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## Counterpoint in the Classroom: Pedagogical Considerations and a Detailed Review of Two Textbooks

BY SARAH MARLOWE

Green, Douglass M. and Evan Jones. *The Principles and Practice of Modal Counterpoint*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Principles and Practice of Tonal Counterpoint*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Of all the topics taught by theory instructors, counterpoint is perhaps one of the most divergent in terms of pedagogical approach, repertoire discussed, and the intended learning outcomes. Should we teach via the species or “direct” approach? Should we focus on modal or tonal counterpoint? How much analysis and model composition will be included? What rules are favored over others? And the list goes on. Every instructor has their preferences, including the authors of the many popular counterpoint textbooks that are currently available. After experimenting with various methods, one thing I am certain of is that the authors themselves are best at teaching from their respective texts (and I am equally certain that studying with any of them would be wonderful); for the rest of us who teach counterpoint, the importance of finding a textbook that aligns with our own strengths and preferences is crucial if we are to provide convincing instruction for our students.

There are several criteria to consider when determining whether a particular textbook is appropriate for a course.

- Course Design: What type of course is the book intended for and what is the primary learning outcome? What is the general pedagogical approach?
- Target Audience: What is the target audience for the textbook (first-year or third-year undergraduates, or graduate students)? What is the overall content and organization? Do you need a book that begins with introductory material, or do you need a textbook that offers more for the advanced composition student?

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The author is grateful to Rebecca Jemian and William Marvin for their helpful feedback during the writing of this article.

- Supplementary Materials (Musical Examples, Exercises for Assessment, etc.): Does the book provide you, the instructor, with a sufficient number of musical examples and exercises, or will you need supplementary texts, anthologies, and handouts?

With the above criteria in mind, this article reviews two of the most recently published textbooks on counterpoint: *The Principles and Practice of Modal Counterpoint* (2010) and *The Principles and Practice of Tonal Counterpoint* (2015) by Douglass M. Green and Evan Jones. This two-volume project was the *magnum opus* of Douglass Green, who passed away before the works were completed, and Evan Jones was selected to prepare the manuscripts for publication as co-author. The seamless organization and tone of the prose makes it impossible for the reader to decipher the individual contributions of Green and Jones, which attests to the highly compatible pedagogical views shared by both authors.

For the purposes of this review, these volumes will be evaluated primarily as textbooks for single-semester counterpoint courses or for a two-semester sequence for upper level (third- and fourth-year) undergraduate students. In terms of language and presentation, they are perhaps most appropriate for undergraduate students, although the books could also work well for introductory counterpoint courses at the graduate level. There are some similarities in presentation, but the volumes are quite different in many respects and will be summarized in separate sections dedicated to modal and tonal counterpoint pedagogy. While this article focuses specifically on these two texts, other textbooks will be mentioned alongside discussion of important pedagogical concerns involved with teaching counterpoint.

## MODAL COUNTERPOINT

One important factor to consider when selecting a textbook is the pedagogical approach one wishes to take in their counterpoint class. The two main choices are the species approach—a series of graduated exercises in abstract rhythmic relationships set against a fixed melody or *cantus firmus*—or the “direct” approach, which places earlier emphasis on style-specific compositional techniques and idioms. Each approach has benefits and disadvantages.

The species approach has long been praised for its strong pedagogical organization and, whether modal or tonal in nature, species relationships are generic to such a degree that the general aesthetic principles they espouse can be applied to a wide variety of musical styles.<sup>1</sup> Detailed study of each species is designed to sensitize students to the rules of voice leading and dissonance treatment, and this approach has the pedagogical advantage of gradually introducing one new idea at a time. Minimally, students need to read in at least one or, ideally, two clefs as well as know how to analyze melodic and harmonic intervals in order to begin study in species counterpoint. It is often incorporated into the early stages of the undergraduate theory curriculum precisely because it requires minimal knowledge of fundamentals and gradually introduces the rules of voice leading, and thus segues nicely into discussion of harmony and four-part writing. The disadvantage to this approach, particularly in a course devoted purely to the study of counterpoint, is that discussion and mastery of each of the five species can occupy a large portion of the semester, leaving little time for more in-depth study of advanced contrapuntal techniques or stylistic composition projects in various genres. If not complemented with other activities, the species approach has the potential to feel mechanical and mundane and the connection between rule-driven exercises and real musical compositions is potentially missed. Rhythm, in particular, is one feature that receives no attention in species study aside from the discussion of metric placement of consonance and dissonance.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Gauldin, *A Practical Approach to 16<sup>th</sup>-Century Counterpoint*, revised ed. (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 2013), 279. Gauldin provides a detailed overview of species counterpoint, complete with critical discussion of its pedagogical benefits and disadvantages in an appendix to this volume. For more detailed discussion of the species approach, see Ian Bent, "Steps to Parnassus: Contrapuntal Theory in 1725 Precursors and Successors," in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Christensen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 554–602.

<sup>2</sup> Gauldin, *16<sup>th</sup>-Century Counterpoint*, 279. See also Michael Rogers, *Teaching Approaches in Music Theory: An Overview of Pedagogical Philosophies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 66. Rogers writes, "Especially in sixteenth-century style, where durational flow and flexibility are critical, the predictable metric regularity of the early species might stifle the elastic feel for nuances and gentle differences between rhythmic lifts and landing."

The direct approach, on the other hand, skips ahead more quickly with the intention of exploring more nuanced features of a specific style and encourages students to begin composing more immediately. Proponents of the direct approach argue that species counterpoint is “artificial,”<sup>3</sup> “inherently unmusical,”<sup>4</sup> and that species exercises neglect important features of the Renaissance, including “topics of free counterpoint, imitation, and chromaticism” and text setting, among many others.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to the species approach, this method combines the review of voice-leading rules with style-specific guidelines, idiomatic patterns, and contrapuntal techniques as derived from representative works of a particular composer or style.

a. First species counterpoint exercise (adapted from J.J. Fux 1725, p. 47)

c.p. P5 3 3 P5 3 P5 3 3 6 6 P8  
c.f.

b. Direct counterpoint exercise (adapted from Gauldin 2013, Example 3–5)

P8 P5 6 P5 3 6 P5 P1 3 3 3 6 6 3  
6 P5 3 3 3 6 P5 3 6 P5 6 P5 3 3 3 3 P1

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From Gauldin, *A Practical Approach to 16th Century Counterpoint*  
Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., © 2013 all rights reserved

Example 1. Species and direct approaches to teaching modal counterpoint

<sup>3</sup> Gustave Frederic Soderlund, *Direct Approach to Counterpoint in 16<sup>th</sup>-Century Style* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1947), vii.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Benjamin, *The Craft of Modal Counterpoint: A Practical Approach*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), xii.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Gauldin, *16<sup>th</sup>-Century Counterpoint*, viii. Gauldin’s text is perhaps the most even-handed in its discussion of species counterpoint. He also provides a thorough annotated bibliography of counterpoint treatises organized by species and non-species or direct approaches.

Example 1 provides samples of a first species exercise (Fux) and introductory exercise using the direct approach (Gauldin). Both activities feature the exclusive use of consonant intervals, but Example 1b requires the added task of negotiating the rhythmic activity between each of the voices. The latter approach clearly results in solutions that emulate the Renaissance style right from the start, but this type of exercise assumes total command of theory fundamentals including melodic and harmonic intervals, voice-leading rules, dissonance treatment, embellishing tones, and so on, at the start of the semester. In fact, Gauldin's first chapter goes on to introduce passing tones and suspensions immediately after this exercise, which is roughly equivalent to teaching first, second, and fourth species simultaneously. On its own, the approach is quite sophisticated and is therefore best accompanied by introductory material early on, which of course requires an additional textbook or supplementary handouts. Because of the faster pace and added rhythmic complexity, the direct approach is not ideally suited for introductory level theory courses. But it is certainly worth consideration for a class comprised primarily of composition majors eager to write full-length compositions; it is also worth considering for upper-level undergraduates if the format of the course is less conducive to spending a large chunk of time on species counterpoint (a class that meets only once per week, for example).

Personal experience suggests that, regardless of the focus, a combination of both approaches yields the greatest results—all students benefit from at least some species counterpoint study and an introduction to (or review of) voice-leading rules, but it is also important to show them how to identify and apply that knowledge within a real musical context in both analysis and model composition. Furthermore, a combined approach will appeal to varied learning styles in the class: some students enjoy rule-driven exercises, others excel in the more creative application of concepts via model composition exercises, and still others shine when given the opportunity to express their thoughts verbally during class discussion or in written prose.

In *The Principles and Practice of Modal Counterpoint*, Green and Jones take a “modified” species approach and include style-specific composition exercises later in the text. In this way, the general learning outcomes are similar to those of Peter Schubert's

*Modal Counterpoint: Renaissance Style*,<sup>6</sup> although the organization and presentation differs significantly as will be discussed below. What is the “modified” species approach? Traditional species counterpoint textbooks often follow the same presentation as Fux’s *Gradus ad Parnassum*:<sup>7</sup> they present first, second, third, fourth, and fifth (mixed) species in two voices, then follow the same process for three voices, four voices, and so on. Green and Jones present the material in two notably different ways: first, they introduce each species of counterpoint in two and then three voices before moving onto the next;<sup>8</sup> and second, they omit third species altogether and proceed directly from second to fourth species.<sup>9</sup> Fourth species is, in my opinion and apparently the authors’ as well, a more natural outgrowth of second species; the rhythmic patterns are similar and they each focus on only one type of dissonance treatment, whereas third species involves a sudden increase in rhythmic activity combined with multiple idiomatic devices (neighbor tones, double neighbor tones, and *nota cambiata*, among others). The end result of the traditional ordering gives the impression that third species is far more complex than the others. In lieu of a chapter devoted specifically to third species, the authors defer discussion of shorter note values to the style-specific chapters later in the text, which aligns more closely with how proponents of the

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Schubert, *Modal Counterpoint, Renaissance Style*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Johann Joseph Fux, *The Study of Counterpoint from Johann Joseph Fux’s Gradus ad Parnassum*, trans. and ed. Alfred Mann (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1971). Other texts that follow this organization, yet differ in other respects, include Teresa Davidian, *Tonal Counterpoint for the 21<sup>st</sup> -Century Musician* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); Knud Jeppesen, *Counterpoint: The Polyphonic Vocal Style of the Sixteenth Century*, trans. Glen Haydon (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1992); and Peter Schubert, *Modal Counterpoint*.

<sup>8</sup> The same organization is used in Felix Salzer and Carl Schachter, *Counterpoint in Composition: The Study of Voice Leading* (New York: Columbia University Press Morningside Edition, 1989), although this textbook presents species rules in the context of tonal counterpoint.

<sup>9</sup> Evan Jones writes, “I share Professor Green’s conviction that Fux’s third species (four notes against one) should be delayed until after fourth species (syncopes); the introduction of smaller note values thus coincides with the study of melody and rhythm in Palestrina, Lassus, and Victoria.” Green and Jones, *Modal Counterpoint*, xi.

direct approach present the material.<sup>10</sup> Even if learning species counterpoint is the exclusive goal, this reordering of the species is pedagogically sound for the reasons outlined above. But in terms of model composition, reserving discussion of shorter note values for the style-specific chapters also has many advantages. First, placing shorter note values into a stylistic context allows for a more seamless transition from generic species exercises to actual musical composition. Students will have been sufficiently sensitized to the issues surrounding consonance and dissonance treatment with discussion of first, second, and fourth species, and rules regarding other melodic embellishments can then be easily folded into model composition exercises. Second, the third species task of writing four quarter notes per measure emphasizes a regular metric grouping that is otherwise de-emphasized when composing in the Renaissance style, and ultimately reinforces a habit that is stylistically inaccurate. Moreover, discussion of shorter note values pairs nicely with issues concerning text setting; text setting often influences rhythmic decisions and is a crucial factor to consider when composing in the Renaissance style. In the end, providing stylistic context at this stage can help students make more informed decisions about rhythm in their own writing.

One feature of Green and Jones's book that stands apart from many other textbooks is the chronological organization of historical materials. Whether the topic is the species or direct approach, most textbooks present the rules for writing in the late Renaissance style as a synthesis of multiple sources, with additional historical context provided where appropriate. Green and Jones present voice-leading rules in a similar fashion, yet they alternate species counterpoint chapters with style-specific chapters that span several centuries worth of music including Gregorian chant, Middle Ages (organum, conductus, rhythmic modes), 14<sup>th</sup>-century textures (canon, hocket, and fauxbourdon), and finally secular and sacred works from the Renaissance (rondeau, mass, parody and paraphrase technique, and mensuration canons). Inclusion of these chapters provides better context for students and could be equally useful as a supplement to a history survey course, assuming there is time for theoretical points of discussion.

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<sup>10</sup> Texts that take a direct approach without discussing species counterpoint first include Benjamin, *The Craft of Modal Counterpoint*; Gauldin, *16<sup>th</sup>-Century Counterpoint*; and Soderlund, *Direct Approach to Counterpoint*.



On the whole, the textbook organization is effective for many reasons. First, interweaving analysis chapters with the more technical species chapters allows time to digest specific voice-leading rules while simultaneously providing interesting analytic points for discussion; this, in turn, breaks up the routine of continued written counterpoint practice. Second, the chronological ordering of the analysis chapters allows students to experience a gradual transformation of contrapuntal practice over a large time span, resulting in their acquisition of a broader range of repertoire including a variety of composers and musical examples drawn from both sacred and secular works. Third, skipping third species and instead introducing shorter note values in combination with style-specific considerations, including text setting, helps minimize redundancy and provides a more natural transition into model composition. The model composition chapters that follow are likewise presented in a complementary ordering to the species sections; compositions in two voices (*Bicinium*) are followed by selected works by Palestrina, Lassus, and Victoria in three and, then, four or more voices.

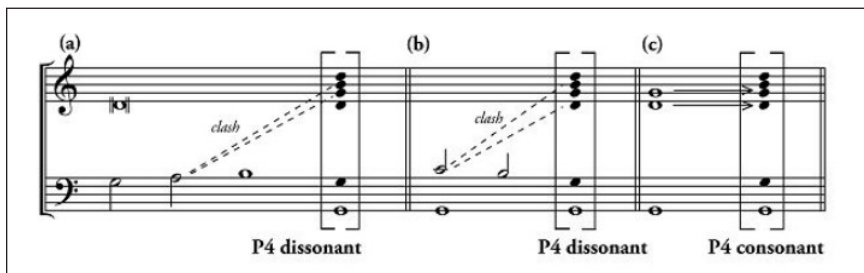
The conflict between the historical chapters and surrounding species counterpoint discussions creates difficulties of organization that are not entirely solved within the book. The species counterpoint rules are taught via the late 16<sup>th</sup>-century model, yet works introduced in the earlier historical chapters will not necessarily adhere to those rules and principles. The authors do not shy away from pointing out these discrepancies, but additional reminders to the student would be helpful. For instance, in the chapter 6 discussion of a 14<sup>th</sup>-century work by Machaut, the authors note, "Parallel unisons, fifths, and octaves continue to appear frequently. There seems to be no feeling [sic] against the doubling of the leading tone, which itself causes parallelism in most cases."<sup>11</sup> Without additional reminders, students could potentially forget that these works do not yet reflect the rules that they are studying in their written exercises.

In general, the authors provide more explanation of theoretical and historical concepts than are found in many other counterpoint texts, and their openness about concepts that are frequently taken for granted in the classroom is refreshing. For instance, many counterpoint textbooks begin by listing the harmonic consonances and dissonances and immediately progress to voice-leading rules, examples, and exercises without explaining *why* certain intervals

<sup>11</sup> Green and Jones, *Modal Counterpoint*, 58.

are considered consonant or dissonant. In contrast to this approach, Green and Jones begin their introduction of two-voice counterpoint with brief mention of the changing definitions of consonance and dissonance over time. Many students are willing to accept lists of rules and follow them, but taking the time to explicate *why* things are a certain way can appeal to some of the more critical thinkers in the class and is additionally useful for instructors who have less experience with the history of music theory.

That said, no text can anticipate every student question, and instructors should be prepared to research topics a bit more fully before discussing them in class. Green and Jones's explanation for why the perfect fourth is a dissonant interval is one such topic. After a brief explanation of how consonant intervals were derived from the small-numbered ratios within the overtone series, the authors take on the challenge of explaining why the perfect fourth is viewed as a dissonance above the lowest sounding voice. Most textbooks simply state that the fourth is dissonant without further explanation, but this is not always convincing for students—*why* are the perfect unison, perfect octave, and perfect fifth treated as consonances and not the perfect fourth? Green and Jones observe, "the perfect fourth has, over the years, been in the ambiguous position of being consonant in some contexts and dissonant in others."<sup>12</sup> But their reliance on the overtone series as explanation for why the perfect fourth is treated as a dissonance above the bass in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century style is a bit unclear.



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Example 2. Explanation of the perfect fourth as dissonance (Green and Jones 2011, Ex. 4–3)

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

Example 2 illustrates their explanation via the triad that results from the first six partials of the overtone series. The fourths in examples *a* and *b* are dissonant with the surrounding sonority, whereas the fourth in example *c* is consonant. The authors admit, “undoubtedly the explanation given above is both incomplete and over-simplified. It is offered as at least a partial explanation for the fact that the perfect fourth, when it is formed from the lowest voice upwards has been usually (but not always) treated as a dissonance.”<sup>13</sup> To be sure, this explanation is a bit incomplete and oversimplified, and, for the student who reads more closely, it will still not be entirely convincing. The visual distinction between “consonant” and “dissonant” in their example has potential to be misread and misunderstood, and could lead a student to infer that the perfect fourth is always allowed as long as it is consonant with the surrounding harmony. In place of this, as well as their comment that the perfect fourth was “perceived as so unstable as to be for all intents and purposes a dissonant interval,” it may prove simpler to observe that, unlike the other perfect intervals, the perfect fourth is not generated by the fundamental and is therefore treated as a dissonant interval against the bass.<sup>14</sup>

The final chapter, “The Rise of Tonality in the Seventeenth Century” is a welcome addition.<sup>15</sup> While there are no full-length music examples included, and those presented are not as clearly annotated as earlier examples in the text, the chapter discusses

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>14</sup> Salzer and Schachter discuss the dissonant perfect fourth in terms of a historic shift of emphasis in the Renaissance: “when the third acquired consonant status, the fourth began to function as an interval with dissonant tendencies; this reversal of roles is already clearly in evidence in the music of fourteenth-century Italy.” Salzer and Schachter, *Counterpoint in Composition*, 15. But a purely historic view can also pose problems; although the perfect fourth was used in *organum*, for instance, it still posed problems that the perfect fifth did not. See Sarah Fuller, “Theoretical Foundations of Early Organum Theory,” *Acta Musicologica* 53/Fasc. 1 (Jan. –Jun., 1981), 52–84; and “Organum-discantus-contrapunctus in the Middle Ages,” in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Christensen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 477–502.

<sup>15</sup> Of the textbooks on 16<sup>th</sup>-century counterpoint cited in this article, Gauldin’s *16<sup>th</sup>-Century Counterpoint* is the only other book to include this topic.

important transitions that occur at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century: the *seconda pratica* (and its drastic changes in dissonance treatment), and developments in instrumental genres. Using continuous variations as the primary compositional genre in this chapter, Green and Jones introduce the concepts of rhythmic diminution and the importance of considering implied harmony when composing melodic lines. The shift from vocal to instrumental repertoire, as well as from the modal system to major-minor tonality, is more implicit than fully expressed, but prioritizing linear over vertical thinking prepares students well for study of Baroque compositional practices.<sup>16</sup> Chapters like this, as well as the brief Epilogue at the end of the text, suggest to the student that the topics they study can, and should, be applied to other musical styles outside of class as well. This volume will either segue nicely into a second-semester course on tonal counterpoint or, for those using the text for a single-semester course, will serve to end the semester by positioning the detailed study of modal counterpoint within a broader musical context, raising important theoretical and stylistic questions to explore after the class has ended.

The general pedagogical approach conveyed in this text is quite compelling as a whole. First, it is presented musically: many of the species chapters extract voice-leading rules from analysis exercises, and the authors are emphatic about singing and performing as often as possible in an activity referred to as “sing-play-sing” (sight-read, play on an instrument to check for accuracy, and then sing again to reinforce the sound). Second, in terms of assessment, most chapters include questions for self-testing, guided reading, and analysis, as well as a sufficient number of written exercises so the instructor does not need to supplement with much (if any) of their own material. Third, model composition assignments are detailed and user-friendly, and they are especially helpful for instructors who may have less experience teaching these concepts. Fourth, counterpoint rules are often framed positively— “only consonances occur as harmonic intervals” or “oblique motion is always good,” etc.— which appeals to this author, who finds it much more encouraging to tell students what they *can* do as opposed to what that *cannot*

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<sup>16</sup> Two useful supplementary sources on the transition from the church modes to the major-minor system are Joel Lester, *Between Modes and Keys: German Theory 1592-1802* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1989); and part I of Alfred Mann, *The Study of Fugue* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc.) 1987.

do.<sup>17</sup> Next, each species chapter is summarized with a succinct general “principle” followed by a section titled “practice” which involves more nuanced discussion of what might happen in a real musical context. And finally, detailed analytical discussions of full-length works are provided in almost every chapter. The inclusion of several full-length works additionally saves the instructor from having to produce an enormous amount of supplementary material.

The main drawback to this text, however, is in its usefulness as a resource outside of class. Finding definitions of specific terms and concepts within the book is not always easy as many terms highlighted in bold print within the chapters are not included in the index (the “leading-tone cadence” is one example).<sup>18</sup> It would be preferable to include a glossary of terms at the end of the text along with an appendix that summarizes various contrapuntal devices described throughout the book. A list of anthologies where instructors can find additional musical examples, as well as suggested resources pertaining to specific topics in the endnotes (in addition to the general bibliography), would also be helpful. The amount of detail provided within each chapter is sufficient for most students, but instructors and more serious students of counterpoint could benefit from further guidance if they wish to seek out more information on a particular concept.

## TONAL COUNTERPOINT

While the species approach remains a valid option for teaching tonal counterpoint,<sup>19</sup> most authors opt for the direct approach, and

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<sup>17</sup> Green and Jones, *Modal Counterpoint*, 39.

<sup>18</sup> Although not the fault of the authors, the electronic version of the modal counterpoint volume is highly problematic in that the Table of Contents lacks links to individual chapters, and there is no way to scroll to a specific page number.

<sup>19</sup> Teresa Davidian, *Tonal Counterpoint*; and Salzer and Schachter, *Counterpoint in Composition*, use the species approach for tonal counterpoint. The direct approach is used in Thomas Benjamin, *The Craft of Tonal Counterpoint*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Routledge, 2003); Robert Gauldin, *A Practical Approach to Eighteenth-Century Counterpoint*, revised ed. (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 2013); Kent Kennan, *Counterpoint*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999); and Peter Schubert and Christoph Neidhöfer, *Baroque Counterpoint* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006).

some supplement it with studies in thoroughbass, focusing on four-part harmonization at the earliest stages of study.<sup>20</sup> From a historical point of view, the thoroughbass method is best suited to teaching Baroque counterpoint; it is reflective of the written score for works from the period and was a prominent pedagogical approach during that time (J.S. Bach was a famous advocate of this approach).<sup>21</sup> This method, also known as *basso continuo*, emphasizes the realization of figured bass notation to complete an implied harmonic progression and it was taught within the framework of chorale harmonization. The approach is most appropriate for upper-level undergraduate students who have completed their core theory sequence, as they will already be familiar with tonal voice leading and figured bass notation.

The danger to this approach, however, lies in the potential to place too much emphasis on the vertical sonority, especially if the course aims to focus on the linear and imitative textures of the Baroque style, in particular.<sup>22</sup> Robert Gauldin recommends consideration of functional harmonic progressions at cadence points, where we do hear functional predominant–dominant–tonic, but cautions the reader against otherwise applying functional harmonic analysis to music from the Baroque era. He explains that not all vertical sonorities are of equal structural importance, and there are other passages where “normal” functional progressions

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<sup>20</sup> In addition to Green and Jones, Schubert and Neidhöfer are the most explicit about using this approach, although considerations of figured bass realization and chorale harmonizations are employed by Gauldin as well.

<sup>21</sup> For more on the thoroughbass method in counterpoint pedagogy, see the section on “Baroque Music Theory,” in Robert Wason, “*Musica practica: music theory as pedagogy*,” in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Christensen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 46–77.

<sup>22</sup> This is a valid concern when teaching species counterpoint as well. It is not uncommon for students to become increasingly focused on harmonic intervals, often to the detriment of the quality of their melodic contours, in an effort to produce a correct solution. The issue is compounded in the thoroughbass method, however, as students will understandably make connections between thoroughbass exercises and harmonic voice-leading exercises from previous theory study, exercises that often require labeling harmonies with functional Roman numerals and thus encourage vertical thinking.

do not occur.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, Peter Schubert and Christoph Neidhöfer explain, “traditional harmony teaching is more applicable to late eighteenth-century music in melody-and-accompaniment texture than to [Baroque] music.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, while the thoroughbass method appears to be more closely akin to the part-writing exercises students complete in their core theory study, the choice of repertoire will determine to what degree harmonic function should or should not be a consideration.

*The Principles and Practice of Tonal Counterpoint* is the companion volume to the modal counterpoint text discussed above. While similar in tone to Green and Jones’s modal counterpoint text, the approach and organization is somewhat different from the earlier volume. The text focuses on the Baroque style and follows the thoroughbass method, but the first chapter begins with a fast-paced overview of species counterpoint. In adapting the species approach to Baroque stylistic norms, the authors use chorale melodies as cantus firmus melodies and highlight the general principles of each species within the context of chorale harmonization. First, second, and fourth species are particularly well suited to four-part chorale textures, and the discussion of species counterpoint combined with study of chorales provides a helpful framework for reviewing the basic rules of voice leading.

Although the species chapter is intended as a quick-paced review of voice leading and not the focus of this volume, users may wish to defer assigning portions of the species discussion until slightly later in the text, for just as in the modal counterpoint volume, introducing third species too early can create unnecessary complications for the students. Personal experience suggests that the task of harmonizing a chorale melody (first species) and including melodic embellishments (usually second and fourth species) provides a more suitable introduction to the discussion of tonal harmony and voice leading; using more rhythmically active lines to imply harmony (third species) should be saved for a separate discussion of the chorale prelude (Chapter 3 in Green and Jones’s book), where more complex textures are meant to maintain a similar harmonic outline to the aforementioned chorale harmonizations.

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<sup>23</sup> Gauldin, *18<sup>th</sup>-Century Counterpoint*, 47.

<sup>24</sup> Schubert and Neidhöfer, *Baroque Counterpoint*, 5.

With the species overview and voice-leading rules in place, Chapter 2 begins the thoroughbass method of counterpoint training. “There is a risk, however, that exercises done via the species approach may seem more rigid and artificial than is musically desirable. For that reason, although we will begin our study within species counterpoint, we will soon endeavor to imitate the contrapuntal style of the great composers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries more directly.”<sup>25</sup> Example 3 provides two excerpts illustrating Green and Jones’s approach to chorale harmonization. In Example 3a, after determining what types of cadences close each phrase, they provide a first species harmonization (a bass line with figured bass to indicate the implied harmonies). Example 3b then demonstrates how to elaborate the bass voice using principles discussed in the previous chapter on species counterpoint. Inner voices would then be supplied and embellished accordingly.

a. Identify cadences and add bass line and figures in first species (excerpt adapted from Examples 2–6 and 2–7).

The musical notation for Example 3a consists of a single staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. The melody is written in a simple, stepwise fashion. Below the staff, figured bass notation is provided for each measure. The figures are: P8 3, P5 3, P8 3 3, P5 P5, 6 P8 6 7 10, 10 P8 6 5, and P8. Brackets below the figures indicate cadences: a 'plagal' cadence under the third and fourth measures, and an 'authentic cadence in V' under the sixth and seventh measures.

b. Embellishing the bass line with notes of adjacency (excerpt adapted from Example 2–8)

The musical notation for Example 3b consists of a single staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. The melody is written in a simple, stepwise fashion. Below the staff, figured bass notation is provided for each measure. The figures are: P5, 3, 3, P5, 3, P5, 3, 3, 6, 6, and P8.

Example 3. First stages in chorale harmonization (Green and Jones 2015)  
 © 2015 From *The Principles and Practice of Tonal Counterpoint* by Douglass M. Green and Evan Jones. Reproduced by permission of Taylor and Francis Group, LLC, a division of Informa plc.

<sup>25</sup> Green and Jones, *Tonal Counterpoint*, 1.



The shift in pedagogical approach with this volume is useful for several reasons: first, if used as a companion to the modal counterpoint textbook, in-depth discussion of species counterpoint is unnecessary as it is discussed extensively in the earlier volume; second, assuming the focus is Baroque-style composition, the thoroughbass method is more stylistically appropriate and allows for the inclusion of real musical examples for written practice; and third, it makes more pedagogical sense to appeal to skills that students have already learned in their core theory classes and that more quickly lead to the task of model composition.

Like the *Modal Counterpoint* volume, each chapter of *Tonal Counterpoint* is devoted to a specific type of composition (chorale harmonization, chorale prelude, two-part inventions, rounds and canons, and fugues). These chapters alternate with general discussions of theoretical principles that gain prominence in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (diminution, sequences, invertible counterpoint, imitative textures, and so on) but the pace feels faster, perhaps partly due to the more advanced nature of these theoretical discussions in comparison to the generic species exercises. Depending on the number of class meetings, some instructors might find it best to omit certain topics, or to periodically place greater emphasis on analysis, to allow time for more detailed writing in fewer textures. Regardless, there is ample material for a single semester.

In an effort to review concepts “without duplicating a course in tonal harmony,”<sup>26</sup> abstract exercises are replaced by excerpts from the literature (or exercises that mimic real musical textures), but they are appropriately tailored so that even those with little to no compositional experience can provide well-formed solutions. For example, the authors introduce the concept of figured bass realization (which is essentially a review of voice leading) within the context of a chorale harmonization by J.S. Bach (the melody, bass line, and figures are provided, and students are asked to supply the inner voices).<sup>27</sup> Although essentially no different from a generic figured bass exercise in terms of the requisite skill-set, examples like this provide a helpful review of tonal voice leading while generating more musically satisfying end products.

Nearly every chapter closes with a “creative study” that requires detailed analytical or compositional exploration of the theme or a

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, xi.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., see Example 2-1 on p. 18.

variation from J.S. Bach's Goldberg Variations (BWV 988). While the tasks might be quite challenging for some undergraduate students, they could perhaps be incorporated into the curriculum as group activities or as projects for advanced undergraduate and graduate students. The benefit of these studies is that students gain deeper familiarity with a single work over the span of the entire semester, and each study is thoughtfully tailored to reinforce concepts introduced earlier in its corresponding chapter.

The breadth of styles represented in this text contrasts with many other tonal counterpoint textbooks. The text not only covers eighteenth- and nineteenth-century contrapuntal procedures, but its final chapter, "The Twentieth Century and Beyond," includes 20th- and 21st-century composers (Xenakis, Hindemith, Bartók, Messiaen, and Schoenberg, among others) whose works reflect the general contrapuntal principles covered in earlier chapters. While no text can sufficiently cover everything, I applaud these authors for highlighting contrapuntal concepts as they appear in later styles. As with the earlier volume, the implication that the materials can be extended to later styles provides essential context for students.

A few areas in the text could benefit from greater clarification and expansion. In terms of harmony, there is a slight conflict between the analysis and composition exercises. In earlier chapters, Green and Jones ask students to analyze harmony with Roman numerals for the purpose of emphasizing harmonic rhythm and tonicization of closely related keys. However, they also note, "chorale melodies are harmonized not by choosing a series of chords, but by writing a coherent bass line to accompany the melody, and only then filling in inner voices that produce chords... . For the most part, it is only necessary to think of specific chords at cadences, and it is best to plan these out first."<sup>28</sup> The latter point is crucial when composing in the Baroque style, in particular, as there are often many vertical sonorities that occur purely as a result of linear motion between various voices. The authors' reasons for asking students to perform traditional Roman numeral analysis are clear, but the danger is that students will remain overly focused on the vertical sonorities rather than on individual lines in their own compositions as well. Instead, it is best to draw students' attention to the previous quotation and the authors' effective discussion for "adding a bass line to a chorale melody," as it properly demonstrates the process of identifying and establishing cadential goals, focusing on well-formed first species

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 27.

counterpoint between the outer voices, and then adding melodic embellishments.<sup>29</sup>

Some of the later chapters offer fewer written activities in favor of more detailed analytic discussion, and the written exercises that are included do not receive the same detailed attention as earlier chapters (or the earlier volume). For example, the written exercises in Chapter 6, on two-part inventions, include only brief verbal instructions to “compose the first few measures of four different two-part inventions,” and “write a complete invention based on your favorite fragment.”<sup>30</sup> The full instructions from Green and Jones are only slightly longer than what is included here. As someone who includes model composition of two-part inventions in my tonal counterpoint course, I find that composing an opening motive presents the one of the greatest challenges for most students. Establishing guidelines for how to compose a suitable motive or, as some other textbooks have done, providing a series of sample motives, is often necessary for students to get started.<sup>31</sup>

Similar issues occur later when students are instructed to “write a round” after encountering only two musical examples in the chapter and with no explicit instruction for how to approach the task, or to “compose a fugue subject that can be used in stretto” with no guidelines for how to do so. In these cases, the beginning counterpoint student is left behind in what seems to be an attempt to appeal to the more advanced composition majors. This is not to say one must be a composer in order to successfully complete the activities, but the lack of instructional detail in these sections stands out as compared to other chapters, which offer more thorough explanations. One exception to this critique is their instructions for composing a perpetual canon. The instructions clearly demonstrate how to plan the cadences, which is the most challenging aspect of composing in this contrapuntal genre.

Although less explicit compositional guidance is offered, the chapter on fugue provides a substantial amount of detail, presented engagingly and appropriately for undergraduate readers. Green and Jones’s decision to introduce tonal answers first is intriguing.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 27–30.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>31</sup> Schubert and Neidhöfer, *Baroque Counterpoint*, 297 ff.; and Gauldin, *18<sup>th</sup>-Century Counterpoint*, 109ff. Both texts offer helpful instruction along these lines.

The insistence that all fugue subjects begin on  $\hat{1}$  or  $\hat{5}$  in order to properly establish the key encourages students to view fugue subjects in terms of their implied harmonies, which is an extremely important aspect of tonal fugue. Although a step-by-step process is not supplied, greater attention is given to the concept of composing a fugue subject and countersubject through extensive analytic discussion, and their discussion of composing a countersubject reinforces the concept of “complementary rhythm” between the voices. If desired, instructors can extract a step-by-step process out of this discussion, and repurpose earlier exercises intended to practice composing fugal answers for practice composing countersubjects as well. More advanced topics such as double and triple fugues, multiple fugues, counterfugues, and fugal textures within larger forms are likely too big to cover in depth within the span of a single semester, but their inclusion among the analysis discussions, along with examples by later composers like Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms, provides a valuable introduction to the tremendous variety and complexity of this contrapuntal genre.

Other important topics are surprisingly absent from this volume. First, cadences are mentioned in passing but there is no explicit outline of the various cadence types. It was also surprising to find no mention of compound (polyphonic) melody or Baroque dance suites, the former being an important feature of many Baroque melodies and the latter being a very approachable style to emulate in model composition.<sup>32</sup> Finally, there is no index in this volume, which (like the modal counterpoint volume) poses challenges for using it outside of the classroom setting.

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<sup>32</sup> The minuet and sarabande are the most manageable for students new to the task of model composition; other dance types like the allemande, courante, and gigue are best left for the more advanced composition students. Assuming students are advanced enough that the latter are viable options, I recommend the following project: break the class up into small groups, asking each group to agree on a key and each student to select a dance type. The result is the creation (and ideally in-class performance) of complete dance suites, which provides substantially more variety than, say, a project where everyone composes and performs a minuet.

## CONCLUSION

This article raises several important issues that one should consider when teaching a course in counterpoint. If the end goal is to teach general voice-leading principles and musical aesthetics, then species counterpoint can be very effective. Since the approach is stylistically generic, it can lead to important analytic discussion of several centuries worth of music. If, however, the aim is detailed study of a specific musical style, a direct approach will effectively facilitate more immediate entry into the activity of model composition. Regardless, either approach is best complemented with at least some discussion of the other. Once the repertoire and pedagogical approach are established, the instructor is left with the task of choosing a textbook that aligns best with their plan for the course. Consideration of audience is essential, not only in terms of the general layout and presentation of material, but also in terms of the content covered within the book (such as the balance of introductory versus advanced topics, for instance). And from a practical standpoint, how useful will the book be after the semester has ended?

The two volumes by Douglass M. Green and Evan Jones incorporate both the species and direct methods for teaching counterpoint, although discussion of species counterpoint is more limited in the tonal counterpoint volume in favor of the thoroughbass method. For the most part, the presentation of material is clear, informative, and friendly in tone; and the written exercises are ideally suited to the upper-level undergraduate student. Supplementary materials, including detailed analyses of full-length compositions, are a useful contribution, and many activities outlined in each volume can lead toward additional take-home activities. The way both volumes conclude with a chapter that discusses “what comes next” helps situate counterpoint study within a larger continuous framework. The tonal counterpoint volume will require instructors to provide supplementary explanations and discussion of missing topics; hopefully a later edition will fill these pedagogical gaps. The clear instruction provided in earlier written activities should be matched in later chapters involving advanced contrapuntal topics. However, the few drawbacks outlined in this review are minimal as compared to the imaginative organization and overall content provided by the authors. These new counterpoint texts can certainly be counted among the many other fine options currently available; it is simply a matter of finding the approach that best aligns with your own.

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