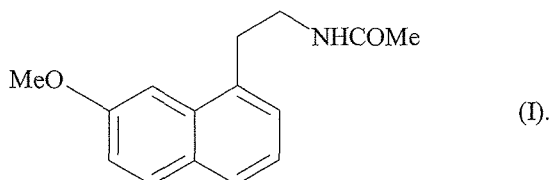


PROCESS AND INTERMEDIATES FOR SYNTHESIZING AGOMELATINE

The present invention relates to a new process for the industrial synthesis of agomelatine, or *N*-[2-(7-methoxy-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide, of formula (I):



Agomelatine, or *N*-[2-(7-methoxy-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide, has valuable pharmacological properties.

5 It has, in fact, the double characteristic of being, on the one hand, an agonist of receptors of the melatoninergetic system and, on the other hand, an antagonist of the 5-HT_{2C} receptor. These properties provide it with activity in the central nervous system and, more especially, in the treatment of major depression, seasonal affective disorder, sleep disorders, cardiovascular pathologies, pathologies of the digestive system, insomnia and
10 fatigue due to jet-lag, appetite disorders and obesity.

Agomelatine, its preparation and its use in therapeutics have been described in European patent specifications EP 0 447 285 and EP 1 564 202.

In view of the pharmaceutical value of this compound, it has been important to be able to produce it using an effective industrial synthesis process which is readily transferable to
15 the industrial scale and which provides agomelatine in a good yield and with excellent purity.

Patent specification EP 0 447 285 describes production of agomelatine in eight steps starting from 7-methoxy-1-tetralone.

In patent specification EP 1 564 202, the Applicant developed a new, much more effective
20 and industrialisable synthesis route in only four steps starting from 7-methoxy-1-tetralone

that makes it possible to obtain agomelatine in highly reproducible manner in a well-defined crystalline form.

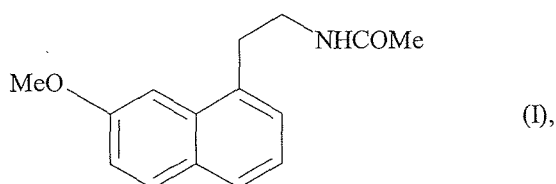
However, the search for new synthesis routes, especially starting from starting materials that are less costly than 7-methoxy-1-tetralone, is currently still relevant.

5 The Applicant has continued his investigations and has developed a new process for the synthesis of agomelatine starting from 1-(4-methoxyphenyl)-4-penten-1-one and a xanthate compound: these new starting materials have the advantage of being simple and readily obtainable in large quantities at less cost.

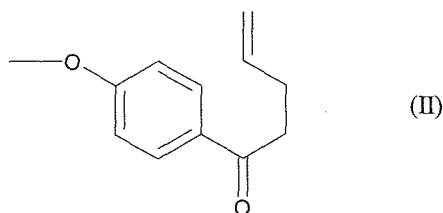
10 This synthesis route is based on the performance of free radical reactions that are not very commonly used but are nevertheless very effective. Converting these reactions to the industrial scale using continuous-flow reactors is promising as it becomes simpler to control propagation of the chain reaction.

15 This new process moreover makes it possible to obtain agomelatine in reproducible manner and without requiring laborious purification, with a purity that is compatible with its use as a pharmaceutical active ingredient. Indeed, agomelatine can accordingly be synthesised in 6 steps in the course of which only one of the intermediates is isolated.

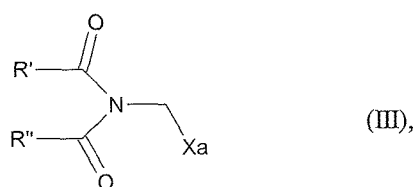
More specifically, the present invention relates to a process for the industrial synthesis of the compound of formula (I):



which process is characterised in that 1-(4-methoxyphenyl)-4-penten-1-one of formula (II):

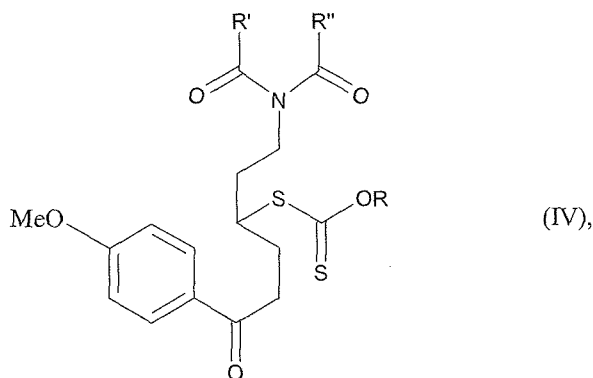


20 is reacted, in the presence of a free radical initiator with a compound of formula (III):



wherein R' and R'', which may be the same or different, each represent a linear or branched (C₁-C₆)alkyl group or R' and R'' together form a (C₂-C₃)alkylene chain, it being possible for the ring thereby formed to be fused with a phenyl group, and Xa represents a group -S-C(S)-OR in which R represents a linear or branched (C₁-C₆)alkyl group,

5 to yield the adduct of formula (IV):

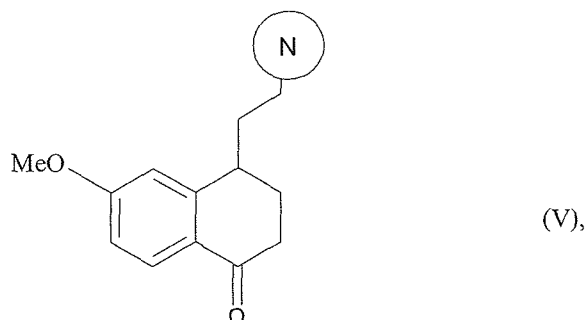


wherein R, R' and R'' are as defined hereinbefore,

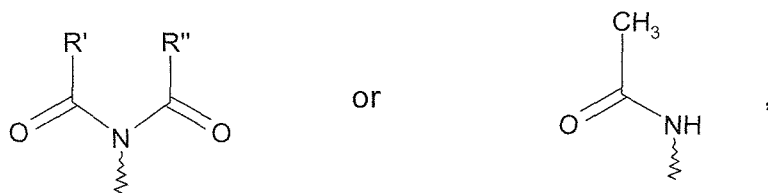
it being possible for the compound of formula (IV) optionally to be isolated,

the amine function of which may optionally be deprotected and converted into an acetamide function,

10 which is subjected to a cyclisation reaction in the presence of a free radical initiator to form the compound of formula (V):



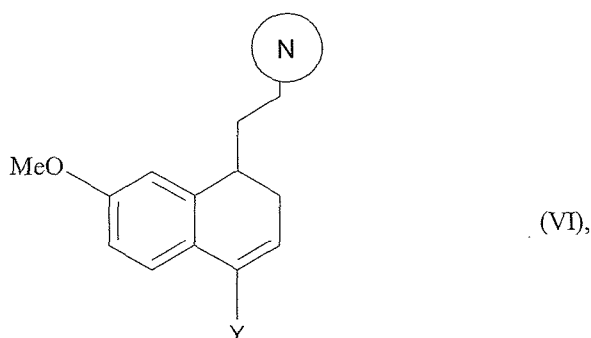
it being understood that the group denotes a protected amine function defined as follows:



wherein R' and R'' are as defined hereinbefore,

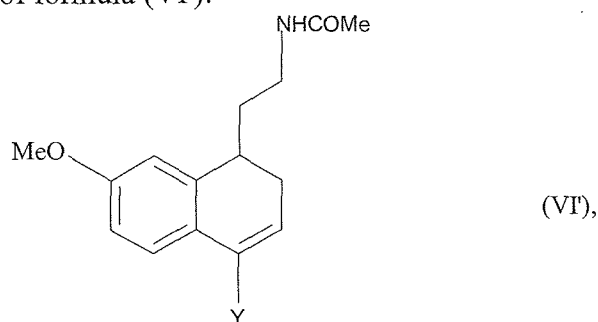
the amine function of which compound of formula (V) may optionally be deprotected,

said compound of formula (V) is either subjected to reduction-esterification followed by dehydration or converted into a vinyl halide to yield the compound of formula (VI):



- 5 wherein Y represents a halogen atom (referred to as X hereinbelow) or a hydrogen atom, the  group being as defined hereinbefore,

the protected amine function of which compound of formula (VI) is converted into an acetamide function where applicable, i.e. when that conversion has not been carried out earlier, to yield the compound of formula (VI'):

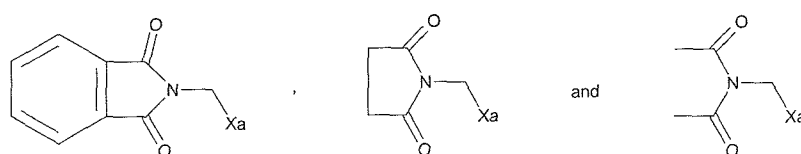


- 10 wherein Y is as defined hereinbefore,

which is finally subjected to an aromatisation reaction to yield the compound of formula (I), which is isolated in the form of a solid.

The compound of formula (II) is accessible to the person skilled in the art by means of conventional chemical reactions and/or chemical reactions described in the literature (Pattisson, V.A. *et al.*, *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* **1962**, *84*, 4295).

Preferred compounds of formula (III) are:



wherein Xa = -S-C(S)-OR is as defined hereinbefore.

In a preferred Xa group, R represents an ethyl group.

In the processes according to the invention, initiation of the free radical reactions is carried out by thermal means. Preferably, the reaction mixture is heated to a temperature of from 50°C to 140°C.

Peroxides are free radical initiators that are especially suitable for carrying out the step of addition of the compound of formula (II) to the compound of formula (III), or for performing cyclisation of the compound of formula (IV) to form the compound of formula (V). By way of example, there may be mentioned, especially, diisobutyl peroxide, cumyl peroxyneodecanoate, *tert*-amyl peroxyneodecanoate, di(2-ethylhexyl) peroxydicarbonate, *tert*-butyl peroxyneodecanoate, dibutyl peroxydicarbonate, dicetyl peroxydicarbonate, dimyristyl peroxydicarbonate, *tert*-butyl peroxyneohexanoate, *tert*-amyl peroxyneohexanoate, didecanoyl peroxide, *tert*-amyl peroxy-2-ethylhexanoate, *tert*-butyl peroxyisobutyrate, 1,4-di(*tert*-butylperoxycarbonyl)cyclohexane, *tert*-butyl peroxyacetate, *tert*-butyl peroxybenzoate, di-*tert*-amyl peroxide, *tert*-butyl cumyl peroxide, bis(*tert*-butyl) peroxide, dicumyl peroxide, dilauroyl peroxide (DLP), dibenzoyl peroxide or di(4-*tert*-butylcyclohexyl) peroxydicarbonate.

Preferably, the addition reaction is initiated in the presence of dilauroyl peroxide.

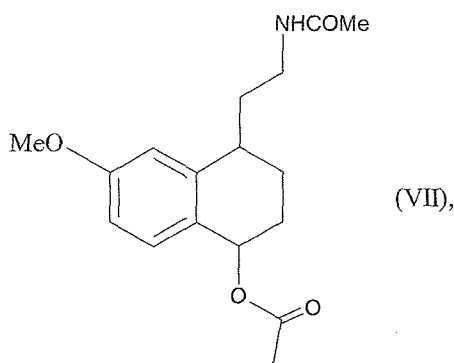
In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the reaction of cyclisation of the adduct of formula (IV) is carried out in the presence of dilauroyl peroxide optionally with dibenzoyl peroxide.

- 5 The addition and/or cyclisation reactions are carried out in a solvent customarily used in free radical chemistry such as 1,2-dichloroethane, dichloromethane, benzene, toluene, trifluoromethylbenzene, chlorobenzene, hexane, cyclohexane, heptane, octane, ethyl acetate, *tert*-butyl alcohol, and mixtures thereof.

Preference is given to using ethyl acetate in the processes according to the invention.

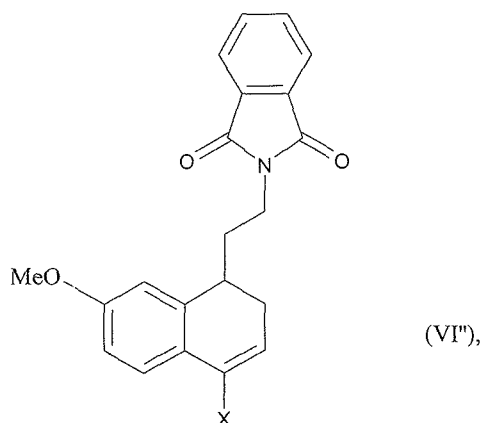
- 10 When the amine function of the compound of formula (V) is protected by a phthalimide group (*i.e.* R' and R'' together form an ethylene chain, the ring thereby formed being fused to a phenyl group):

- the compound of formula (V) is advantageously subjected to an amine-deprotecting reaction and then reacted with acetic anhydride to form the compound of formula (VII):

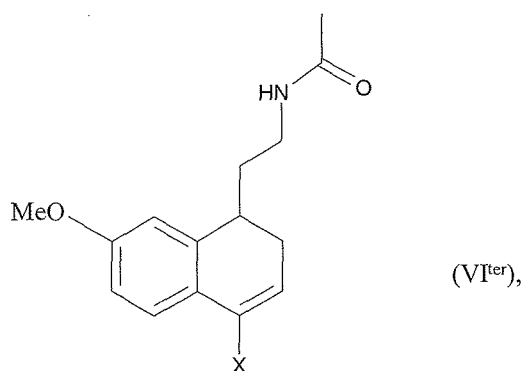


- 15 which compound of formula (VII) is then hydrolysed and then dehydrated before being subjected to an aromatisation reaction to yield the compound of formula (I), which is isolated in the form of a solid,

- alternatively, the compound of formula (V) can be subjected to a halogenation reaction to yield the compound of formula (VI'), a particular case of the compounds of formula (VI):



wherein X represents a halogen atom (preferably Cl or Br),
 said compound of formula (VI'') then being subjected to an amine-deprotecting reaction
 and then reacted with acetic anhydride to form the compound of formula (VI^{ter}), a
 particular case of the compounds of formula (VI):



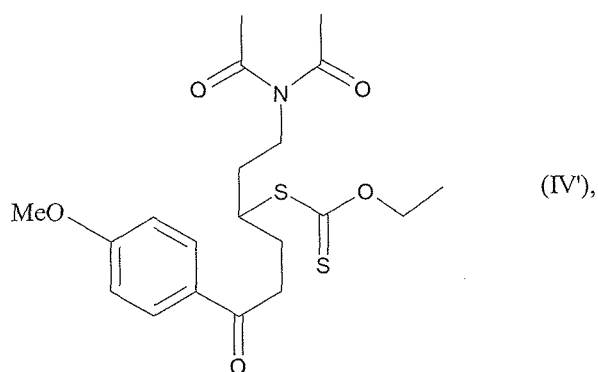
5 wherein X is as defined hereinbefore,
 which compound of formula (VI^{ter}) is finally aromatised in a basic medium to yield the
 compound of formula (I), which is isolated in the form of a solid.

10 In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the amine-deprotecting reaction, when the
 amine function is protected by a phthalimide group, is carried out in the presence of a
 reducing agent such as sodium borohydride. Hydrazine-type agents may also be used.

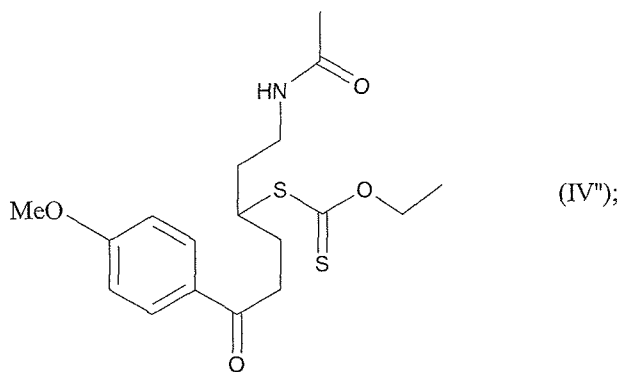
Preferably, the step of aromatisation of the compound of formula (VII) may be carried out
 using a benzoquinone such as 2,3-dichloro-5,6-dicyano-1,4-benzoquinone (DDQ), whereas
 aromatisation of the compound of formula (VI^{ter}) is advantageously carried out in the
 presence of a strong non-nucleophilic base. This latter reaction is carried out in a polar

protic medium. In a preferred embodiment of the invention, aromatisation of the compound of formula (VI^{ter}) is carried out in the presence of an alcoholate/alcohol couple, and even more preferably in the presence of the couple potassium *tert*-butylate/*tert*-butanol or the couple potassium 3-methyl-3-pentylate/3-methyl-3-pentanol.

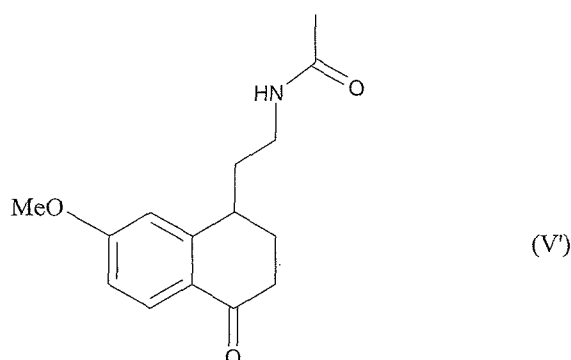
- 5 In another variant of the invention, addition of a compound of formula (II) with a compound of formula (III) wherein R' and R'' each represent a methyl group is carried out to yield the adduct of formula (IV'):



which is subjected to a deprotection reaction in the presence of a base (such as triethylamine) to yield the compound of formula (IV''), which is optionally isolated:



- 10 said compound of formula (IV'') is then subjected to a cyclisation reaction in the presence of a free radical initiator to yield the compound of formula (V'), a particular case of the compounds of formula (V):



which is converted into a vinyl halide and then subjected to an aromatisation reaction to yield the compound of formula (I), which is isolated in the form of a solid.

This process is especially valuable for the following reasons:

- 5 - it makes it possible to obtain the compound of formula (I) on an industrial scale in good yields, starting from a simple, low-cost starting material;
- only the intermediate of formulae (V) requires a purification and isolation step.

The compounds of formulae (V), (VI) and (VII) obtained according to the process of the invention are new and useful as intermediates in the synthesis of agomelatine.

10 Preferred compounds of formula (V) are as follows:

- 2-[2-(7-methoxy-4-oxo-1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]-1*H*-isoindole-1,3(2*H*)-dione,
- *N*-[2-(7-methoxy-4-oxo-1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide.

Preferred compounds of formula (VI) are as follows:

- 15 - 2-[2-(4-chloro-7-methoxy-1,2-dihydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]-1*H*-isoindole-1,3(2*H*)-dione,
- 2-[2-(4-bromo-7-methoxy-1,2-dihydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]-1*H*-isoindole-1,3(2*H*)-dione,
- *N*-[2-(4-chloro-7-methoxy-1,2-dihydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide,

- *N*-[2-(4-bromo-7-methoxy-1,2-dihydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide,
- *N*-[2-(7-methoxy-1,2-dihydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide.

The Examples hereinbelow illustrate the invention without limiting it in any way.

For the purpose of validating the reaction route, the synthesis intermediates were systematically isolated and characterised. However, it is possible to considerably optimise the procedures by limiting the number of intermediates isolated. Accordingly, Example 5 given hereinbelow corresponds to the same reaction route as that used in Example 4 but with the difference that only *N*-[2-(7-methoxy-4-oxo-1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1-naphthyl)-ethyl]acetamide was isolated.

Example 1: *N*-[2-(7-Methoxy-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide

Step A: *S*-[1-(1,3-Dioxo-1,3-dihydro-2*H*-isoindol-2-yl)methyl]-*O*-ethyl dithiocarbonate

To a cold (0°C) solution of *N*-(chloromethyl)phthalimide (40.0 g, 205.0 mmol) in acetone (400 mL) there is added, in successive portions, potassium *O*-ethylxanthate (36.1 g, 225.0 mmol). The reaction mixture is stirred at 0°C for 30 minutes and then the solvent is evaporated off. The residue thereby obtained is taken up in water. The aqueous phase is extracted with dichloromethane, whilst the organic phases are dried over MgSO₄ and concentrated under reduced pressure. The residue thereby obtained is recrystallised from a mixture of ethyl acetate and petroleum ether to yield the title product in a yield of 74%.

¹H NMR (δ, ppm) 7.90-7.84 (m, 2H, CH-2), 7.77-7.72 (m, 2H, CH-1), 5.33 (s, 2H, CH₂-5), 4.68 (q, 2H, *J* = 7.1 Hz, CH₂-7), 1.46 (t, 3H, *J* = 7.1 Hz, CH₃-8).

¹³C NMR (δ, ppm) (CDCl₃, 100 MHz) 210.2 (CS), 166.6 (NCO), 134.4 (CH-1), 131.8 (C-3), 123.6 (CH-2), 70.5 (CH₂-7), 41.2 (CH₂-5), 13.7 (CH₃-8).

Step B: *S*-[1-[2-(1,3-dioxo-1,3-dihydro-2*H*-isoindol-2-yl)ethyl]-4-(4-methoxyphenyl)-4-oxobutyl]-*O*-ethyl dithiocarbonate

A mixture of 1-(4-methoxyphenyl)-4-penten-1-one¹ (11.0 g, 57.6 mmol) and the xanthate obtained in Step A (19.4 g, 69.2 mmol) in ethyl acetate (580 mL) is heated at reflux under a nitrogen atmosphere for 15 minutes. Then, 10 mol% dilauroyl peroxide are added every 1.5 hours. After adding 4×10 mol% and 1×5 mol% dilauroyl peroxide, the solvent is finally evaporated off and the residue obtained is purified by flash column chromatography (petroleum ether-ethyl acetate: 80-20) to yield the title compound in the form of an oil in a yield of 78%.

HRMS (EI, *m/z*) Calc. for C₂₄H₂₅NO₅S₂: 471.1174; found: 471.1172.

¹ 1-(4-Methoxyphenyl)-4-penten-1-one is obtained according to the protocol described in Pattisson, V.A. *et al.*, *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* **1962**, 84, 4295.

Step C: 2-[2-(7-Methoxy-4-oxo-1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]-1H-isoindole-1,3(2H)-dione

A solution of the product obtained in Step B (20.6 g, 43.7 mmol) in chlorobenzene (660 mL) is refluxed under a nitrogen atmosphere for 15 minutes. Then 10 mol% of dilauroyl peroxide are added every 15 minutes until all the starting reagent has been consumed. The mixture is cooled to ambient temperature and concentrated under reduced pressure. Acetonitrile is then introduced to cause a large part of the dilauroyl peroxide compounds to precipitate out. The mixture is then filtered, concentrated under reduced pressure and purified by flash column chromatography (petroleum ether-ethyl acetate: 90-10, then 70-30) to yield the title product in the form of a solid in a yield of 39%.

HRMS (EI, m/z) Calc. for C₂₁H₁₉NO₄: 349.1314; found: 349.1316.

Step D: 4-[2-(Acetylamino)ethyl]-6-methoxy-1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1-naphthyl acetate

To a solution of the tetralone obtained in Step C (350 mg, 1.0 mmol) in isopropanol (10 mL) at ambient temperature there is added sodium borohydride (190 mg, 5.0 mmol). The mixture is stirred at reflux overnight and then a solution of sodium hydroxide (80 mg, 2.0 mmol) in water (2.0 mL) is added dropwise. The mixture is maintained under reflux for 30 minutes, and then acetone (1.5 mL) is added. After 10 minutes, the mixture is cooled to ambient temperature before being concentrated under reduced pressure. The oil thereby obtained is dissolved in dichloromethane (10 mL). Dimethylaminopyridine (270 mg, 2.2 mmol) is then added, followed by acetic anhydride (210 µL, 2.2 mmol) dropwise. The solution is stirred at ambient temperature for 1 hour and then water is added. The pH of the solution is adjusted to from 8 to 9 by adding saturated sodium hydrogen carbonate solution. The aqueous phase is extracted with dichloromethane and the organic phases are washed with saturated NaCl solution, dried over magnesium sulphate, filtered and evaporated. The title compound is obtained after purification by flash column chromatography (ethyl acetate-petroleum ether: 90-10, then ethyl acetate-methanol: 90-10) in the form of an oil in a yield of 79%.

HRMS (EI, m/z) Calc. for C₁₇H₂₃NO₄: 305.1627; found: 305.1630.

Step E: *N*-[2-(7-Methoxy-1,2-dihydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide

To a solution of the compound obtained in Step D (261 mg, 0.86 mmol) in a mixture of methanol/water (2/0.2 mL) at ambient temperature there is added sodium hydroxide (86 mg, 2.14 mmol). The mixture is stirred for 1 hour under reflux, and the solution is then cooled. Hydrochloric acid (2.6 mL, 2.6 mmol, 1N) is added and the mixture is stirred overnight. The aqueous phase is extracted with dichloromethane, and the organic phases are washed with saturated NaCl solution, dried over magnesium sulphate, filtered and evaporated. The title compound is obtained after purification by flash column chromatography (ethyl acetate-petroleum ether: 90-10, then ethyl acetate-methanol: 90-10) in the form of an oil in a yield of 61%.

HRMS (EI, m/z) Calc. for C₁₅H₁₉NO₂: 245.1416; found: 245.1413.

Step F: *N*-[2-(7-Methoxy-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide

To a solution of the compound obtained in Step E (100 mg, 0.41 mmol) in dichloromethane (4 mL) there is added, at ambient temperature, DDQ (111 mg, 0.49 mmol). The reaction mixture is stirred for 2 days and then washed with saturated NaHCO₃ solution. The aqueous phase is extracted with ethyl acetate, and the organic phases are collected and then dried using brine and then over MgSO₄. After filtration, the solvents are evaporated off under reduced pressure and the crude reaction mixture obtained is purified by chromatography on a silica column (eluant: ethyl acetate/petroleum ether 90/10, then ethyl acetate/methanol 90/10) to yield the title product in a yield of 48%.

Example 2: *N*-[2-(7-Methoxy-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide

Step A: 2-[2-(7-Methoxy-4-oxo-1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]-1*H*-isoindole-1,3(2*H*)-dione

The compound is obtained using the procedures described in Steps A to C of Example 1.

Step B: 2-[2-(4-Chloro-7-methoxy-1,2-dihydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]-1H-isoindole-1,3(2H)-dione

To a solution of DMF (190 μ L, 2.4 mmol) in 1.0 mL of dichloromethane at 0°C there is added POCl₃ (190 mL, 2.0 mmol)² dropwise. After 30 minutes, the tetralone obtained in Step A (0.70 g, 2.0 mmol), dissolved in dichloromethane (2.0 mL), is added dropwise to the Vilsmeier reagent. The temperature of the reaction mixture is allowed to return to ambient temperature. The mixture is stirred until the reagents have completely disappeared (monitored by TLC). Saturated sodium acetate solution is then added, and then the solution is extracted with dichloromethane. The organic phase is washed with saturated NaCl solution and with water, and is then dried over MgSO₄, filtered and evaporated. The title compound is obtained by flash column chromatography (petroleum ether-ethyl acetate: 80-20) in the form of a solid in a yield of 75%.

HRMS (EI, m/z) Calc. for C₂₁H₁₈ClNO₃: 367.0975; found: 367.0975.

Step C : N-[2-(4-Chloro-7-methoxy-1,2-dihydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide

To a solution of the compound obtained in Step B (370 mg, 1.0 mmol) in isopropanol (10 mL) at ambient temperature there is added sodium borohydride (190 mg, 5.0 mmol). The mixture is stirred for 3 hours under reflux, and then a solution of sodium hydroxide (80 mg, 2.0 mmol) in water (2.0 mL) is added dropwise. The mixture is maintained under reflux for 30 minutes, and then acetone (1.5 mL) is added. After 10 minutes, the mixture is cooled to ambient temperature before being concentrated under reduced pressure. The oil thereby obtained is dissolved in dichloromethane (10 mL). Dimethylaminopyridine (270 mg, 2.2 mmol) is then added, followed by acetic anhydride (210 μ L, 2.2 mmol) dropwise. The solution is stirred at ambient temperature for 1 hour and then water is added. A few drops of hydrochloric acid (1N) are also added to obtain an acid pH. The aqueous phase is extracted with dichloromethane and the organic phases are washed with saturated NaCl solution, dried over magnesium sulphate, filtered and evaporated. The title

² Lilienkamp A. *et al.*, *Org. Letters*. **2003**, 5, 3387

compound is obtained after purification by flash column chromatography (ethyl acetate-petroleum ether: 90-10, then ethyl acetate-methanol: 90-10) in the form of an oil in a yield of 71%.

HRMS (EI, m/z) Calc. for C₁₅H₁₈ClNO₂: 279.1026; found: 279.1030.

Step D: *N*-[2-(7-Methoxy-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide

5 To a solution of the compound obtained in Step C (125 mg, 0.45 mmol) in *tert*-butanol (1 mL) at reflux there is added potassium *tert*-butylate (200 mg, 1.8 mmol). The mixture is stirred for 3 hours under reflux and then hydrochloric acid (1N) is added. The aqueous phase is extracted with dichloromethane and the organic phases are washed with saturated NaCl solution, dried over magnesium sulphate, filtered and evaporated. The title
10 compound is obtained after purification by flash column chromatography (ethyl acetate-petroleum ether: 90-10, then ethyl acetate-methanol: 90-10) in the form of a solid in a yield of 68%.

HRMS (EI, m/z) Calc. for C₁₅H₁₉NO₃: 261.1365; found: 261.1369.

Example 3: *N*-[2-(7-Methoxy-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide

15 **Step A:** 2-[2-(7-Methoxy-4-oxo-1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]-1*H*-isoindole-1,3(2*H*)-dione

The compound is obtained using the procedures described in Steps A to C of Example 1.

Step B: 2-[2-(4-Bromo-7-methoxy-1,2-dihydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]-1*H*-isoindole-1,3(2*H*)-dione

20 To a cold solution of triphenyl phosphite (290 µL, 1.1 mmol) in dichloromethane (3.5 mL), maintained at -78°C under a nitrogen atmosphere, bromine (60 µL, 1.2 mmol) is added

dropwise³. Triethylamine (180 μ L, 1.3 mmol) and the tetralone obtained in Step A (350 mg, 1.0 mmol) are added to the solution. The reaction mixture is stirred for 18 hours whilst its temperature is brought back to ambient temperature. The mixture is then heated at reflux for one hour before being concentrated and purified by flash column chromatography (petroleum ether-ethyl acetate: 80-20). The title compound is obtained in the form of an oil in a yield of 95%.

HRMS (EI, m/z) Calc. for $C_{21}H_{18}BrNO_3$: 411.0470; found: 411.0470.

Step C: *N-[2-(4-Bromo-7-methoxy-1,2-dihydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide*

To a solution of the compound obtained in Step B (390 mg, 0.95 mmol) in isopropanol (10 mL) at ambient temperature there is added sodium borohydride (179 mg, 4.7 mmol). The mixture is stirred for 3 hours under reflux, and then a solution of sodium hydroxide (76 mg, 1.9 mmol) in water (2.0 mL) is added dropwise. The mixture is maintained under reflux for 30 minutes, and then acetone (1.5 mL) is added. After 10 minutes, the mixture is cooled to ambient temperature before being concentrated under reduced pressure. The oil thereby obtained is dissolved in dichloromethane (10 mL). Dimethylaminopyridine (255 mg, 2.1 mmol) is then added, followed by acetic anhydride (200 μ L, 2.1 mmol) dropwise. The solution is stirred at ambient temperature for 1 hour and then water is added. A few drops of hydrochloric acid (1N) are also added to obtain an acid pH. The aqueous phase is extracted with dichloromethane and the organic phases are washed with saturated NaCl solution, dried over magnesium sulphate, filtered and evaporated. The title compound is obtained after purification by flash column chromatography (ethyl acetate-petroleum ether: 90-10, then ethyl acetate-methanol: 90-10) in the form of an oil in a yield of 64%.

HRMS (EI, m/z) Calc. for $C_{15}H_{18}BrNO_2$: 323.0521; found: 323.0517.

Step D: *N-[2-(7-Methoxy-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide*

The compound is obtained using the procedure described in Step D of Example 2.

³ Spaggiari A. *et al.*, *J. Org. Chem.* **2007**, 72, 2216

Example 4: N-[2-(7-Methoxy-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide

Step A: S-[*(Acetylamino)methyl*]-O-ethyl dithiocarbonate

Acetamide (29.5 g, 0.50 mol) and paraformaldehyde (18.0 g, 0.6 mol) are dissolved in acetic anhydride (250 mL) and acetic acid (50 mL). The solution is heated at 80°C for 5 hours, cooled and evaporated. 20% by weight of the resulting oil is then dissolved in ethanol (200 mL) and cooled to 0°C before adding potassium O-ethylxanthate (19.2 g, 0.12 mol). The reaction mixture is stirred at ambient temperature for 6 hours, and then water is added and a large part of the ethanol is removed from the mixture under reduced pressure. The suspension is held at 0°C for 20 minutes and filtered. After dissolving the residue in dichloromethane, the organic phase is dried over magnesium sulphate, filtered and evaporated to yield the title compound in the form of a solid in a yield of 57%.

HRMS (EI, m/z) Calc. for C₆H₁₁NO₂S₂: 193.0231; found: 193.0230.

Step B: S-[*(Diacetylamino)methyl*]-O-ethyl dithiocarbonate

A solution of the xanthate obtained in Step A (5.93 g, 30.7 mmol) in isoprenyl acetate (45 mL) is refluxed overnight in the presence of a few crystals of *p*-toluenesulphonic acid and is then cooled and concentrated under reduced pressure. The title compound is obtained in the form of an oil after purification by flash column chromatography (ethyl acetate-petroleum ether: 80-20) in a quantitative yield.

HRMS (EI, m/z) Calc. for C₈H₁₃NO₃S₂: 235.0337; found: 235.0338.

Step C: S-[1-[2-(*Diacetylamino*)ethyl]-4-(4-methoxyphenyl)-4-oxobutyl]-O-ethyl dithiocarbonate

The compound of Step B is used directly without having been purified. The oil obtained in the Step above (25 % by weight) is added to a solution of 1-(4-methoxyphenyl)-4-penten-

1-one (2.92 g, 15.3 mmol) in ethyl acetate (8 mL) and refluxed under a nitrogen atmosphere for 15 minutes. 10 mol% dilauroyl peroxide (305 mg) are then added every 1.5 hours. After adding 2×10 mol% and 1×5 mol% dilauroyl peroxide, the solvent is evaporated off. The title compound is obtained after purification by flash column chromatography (ethyl acetate-petroleum ether: 90-10, then pure ethyl acetate) in the form of an oil in a yield of 72%.

HRMS (EI, m/z) Calc. for $C_{20}H_{27}NO_5S_2$: 425.1331; found: 425.1331.

Step D: *N-[2-(7-methoxy-4-oxo-1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide*

A solution of the compound obtained in Step C (1.10 g, 2.59 mmol) in ethyl acetate (52 mL) is refluxed under a nitrogen atmosphere for 15 minutes, and then dibenzoyl peroxide (940 mg, 3.88 mmol) and 20 mol% dilauroyl peroxide (206 mg) are added every 1.5 hours until the reagent has completely disappeared. The mixture is then cooled to ambient temperature and concentrated under reduced pressure. The oil thereby obtained is dissolved in methanol (5 mL) in the presence of triethylamine (3.6 mL) and then refluxed for 1 hour. The mixture is concentrated under reduced pressure and purified by flash column chromatography (ethyl acetate-petroleum ether: 90-10, then ethyl acetate-methanol: 80-20) to yield the title compound in the form of an oil in a yield of 56%.

HRMS (EI, m/z) Calc. for $C_{15}H_{19}NO_3$: 261.1365; found: 261.1369.

Step E: *N-[2-(7-Methoxy-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide*

To a solution of DMF (93 μ L, 1.2 mmol) in 0.5 mL of dichloromethane at 0°C there is added $POCl_3$ (92 mL, 1.0 mmol) dropwise. After 30 minutes, the tetralone obtained in Step D (261 mg, 1.0 mmol), dissolved in dichloromethane (1 mL), is added dropwise to the Vilsmeier reagent. The reaction mixture is allowed to return to ambient temperature, being stirred overnight. Saturated sodium acetate (NaOAc) solution is then added and the solution is then extracted with dichloromethane. The organic phase is washed using saturated NaCl solution and water and is then dried over $MgSO_4$, filtered and evaporated.

The residue is dissolved in *tert*-butanol (2 mL) and refluxed. Potassium *tert*-butylate (450 mg, 4.0 mmol) is added, and the mixture is maintained under reflux for 3 hours. After cooling to ambient temperature, hydrochloric acid (1N) is added. The aqueous phase is extracted with dichloromethane, and the organic phase is washed with saturated NaCl solution and then dried over MgSO₄, filtered and evaporated. The title compound is obtained after purification by flash column chromatography (ethyl acetate-petroleum ether: 90-10, then ethyl acetate-methanol: 90-10) in the form of a solid in a yield of 53%.

HRMS (EI, m/z) Calc. for C₁₅H₁₉NO₃: 261.1365; found: 261.1369.

Example 5: *N*-[2-(7-Methoxy-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide

Step A: *S*-[(Acetylamino)methyl]-*O*-ethyl dithiocarbonate

The title compound is obtained according to the experimental protocol described in Example 4.

Step B: *N*-[2-(7-methoxy-4-oxo-1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide

A solution of the xanthate obtained in Step A (9.34 g, 48.3 mmol) in isoprenyl acetate (75 mL) is refluxed for 3 hours in the presence of a few crystals of *p*-toluenesulphonic acid and is then evaporated to yield *S*-[(diacetylamino)methyl]-*O*-ethyl dithiocarbonate. A sample of the crude product thereby obtained (1.0 g) is added to a solution of 1-(4-methoxyphenyl)-4-penten-1-one (800 mg, 4.20 mmol) in ethyl acetate (4 mL) and refluxed under a nitrogen atmosphere for 15 minutes. 10 mol% dilauroyl peroxide (170 mg) are then added every 1.5 hours. After adding 4×10 mol% and 1×5 mol% dilauroyl peroxide, the solvent is evaporated off to yield *S*-[1-[2-(diacetylamino)ethyl]-4-(4-methoxyphenyl)-4-oxobutyl]-*O*-ethyl dithiocarbonate. The crude product thereby obtained is dissolved in ethyl acetate (85 mL). The solution is refluxed under a nitrogen atmosphere for 15 minutes, and then dibenzoyl peroxide (1.53 g, 6.30 mmol) and 20 mol% dilauroyl peroxide (335 mg) are added every 1.5 hours until the reagent has completely disappeared. The mixture is then cooled to ambient temperature and concentrated under reduced pressure. The oil

thereby obtained is dissolved in methanol (8.5 mL) in the presence of triethylamine (5.9 mL) and then refluxed for 1 hour. The mixture is concentrated under reduced pressure and purified by flash column chromatography (ethyl acetate-petroleum ether: 90-10, then ethyl acetate-methanol: 80-20) to yield the title compound in the form of an oil in a yield of 44%.

HRMS (EI, m/z) Calc. for C₁₅H₁₉NO₃: 261.1365; found: 261.1369.

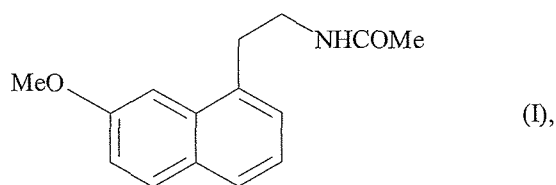
Step C: *N-[2-(7-Methoxy-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide*

The title compound is obtained according to the protocol described in Step E of Example 4.

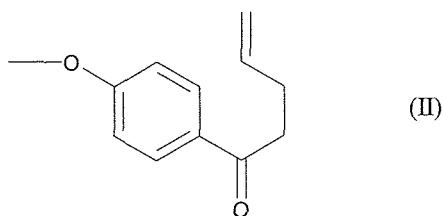
HRMS (EI, m/z) Calc. for C₁₅H₁₉NO₃: 261.1365; found: 261.1369.

CLAIMS

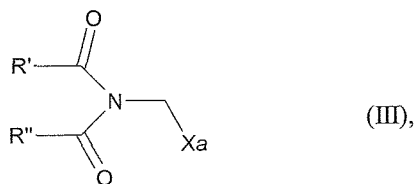
1. Process for the industrial synthesis of the compound of formula (I):



characterised in that 1-(4-methoxyphenyl)-4-penten-1-one of formula (II):

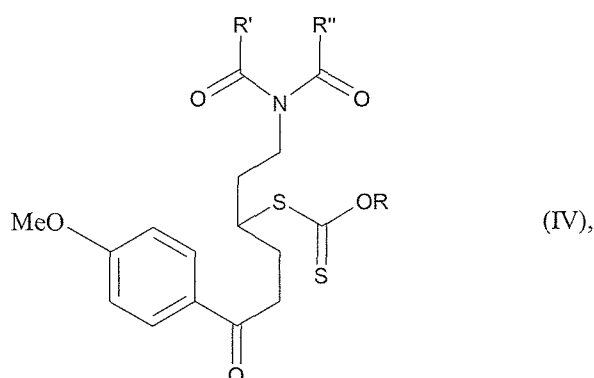


is reacted, in the presence of a free radical initiator, with a compound of formula (III):



wherein R' and R'', which may be the same or different, each represent a linear or branched (C₁-C₆)alkyl group or R' and R'' together form a (C₂-C₃)alkylene chain, it being possible for the ring thereby formed to be fused with a phenyl group, and Xa represents a group -S-C(S)-OR in which R represents a linear or branched (C₁-C₆)alkyl group,

to yield the adduct of formula (IV):

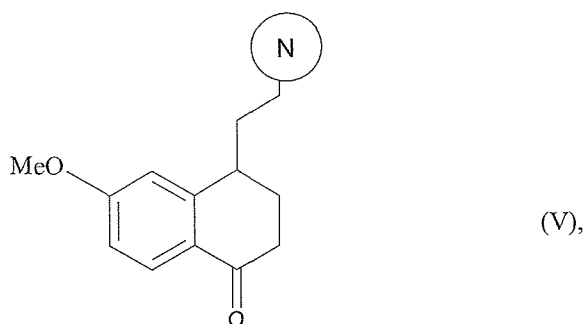


wherein R, R' and R'' are as defined hereinbefore,

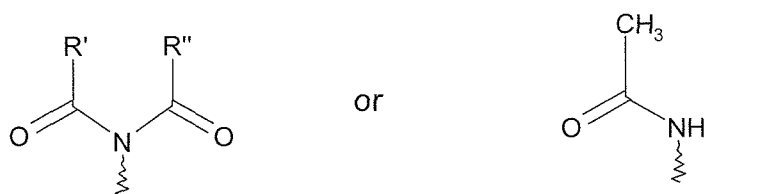
it being possible for the compound of formula (IV) optionally to be isolated,

the amine function of which may optionally be deprotected and converted into an acetamide function,

5 which is subjected to a cyclisation reaction in the presence of a free radical initiator to form the compound of formula (V):



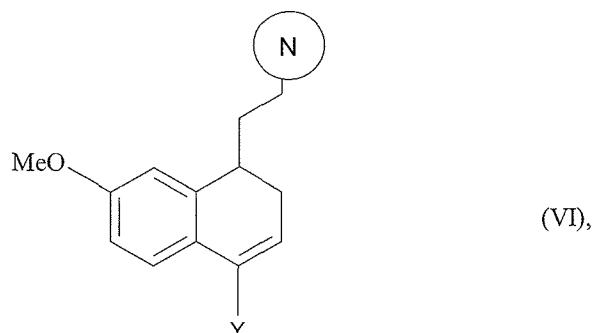
it being understood that the group $\text{—} \text{N} \text{—}$ denotes a protected amine function defined as follows:



wherein R' and R'' are as defined hereinbefore,

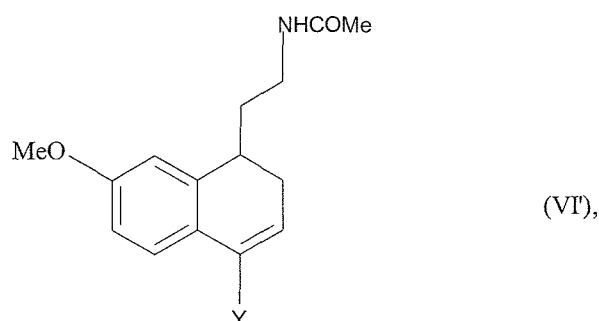
10 the amine function of which compound of formula (V) may optionally be deprotected,

said compound of formula (V) is either subjected to reduction-esterification followed by dehydration or converted into a vinyl halide to yield the compound of formula (VI):



wherein Y represents a halogen atom or a hydrogen atom, the group being as defined hereinbefore,

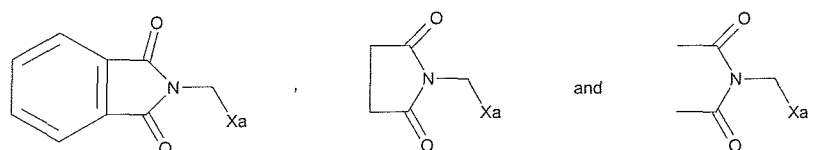
the protected amine function of which compound of formula (VI) is converted into an acetamide function where applicable, i.e. when that conversion has not been carried out earlier, to yield the compound of formula (VI'):



wherein Y is as defined hereinbefore,

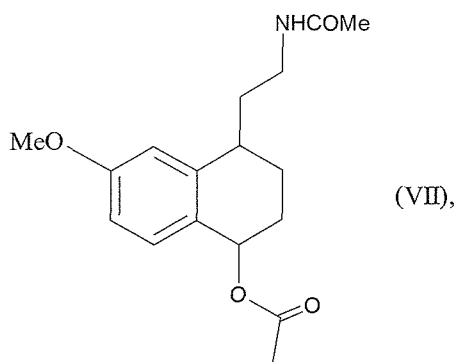
which is finally subjected to an aromatisation reaction to yield the compound of formula (I), which is isolated in the form of a solid.

2. Process for the synthesis of the compound of formula (I) according to claim 1, characterised in that the compound of formula (III) is selected from:



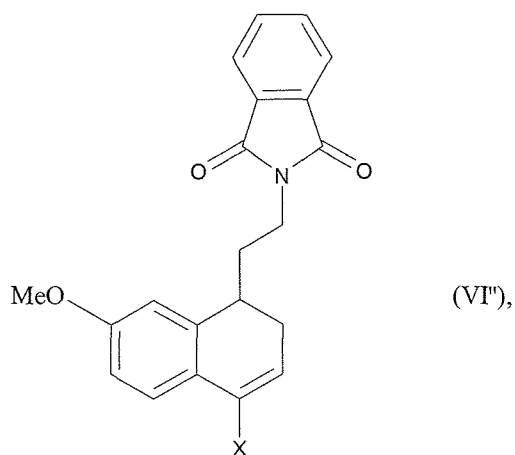
wherein Xa = -S-C(S)-OR is as defined in claim 1.

3. Process for the synthesis of the compound of formula (I) according to either claim 1 or claim 2, characterised in that the group $Xa = -S-C(S)-OC_2H_5$.
4. Process for the synthesis of the compound of formula (I) according to claim 1, characterised in that the free radical reactions are initiated by thermal means at a temperature of from 50 to 140°C.
5. Process for the synthesis of the compound of formula (I) according to claim 1, characterised in that the step of addition of the compound of formula (II) to the compound of formula (III) is initiated in the presence of dilauroyl peroxide.
6. Process for the synthesis of the compound of formula (I) according to claim 1, characterised in that the reaction of cyclisation of the adduct of formula (IV) is carried out in the presence of dilauroyl peroxide optionally with dibenzoyl peroxide.
7. Process for the synthesis of the compound of formula (I) according to claim 1, characterised in that the step of addition of the compound of formula (II) to the compound of formula (III) and the step of cyclisation of the adduct of formula (IV) are carried out in ethyl acetate.
8. Process for the synthesis of the compound of formula (I) according to claim 1, characterised in that the compound of formula (V) wherein R' and R'' together form an ethylene chain, the ring thereby formed being fused to a phenyl group, is subjected to an amine-deprotecting reaction and is then reacted with acetic anhydride to form the compound of formula (VII):



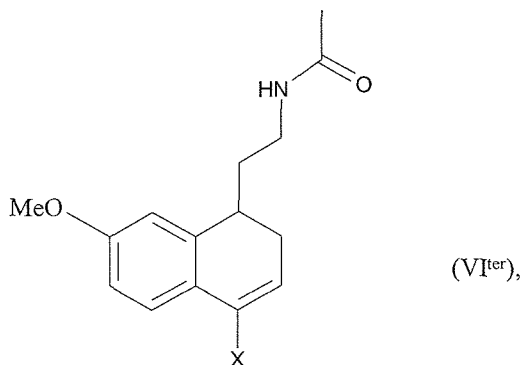
which compound of formula (VII) is then hydrolysed and then dehydrated before being subjected to an aromatisation reaction to yield the compound of formula (I), which is isolated in the form of a solid.

9. Process for the synthesis of the compound of formula (I) according to claim 1, characterised in that the compound of formula (V) wherein R' and R'' together form an ethylene chain, the ring thereby formed being fused to a phenyl group, is subjected to a halogenation reaction to yield the compound of formula (VI''), a particular case of the compounds of formula (VI):



wherein X represents a halogen atom (preferably Cl or Br),

said compound of formula (VI'') then being subjected to an amine-protecting reaction and then reacted with acetic anhydride to form the compound of formula (VI^{ter}), a particular case of the compounds of formula (VI):



wherein X is as defined hereinbefore,

which compound of formula (VI^{ter}) is finally aromatised in a basic medium to yield the compound of formula (I), which is isolated in the form of a solid.

5 **10.** Process for the synthesis of the compound of formula (I) according to claim 1, characterised in that the reaction deprotecting the amine function of the compound of formula (V), when the amine function is protected by a phthalimide group, is carried out in the presence of sodium borohydride or a hydrazine-type agent.

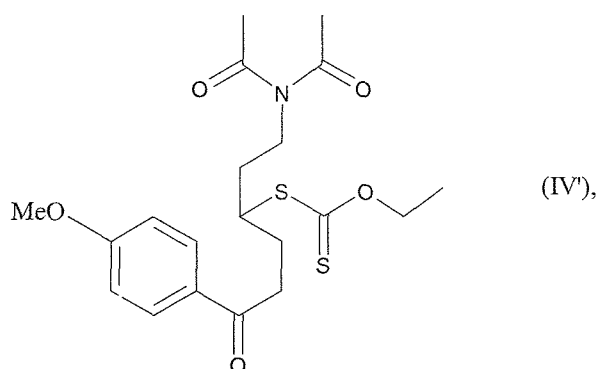
10 **11.** Process for the synthesis of the compound of formula (I) according to claim 8, characterised in that the step of aromatisation of the compound of formula (VII) is carried out using a benzoquinone such as 2,3-dichloro-5,6-dicyano-1,4-benzoquinone (DDQ).

12. Process for the synthesis of the compound of formula (I) according to claim 9, characterised in that aromatisation of the compound of formula (VI^{ter}) is carried out in the presence of a strong non-nucleophilic base.

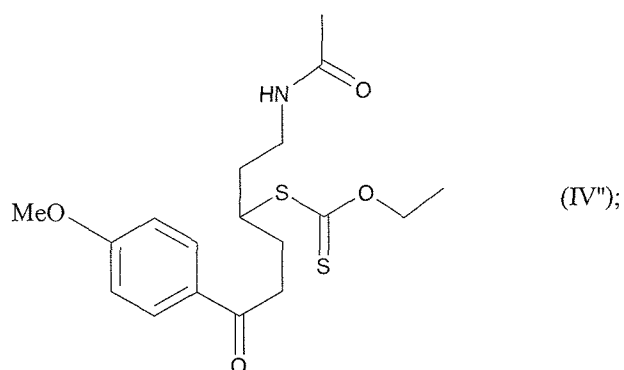
15 **13.** Process for the synthesis of the compound of formula (I) according to claim 9, characterised in that aromatisation of the compound of formula (VI^{ter}) is carried out in the presence of an alcoholate/alcohol couple.

20 **14.** Process for the synthesis of the compound of formula (I) according to claim 13, characterised in that aromatisation of the compound of formula (VI^{ter}) is carried out in the presence of the couple potassium *tert*-butylate/*tert*-butanol or the couple potassium 3-methyl-3-pentylate/3-methyl-3-pentanol.

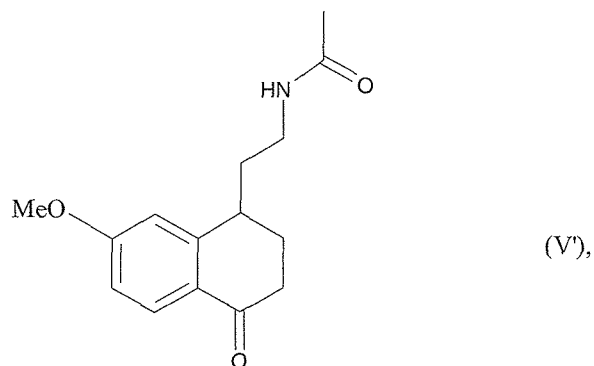
25 **15.** Process for the synthesis of the compound of formula (I) according to claim 1, characterised in that addition of a compound of formula (II) with a compound of formula (III) wherein R' and R'' each represent a methyl group is carried out to yield the adduct of formula (IV'):



which is subjected to a deprotection reaction in the presence of a base (such as triethylamine) to yield the compound of formula (IV''), which is optionally isolated:



said compound of formula (IV'') is then subjected to a cyclisation reaction in the presence of a free radical initiator to yield the compound of formula (V'), a particular case of the compounds of formula (V):



which is converted into a vinyl halide and then subjected to an aromatisation reaction to yield the compound of formula (I), which is isolated in the form of a solid.

16. Compound of formula (V) according to claim 1 for use as an intermediate in the synthesis of agomelatine of formula (I).

17. Compound of formula (V) according to claim 16 selected from the following compounds:

- 2-[2-(7-methoxy-4-oxo-1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]-1*H*-isoindole-1,3(2*H*)-dione,
- *N*-[2-(7-methoxy-4-oxo-1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide.

18. Use of a compound of formula (V) according to either claim 16 or claim 17 in the synthesis of agomelatine of formula (I).

19. Compound of formula (VI) according to claim 1 for use as an intermediate in the synthesis of agomelatine of formula (I).

20. Compound of formula (VI) according to claim 19 selected from the following compounds:

- 2-[2-(4-chloro-7-methoxy-1,2-dihydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]-1*H*-isoindole-1,3(2*H*)-dione,
- 2-[2-(4-bromo-7-methoxy-1,2-dihydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]-1*H*-isoindole-1,3(2*H*)-dione,
- *N*-[2-(4-chloro-7-methoxy-1,2-dihydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide,
- *N*-[2-(4-bromo-7-methoxy-1,2-dihydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide,
- *N*-[2-(7-methoxy-1,2-dihydro-1-naphthyl)ethyl]acetamide.

21. Use of a compound of formula (VI) according to either claim 19 or claim 20 in the synthesis of agomelatine of formula (I).

22. Compound of formula (VII) according to claim 8 for use as an intermediate in the synthesis of agomelatine of formula (I).

23. Use of the compound of formula (VII) according to claim 22 in the synthesis of agomelatine of formula (I).

24. Process for the synthesis of agomelatine according to claim 1 starting from the compound of formula (V), characterised in that the compound of formula (V) is obtained according to the synthesis process according to any one of claims 1 to 7.

25. Process for the synthesis of agomelatine according to claim 1 starting from the compound of formula (VI), characterised in that the compound of formula (VI) is obtained according to the synthesis process according to any one of claims 1 to 7 or 9.

26. Process for the synthesis of agomelatine according to claim 1 starting from the compound of formula (VII), characterised in that the compound of formula (VII) is obtained according to the synthesis process according to claim 8 or 11.