

Opium: Reality's Dark Dream. By Thomas Dormandy. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; 2012. 376 pp. US \$40 Hardcover. ISBN: 978-0300175325.

On the book's cover, Thomas Dormandy's *Opium: Reality's Dark Dream* is advertised to "encompass the entire history of the world's most fascinating drug." But at fewer than 400 pages, the book actually reads more like a story, or a series of stories, about opium's role in various societies. The problem with storytelling, however, is that the whole thing hinges on the use of language. Awkward wording, poor timing, and meandering digressions can sabotage an otherwise compelling story. These mistakes are often fatal — not merely distracting — because by jarring and tormenting the readers, the storyteller alienates his audience, so they rebuff his attempts to convince them.

Unfortunately, Dormandy's book is loaded with these sorts of mistakes. Pretentious language is his worst offense, which clutters and confuses some sentences beyond recognition. Twice for example, he remarks, "The profits could be luminous," perhaps meaning great or, alternatively, light. Nearly as exasperating is his penchant for overly dramatic language and halting, jerky sentence fragments, both of which leave the reader feeling emotionally manipulated.

The real problem with Dormandy's collection of stories, however, is that it lacks a true audience. The book is too much for the interested layman, who would be buried beneath an avalanche of petty details, important only to dedicated scholars. (For example, in one story, Dormandy remarks that a woman's "past history was unremarkable," then spends nearly a page recounting her upbringing and education.) At the same time, the book is too unscientific for any academic, thanks to its sarcastic tone, dramatic hyperbole, and random, bizarre, outbursts against capitalism (in one instance he attributes economic depression to "as usual, the greed of entrepreneurs in New York, Boston, and Chicago.") Meanwhile, blatantly factually incorrect statements — inserted for dramatic effect — explode like landmines

underfoot, further rattling Dormandy's credibility: "In the wild, it [the white poppy] is most likely to flourish in earth that has recently been dug, ploughed, or most effectively, torn apart by shrapnel." These emotional exaggerations provide the book with its energy and excitement, which — perversely — means that the captivating, memorable lines of the text are the dramatic falsehoods.

Finally, Dormandy's selection of which stories to tell may leave some readers surprised and disappointed. For example, he spends three chapters discussing the influence of opium on Romantic-era literature, but only eight pages on Afghanistan and two on methadone. The largest and best portion of the book examines opium's ancient role as an analgesic prior to the emergence of treatments for many diseases, when doctors often had nothing to offer their patients but pain relief. But even here, all the above criticisms apply, and the stories regularly disintegrate around their writing.

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Pharmacology: An Illustrated Review. By Mark A. Simmons. New York: Thieme; 2012, 414 pp. US \$39.99 Paperback. ISBN 978-1604062052.

Pharmacology: An Illustrated Review is the pioneer publication of Thieme's newest series of basic science review books targeting medical students. The introductory section covers general principles ranging from first pass metabolism to receptor structures to considerations in elderly or pregnant patients. Subsequent chapters are divided by organ systems. Each chapter contains a brief overview of the physiology, followed by drugs organized by indication, target, and structural class. Information is given on each drug's mechanism of action, pharmacokinetics, uses, and relevant side effects, or contraindications. Questions in the style of USMLE Step 1 as well as answers and explanations are listed at the end of the chap-