This volume has been long awaited by scholars of Latin poetry, and it does not disappoint. The first separate and full commentary in English on this crucial last book of the poem for over half a century is doubly welcome, since it is abundantly clear that Tarrant (T.) has thought hard and long about every aspect of the book and the poem over many years, and the results are tangibly rich and valuable. As T. tellingly states (44), “the commentary form provides some protection against tendentious reading or at least makes it harder to present such readings without the fact becoming obvious through significant omissions or overinterpretations”, and this commentary is a model of such careful and judicious interpretation.

The introduction combines balance and compression, packing a good deal into its fifty pages. It identifies some crucial themes in the book (delay and suspense, the link of the ending with Romulus’ founding fratricide, echoes of Roman civil war, the preparation for events after the poem’s close, the centrality of Turnus, doubling of scenes and themes). Its lapidary style means that it will be mined for examination quotations, e.g. 12: “Turnus is obviously on the wrong side of history, but that does not make him a bad person”. Its discussion of the poem’s famously controversial end shows particular balance and sensitivity: on the one hand, T. is clear that the killing of Turnus can be “amply justified” according to the contemporary Roman value-system, while on the other he is convinced that the end of Turnus is not presented in an “unproblematic” way. This puts him in a moderate middle position between those who believe that the killing is morally unjustified and those who believe it is simply praiseworthy. He recognises that Aeneas’ obligation to Pallas and Evander demands Turnus’ death (22), but is disturbed at Aeneas’ loss of emotional control. Here one could add that this loss of control could say something positive about Aeneas’ character: it is important that he is incapable of cold-blooded calculation of duty and needs emotional arousal in order to kill. Stoics might blame his loss of control, but Aristotle might have applauded his righteous anger.

This is not a critical edition, but given T.’s distinction as a textual critic there are naturally matters of textual interest and judgement, especially in reaction to Conte’s interesting recent Teubner text. Like Courtney and others, T. believes that editors have been too respectful of the Vergilian vulgate, and he is not afraid to point out problems. At 161-2 Interea reges, ingenti mole Latinus / quadriiugo uexitur curru he rightly sees that ingenti mole is difficult, but this could be solved by reading the genitive quadriiugi…currus (my suggestion) in...
162 for the transmitted ablative, which then gives the phrase a clear construction; at 389 he questions the unusual singular _latebram_ (I would indeed read the normal _latebras_ with M), and at 648-9 _sancta ad vos anima et istius inscia culpae / descendam magnorum haud umquam indignus avorum_ he rightly sees the combination in 648 of two unusual features (hiatus and lengthening) as suspicious. At 605 he prefers the directly transmitted and unexceptional _flavos_ to the archaic _floros_, ‘fair’, found in the ancient commentators, but many might concur with Conte’s preference for the latter as _lectio difficilior_ despite its source; at 790 T. is clearly right in preferring _certamine_ from the same source to the generally transmitted _certamina_, a poor construction syntactically and an easy corruption. At 882-4 he agrees with Ribbeck’s excision of these three lines, with some justification: they are repetitive and Conte’s argument that this is tragic amplitude of style can be assailed.

The commentary is full of excellent notes on all aspects of Vergilian language and style. Especially good are the detailed analyses of the book’s many similes, carefully tracing their literary origins and narrative effects; T. is clearly aware (see 527) of what David West has called “transfusion”, by which the imagery of the simile spills over into the context (or vice versa), but occasionally more can be said in this direction (e.g. _acuit_ at 108 clearly picks up the bull-image of 103-6 with its sharpening of horns, 589 _castra_ plainly looks to the military _comparandum_, and 756 _clamor_ recalls the just-finished hunting-simile). There is splendid material on technical features, e.g. _epanalepsis_ (546-7, 673-4). Neat intratextual echoes within the poem are constantly detected: the fall of Latinus’ city echoes that of Troy (569), Turnus’ address of his sister looks back to those made to their sisters by the similarly doomed Dido and Camilla (632), and Jupiter’s interaction with his wife Juno recalls that with his daughter Venus in Book 1 (829). Interesting intertextual characterisations are pointed out: Turnus evokes Sophocles’ Antigone (676-80), Juturna a character in Bion (879-81). Poetic word order is often well treated, but more could perhaps be said about the careful and expressive distribution of proper names in the hexameter: at 10.83 giver and receiver of a gift neatly appear framing the line, at 137 attackers and defenders are set out in a chiastic frame bracketed by names (Troumque _acies urbemque Latini_), while at 580 the two opposing kings’ names frame the line. Proper names are rightly often commented on for their semantic value, an important element of ornamentation in Vergilian battle-narrative, but again this could be extended: at 304 the name of the herdsman Alsus may allude to Greek _alsos_, grove, his swift pursuer Podalirius to _pous_, foot.

Narrative technique is carefully observed in the segmentation of the story: for example, at 103-6 the excellent point is made that this opening section (1-106) is bookended by animal similes for Turnus. T. is also commendably