Sem	Sem tells Jup that he is to come to her not in human shape but as Jupiter himself.	
AM		46b	Aria - Jupiter	'Ah, take heed what you press', Jup exclaims, 'For beyond all Redress, Should I grant what you wish, I shall harm ye.'	
		46c	Aria - Semele	Semele, imagining that he is merely reluctant to accord her immortality, will not give way ('I'll be pleas'd with no less'). She goes to prepare herself.	
am	Scene 5	47	Arioso - Jupiter	Jup, left alone, pensive and dejected, bitterly regrets his impetuous oath; for if he appears as the Mighty Thunderer 'she must a victim fall', for all that he may apply his 'softest lightning' and 'mildest melting bolt'.	
FM	Scene 6	48	Aria - Juno	Juno appears in her Chariot, and delights in her triumph ('Above measure, Is the pleasure Which my Revenge supplies.')	
fm	Scene 7	49	Symphony of All the Instruments	The scene discovers Semele ... while a mournful Symphony is playing. She looks up and sees Jupiter descending in a cloud; flashes of lightning issue from either side, and thunder is heard grumbling in the air. Semele realizes the consequences of her vanity and ambition ('Ah me! too late I now repent'). Consumed by Jupiter's fire, she dies.	

			Recit - Semele		
		50	Symphony of All the Instruments		A sudden and great Flash of Lightning breaks forth, and a Clap of loud Thunder is heard; when at one instant Semele with the Palace and the whole present Scene disappear, and Jupiter re-ascends swiftly.
	Scene 8	iv	Recit - Cad, Ath, & Ino	The Scene totally changed represents a pleasant Country, Mount Cithaeron closing the Prospect.	In Thebes, Ino – now returned – is with Cadmus, Athamas and priests; they have witnessed the demise of Semele as some kind of fiery storm ('Oh terror and astonishment!'). Ino relates that Hermes, messenger of the gods, has told her of Semele's fate, and also that Jupiter commands her and Athamas to wed; Athamas contentedly accepts the situation.
B♭M	Scene 9	51a	Aria - Apollo		A bright cloud descends and rests upon Mount Cithaeron, which opening, discovers Apollo seated in it as the God of Prophecy. Apollo predicts that a phoenix shall rise from Semele's ashes, a god more mighty even than Love – it will be Bacchus, god of wine. Everyone celebrates this fortunate outcome ('Then mortals be merry').
		51b			
		51c			
		51d	Chorus - All		

References

- Buelow, George J. 1973. "Music, Rhetoric, and the Concept of the Affections: A Selective Bibliography." *Notes* 30/2: 250–259.
- Congreve, William. 1710. *Semele: An Opera*. Edited by Richard Bear. Renaissance Editions, 2001. <<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~rbear/congreve1.html>>.
- Eccles, John. 1707. *Semele: An Opera*. Volume 76 of *Musica Britannica*. Edited by Richard Platt. London: Stainer and Bell, 2000.
- Hicks, Anthony. 2001. "Handel, George Frideric." *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Second Edition*. Eds. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrell. <<http://www.grovemusic.com/>>.
- Kerman, Joseph. 1956. *Opera as Drama*. New York: Knopf.
- Lincoln, Stoddard. 2001. "Eccles, John." *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Second Edition*. Eds. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrell. <<http://www.grovemusic.com/>>.
- Maus, Fred Everett. 1997. "Music as Drama." In *Music and Meaning*, edited by Jenever Robinson, 105–130. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Rooley, Anthony. 2002. "Director's Notes." Program for Florida State Opera Spring 2003 production of Eccles' *Semele*.
- Sadie, Stanley. "Opera Synopses: Semele." Royal Opera House. <<http://www.royalopera.org/Synopses/index.cfm?ccs=77&cs=657>>.