

= La Peau de chagrin =

La Peau de chagrin (French pronunciation : [la po dʁ ʔaʃaʁ ʔ] , The Magic Skin or The Wild Ass 's Skin) is an 1831 novel by French novelist and playwright Honoré de Balzac (1799 ? 1850) . Set in early 19th @-@ century Paris , it tells the story of a young man who finds a magic piece of shagreen that fulfills his every desire . For each wish granted , however , the skin shrinks and consumes a portion of his physical energy . La Peau de chagrin belongs to the Études philosophiques group of Balzac 's sequence of novels , La Comédie humaine .

Before the book was completed , Balzac created excitement about it by publishing a series of articles and story fragments in several Parisian journals . Although he was five months late in delivering the manuscript , he succeeded in generating sufficient interest that the novel sold out instantly upon its publication . A second edition , which included a series of twelve other " philosophical tales " , was released one month later .

Although the novel uses fantastic elements , its main focus is a realistic portrayal of the excesses of bourgeois materialism . Balzac 's renowned attention to detail is used to describe a gambling house , an antique shop , a royal banquet , and other locales . He also includes details from his own life as a struggling writer , placing the main character in a home similar to the one he occupied at the start of his literary career . The central theme of La Peau de chagrin is the conflict between desire and longevity . The magic skin represents the owner 's life @-@ force , which is depleted through every expression of will , especially when it is employed for the acquisition of power . Ignoring a caution from the shopkeeper who offers him the skin , the protagonist greedily surrounds himself with wealth , only to find himself miserable and decrepit at the story 's end .

La Peau de chagrin firmly established Balzac as a writer of significance in France . His social circle widened significantly , and he was sought eagerly by publishers for future projects . The book served as the catalyst for a series of letters he exchanged with a Polish baroness named Ewelina Hańska , who later became his wife . It also inspired Gisèle Klebe 's opera Die tödlichen Wünsche .

= = Background = =

In 1830 Honoré de Balzac had only begun to achieve recognition as a writer . Although his parents had persuaded him to make his profession the law , he announced in 1819 that he wanted to become an author . His mother was distraught , but she and his father agreed to give him a small income , on the condition that he dedicate himself to writing , and deliver to them half of his gross income from any published work . After moving into a tiny room near the Bibliothèque de l 'Arsenal in Paris , Balzac wrote for one year , without success . Frustrated , he moved back to his family in the suburb of Villeparisis and borrowed money from his parents to pursue his literary ambitions further . He spent the next several years writing simple potboiler novels , which he published under a variety of pseudonyms . He shared some of his income from these with his parents , but by 1828 he still owed them 50 @, @ 000 francs .

He published for the first time under his own name in 1829 . Les Chouans , a novel about royalist forces in Brittany , did not succeed commercially , but it made Balzac known in literary circles . He achieved a major success later the same year when he published La Physiologie du mariage , a treatise on the institution of marriage . Bolstered by its popularity , he added to his fame by publishing a variety of short stories and essays in the magazines Revue de Paris , La Caricature , and La Mode . He thus made connections in the publishing industry that later helped him to obtain reviews of his novels .

At the time , French literary appetites for fantastic stories had been whetted by the 1829 translation of German writer E. T. A. Hoffmann 's collection Fantastic Tales ; the gothic fiction of England 's Ann Radcliffe ; and French author Jules Janin 's 1829 novel L 'Âne Mort et la Femme Guillotinée (The Dead Donkey and the Guillotined Woman) . Although he planned a novel in the same tradition , Balzac disliked the term " fantastic " , referring to it once as " the vulgar program of a genre in its first flush of newness , to be sure , but already too much worn by the mere abuse of the word " .

The politics and culture of France , meanwhile , were in upheaval . After reigning for six controversial years , King Charles X was forced to abdicate during the July Revolution of 1830 . He was replaced by Louis @-@ Philippe , who named himself " King of the French " (rather than the usual " King of France ") in an attempt to distance himself from the Ancien Régime . The July Monarchy brought an entrenchment of bourgeois attitudes , in which Balzac saw disorganization and weak leadership .

= = Writing and publication = =

The title *La Peau de chagrin* first appeared in print on 9 December 1830 , as a passing mention in an article Balzac wrote for *La Caricature* under the pseudonym Alfred Coudreux . His scrapbook includes the following note , probably written at the same time : " L 'invention d 'une peau qui représente la vie . Conte oriental . " (" The invention of a skin that represents life . Oriental story . ") One week later , he published a story fragment called " *Le Dernier Napoléon* " in *La Caricature* , under the name " Henri B ... " . In it , a young man loses his last Napoleon coin at a Parisian gambling house , then continues to the Pont Royal to drown himself . During this early stage , Balzac did not think much of the project . He referred to it as " a piece of thorough nonsense in the literary sense , but in which [the author] has sought to introduce certain of the situations in this hard life through which men of genius have passed before achieving anything " . Before long , though , his opinion of the story improved .

By January 1831 Balzac had generated enough interest in his idea to secure a contract with publishers Charles Gosselin and Urbain Canel . They agreed on 750 copies of an octavo edition , with a fee of 1 @,@ 125 francs paid to the author upon receipt of the manuscript ? by mid @-@ February . Balzac delivered the novel in July .

During the intervening months , however , he provided glimpses of his erratic progress . Two additional fragments appeared in May , part of a scheme to promote the book before its publication . " *Une Débauche* " , published in the *Revue des deux mondes* , describes an orgiastic feast that features constant bantering and discussion from its bourgeois participants . The other fragment , " *Le Suicide d 'un poète* " , was printed in the *Revue de Paris* ; it concerns the difficulties of a would @-@ be poet as he tries to compensate for his lack of funds . Although the three fragments were not connected into a coherent narrative , Balzac was excerpting characters and scenes from his novel @-@ in @-@ progress .

The novel 's delayed publication was a result of Balzac 's active social life . He spent many nights dining at the homes of friends , including novelist Eugène Sue and his mistress Olympe Pélissier , as well as the feminist writer George Sand and her lover Jules Sandeau . Balzac and Pélissier had a brief affair , and she became the first lover with whom he appeared in public . Eventually he removed himself from Paris by staying with friends in the suburbs , where he committed himself to finishing the work . In late spring he allowed Sand to read a nearly @-@ finished manuscript ; she enjoyed it and predicted it would do well .

Finally , in August 1831 , *La Peau de chagrin : Conte philosophique* was published in two volumes . It was a commercial success , and Balzac used his connections in the world of Parisian periodicals to have it reviewed widely . The book sold quickly , and by the end of the month another contract had been signed : Balzac would receive 4 @,@ 000 francs to publish 1 @,@ 200 additional copies . This second edition included a series of twelve other stories with fantastic elements , and was released under the title *Romans et contes philosophiques* (*Philosophical Novels and Stories*) . A third edition , rearranged to fill four volumes , appeared in March 1833 .

= = Synopsis = =

La Peau de chagrin consists of three sections : " *Le Talisman* " (" *The Talisman* ") , " *La Femme sans c?ur* " (" *The Woman without a Heart* ") , and " *L 'Agonie* " (" *The Agony* ") . The first edition contained a Preface and a " *Moralité* " , which were excised from subsequent versions . A two @-@ page Epilogue appears at the end of the final section .

" Le Talisman " begins with the plot of " Le Dernier Napoléon " : A young man named Raphaël de Valentin wagers his last coin and loses , then proceeds to the river Seine to drown himself . On the way , however , he decides to enter an unusual shop and finds it filled with curiosities from around the world . The elderly shopkeeper leads him to a piece of shagreen hanging on the wall . It is inscribed with " Oriental " writing ; the old man calls it " Sanskrit " , but it is imprecise Arabic . The skin promises to fulfill any wish of its owner , shrinking slightly upon the fulfillment of each desire . The shopkeeper is willing to let Valentin take it without charge , but urges him not to accept the offer . Valentin waves away the shopkeeper 's warnings and takes the skin , wishing for a royal banquet , filled with wine , women , and friends . He is immediately met by acquaintances who invite him to such an event ; they spend hours eating , drinking , and talking .

Part two , " La Femme sans cœur " , is narrated as a flashback from Valentin 's point of view . He complains to his friend Émile about his early days as a scholar , living in poverty with an elderly landlord and her daughter Pauline , while trying fruitlessly to win the heart of a beautiful but aloof woman named Foedora . Along the way he is tutored by an older man named Eugène de Rastignac , who encourages him to immerse himself in the world of high society . Benefiting from the kindness of his landladies , Valentin maneuvers his way into Foedora 's circle of friends . Unable to win her affection , however , he becomes the miserable and destitute man found at the start of " Le Talisman " .

" L'Agonie " begins several years after the feast of parts one and two . Valentin , having used the talisman to secure a large income , finds both the skin and his health dwindling . He tries to break the curse by getting rid of the skin , but fails . The situation causes him to panic , horrified that further desires will hasten the end of his life . He organizes his home to avoid the possibility of wishing for anything : his servant , Jonathan , arranges food , clothing , and visitors with precise regularity . Events beyond his control cause him to wish for various things , however , and the skin continues to recede . Desperate , the sickly Valentin tries to find some way of stretching the skin , and takes a trip to the spa town of Aix - les - Bains in the hope of recovering his vitality .

With the skin no larger than a periwinkle leaf , he is visited by Pauline in his room ; she expresses her love for him . When she learns the truth about the shagreen and her role in Raphaël 's demise , she is horrified . Raphaël cannot control his desire for her and she rushes into an adjoining room to escape him and so save his life . He pounds on the door and declares both his love and his desire to die in her arms . She , meanwhile , is trying to kill herself to free him from his desire . He breaks down the door , they consummate their love in a fiery moment of passion , and he dies .

= = Style = =

Although he preferred the term " philosophical " , Balzac 's novel is based upon a fantastic premise . The skin grants a world of possibility to Valentin , and he uses it to satisfy many desires . Pressured into a duel , for example , he explains how he need neither avoid his opponent 's gunshot nor aim his own weapon ; the outcome is inevitable . He fires without care , and kills the other man instantly . Elsewhere , the supernatural qualities of the skin are demonstrated when it resists the efforts of a chemist and a physicist to stretch it .

This inclusion of the fantastic , however , is mostly a framework by which the author discusses human nature and society . One critic suggests that " the story would be much the same without it " . Balzac had used supernatural elements in the potboiler novels he published under noms de plume , but their presence in *Peau de chagrin* signaled a turning point in his approach to the use of symbolism . Whereas he had used fantastic objects and events in earlier works , they were mostly simple plot points or uncomplicated devices for suspense . With *La Peau de chagrin* , on the other hand , the talisman represents Valentin 's soul ; at the same time , his demise is symbolic of a greater social decline . Balzac 's real foci in the 1831 novel are the power of human desire and the nature of society after the July Revolution . French writer and critic Félicien Marceau even suggests that the symbolism in the novel allows a purer analysis than the individual case studies of other Balzac novels ; by removing the analysis to an abstract level , it becomes less complicated by variations of individual personality . As an everyman , Valentin displays the essential characteristics

of human nature , not a particular person 's approach to the dilemma offered by the skin .

In his Preface to the novel 's first edition , Balzac meditates on the usefulness of fantastic elements : " [Writers] invent the true , by analogy , or they see the object to be described , whether the object comes to them or they go toward the object ... Have men the power to bring the universe into their brain , or is their brain a talisman with which they abolish the laws of time and space ? " Critics agree that Balzac 's goal in *La Peau de chagrin* was the former .

= = = Realism = = =

The novel is widely cited as an important early example of the realism for which Balzac became famous . Descriptions of Paris are one example : the novel is filled with actual locations , including the Palais Royal and the Notre Dame Cathedral . The narration and characters allude repeatedly to art and culture , from Gioachino Rossini 's opera *Tancredi* to the statue of Venus de Milo .

The book 's third paragraph contains a long description of the process and purpose behind the ritual in gambling houses whereby " the law despoils you of your hat at the outset . " The atmosphere of the establishment is described in precise detail , from the faces of the players to the " greasy " wallpaper and the tablecloth " worn by the friction of gold " . The emphasis on money evoked in the first pages ? and its contrast with the decrepit surroundings ? mirrors the novel 's themes of social organization and economic materialism .

The confluence of realist detail with symbolic meaning continues when Valentin enters the antique shop ; the store represents the planet itself . As he wanders about , he tours the world through the relics of its various epochs : " Every land of earth seemed to have contributed some stray fragment of its learning , some example of its art . " The shop contains a painting of Napoleon ; a Moorish yataghan ; an idol of the Tartars ; portraits of Dutch burgomasters ; a bust of Cicero ; an Ancient Egyptian mummy ; an Etruscan vase ; a Chinese dragon ; and hundreds of other objects . The panorama of human activity reaches a moral fork in the road when the shopkeeper leads Valentin to Raphael 's portrait of Jesus Christ . It does not deter him from his goal , however ; only when he finds the skin does Valentin decide to abort his suicidal mission . In doing so , he demonstrates humanity favoring ego over divine salvation .

= = = Opening image = = =

At the start of the novel , Balzac includes an image from Laurence Sterne 's 1759 novel *Tristram Shandy* : a curvy line drawn in the air by a character seeking to express the freedom enjoyed " whilst a man is free " . Balzac never explained his purpose behind the use of the symbol , and its significance to *La Peau de chagrin* is the subject of debate . In his comprehensive review of *La Comédie humaine* , Herbert J. Hunt connects the " serpentine squiggle " to the " sinuous design " of Balzac 's novel . Critic Martin Kanes , however , suggests that the image symbolizes the impossibility of language to express an idea fully . This dilemma , he proposes , is directly related to the conflict between will and knowledge indicated by the shopkeeper at the start of the novel .

= = Themes = =

= = = Autobiography = = =

Balzac mined his own life for details in the first parts of *La Peau de Chagrin* , and he likely modeled the protagonist Raphaël de Valentin on himself . Details recounted by Valentin of his impoverished living quarters are autobiographical allusions to Balzac 's earliest days as an author : " Nothing could be uglier than this garret , awaiting its scholar , with its dingy yellow walls and odor of poverty . The roofing fell in a steep slope , and the sky was visible through chinks in the tiles . There was room for a bed , a table , and a few chairs , and beneath the highest point of the roof my piano could stand . " Although they allow for a degree of embellishment , biographers and critics agree that Balzac was

drawing from his own experience .

Other parts of the story also derive from the author 's life : Balzac once attended a feast held by the Marquis de Las Marismas , who planned to launch a newspaper ? the same situation in which Valentin finds himself after expressing his first wish to the talisman . Later , Valentin visits the opera armed with a powerful set of glasses that allow him to observe every flaw in the women on stage (to guard against desire) . These may also have been drawn from Balzac 's experience , as he once wrote in a letter about a set of " divine " opera glasses he ordered from the Paris Observatory .

More significant is the connection between the women in the novel and the women in Balzac 's life . Some critics have noted important similarities between Valentin 's efforts to win the heart of Foedora and Balzac 's infatuation with Olympe Pélissier . A scene in which Valentin hides in Foedora 's bedroom to watch her undress is said to come from a similar situation wherein Balzac secretly observed Pélissier . It 's probable that Pélissier was not the model for Foedora , however , since she accepted Balzac 's advances and wrote him friendly letters ; Foedora , by contrast , declares herself outside the reach of any interested lover . Critics agree that the " Woman without a Heart " described in the novel is a composite of other women Balzac knew . The character of Pauline , meanwhile , was likely influenced by another of Balzac 's mistresses , Laure de Berny .

= = = Vouloir , pouvoir , and savoir = = =

At the start of the book , the shopkeeper discusses with Valentin " the great secret of human life " . They consist of three words , which Balzac renders in capital letters : VOULOIR (" to will ") , POUVOIR (" to be able ") , and SAVOIR (" to know ") . Will , he explains , consumes us ; power (or , in one translation , " to have your will ") destroys us ; and knowledge soothes us . These three concepts form the philosophical foundation of the novel .

The talisman connects these precepts to the theory of vitalism ; it physically represents the life force of its owner , and is reduced with each exercise of the will . The shopkeeper tries to warn Valentin that the wisest path lies not in exercising his will or securing power , but in developing the mind . " What is folly " , he asks Valentin , " if not an excess of will and power ? " Overcome with the possibilities offered by the skin , however , the young man throws caution to the wind and embraces his desire . Upon grabbing the talisman , he declares : " I want to live with excess . " Only when his life force is nearly depleted does he recognize his mistake : " It suddenly struck him that the possession of power , no matter how enormous , did not bring with it the knowledge of how to use it ... [he] had had everything in his power , and he had done nothing . "

The will , Balzac cautions , is a destructive force that seeks only to acquire power unless tempered by knowledge . The shopkeeper presents a foil for Valentin 's future self , offering study and mental development as an alternative to consuming desire . Foedora also serves as a model for resistance to the corruption of will , insofar as she seeks at all times to excite desire in others while never giving in to her own . That Valentin is happiest living in the material squalor of his tiny garret ? lost in study and writing , with the good @-@ hearted Pauline giving herself to him ? underscores the irony of his misery at the end of the book , when he is surrounded with the fruits of his material desire .

= = = Society = = =

The novel extrapolates Balzac 's analysis of desire from the individual to society ; he feared that the world , like Valentin , was losing its way due to material excess and misguided priorities . In the gambling house , the orgiastic feast , the antique shop , and the discussions with men of science , Balzac examines this dilemma in various contexts . The lust for social status to which Valentin is led by Rastignac is emblematic of this excess ; the gorgeous but unattainable Foedora symbolizes the pleasures offered by high society .

Science offers no panacea . In one scene , a group of doctors offer a range of quickly formulated opinions as to the cause of Valentin 's feebleness . In another , a physicist and a chemist admit defeat after employing a range of tactics designed to stretch the skin . All of these scientific approaches lack an understanding of the true crisis , and are therefore doomed to fail . Although it is

only shown in glimpses ? the image of Christ , for example , painted by Valentin 's namesake , the Renaissance artist Raphael ? Balzac wished to remind readers that Christianity offered the potential to temper deadly excess . After failing in their efforts to stretch the skin , the chemist declares : " I believe in the devil " ; " And I in God " , replies the physicist .

The corruption of excess is related to social disorganization in a description at the start of the final section . Physically feeble though living in absolute luxury , Raphaël de Valentin is described as retaining in his eyes " an extraordinary intelligence " with which he is able to see " everything at once " :

That expression was painful to see ... It was the inscrutable glance of helplessness that must perforce consign its desires to the depths of its own heart ; or of a miser enjoying in imagination all the pleasures that his money could procure for him , while he declines to lessen his hoard ; the look of a bound Prometheus , of the fallen Napoleon of 1815 , when he learned at the Elysee the strategical blunder that his enemies had made , and asked for twenty @-@ four hours of command in vain ...

= = Reception and legacy = =

The novel sold out immediately after going on sale , and was reviewed in every major Parisian newspaper and magazine . In some cases Balzac wrote the reviews himself ; using the name " Comte Alex de B ? " , he announced that the book proved he had achieved " the stature of genius " . Independent reviews were less sweeping , but also very positive . Poet Émile Deschamps praised the rhythm of the novel , and the religious commentator Charles Forbes René de Montalembert indicated approvingly that it highlighted the need for more spirituality in society as a whole . Although some critics chastised Balzac for reveling in negativity , others felt it simply reflected the condition of French society . German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe declared it a shining example of the " incurable corruption of the French nation " . Critics argue about whether Goethe 's comments were praise for the novel or not .

This storm of publicity caused a flurry of activity as readers around France scrambled to obtain the novel . Balzac 's friend and La Caricature editor Charles Philipon wrote to the author one week after publication : " there is no getting hold of La Peau de chagrin . Grandville had to stop everything to read it , because the librarian sent round every half @-@ hour to ask if he had finished . " Friends near and far wrote to Balzac indicating their similar difficulties in locating copies . The second edition was released one month later , and it was followed by parodies and derivative works from other writers . Balzac 's friend Théophile Gautier included a comical homage in his 1833 story collection Les Jeunes @-@ France when , during a recreation of the feast from Balzac 's novel , a character says : " This is the point at which I 'm supposed to pour wine down my waistcoat ... It says so in black and white on page 171 of La Peau de chagrin ... And this is where I have to toss a 100 @-@ sou coin in the air to see whether or not there 's a God . "

The novel established Balzac as a prominent figure in the world of French literature . Publishers fought among themselves to publish his future work , and he became a mainstay on the list of invitation for social functions around Paris . Balzac took pride in his novel 's success , and declared to the editor of the journal L 'Avenir that " Elle est donc le point de départ de mon ouvrage " (" This is the point of departure for my body of work ") . Consistently popular even after his death , La Peau de chagrin was republished nineteen times between 1850 and 1880 .

When he developed his scheme for organizing all of his novels and stories into a single sequence called La Comédie humaine , Balzac placed La Peau de chagrin at the start of the section called Études philosophiques (" Philosophical Studies ") . Like the other works in this category ? including the similarly autobiographical Louis Lambert (1832) ? it deals with philosophy and the supernatural . But it also provides a bridge to the realism of the Études des m?urs (" Study of Manners ") , where the majority of his novels were located .

= = = L 'Étrangère = = =

The popularity of the novel extended to Ukraine , where a baroness named Ewelina Hańska read about Balzac 's novels in newspapers she received from Paris . Intrigued , she ordered copies of his work , and she read them with her cousins and friends around Volhynia . They were impressed by the understanding he showed toward women in *La Physiologie du mariage* , but felt that *La Peau de chagrin* portrayed them in a cruel and unforgiving light . Hańska wrote a letter to Balzac , signed it as *L'Étrangère* (" The Stranger ") , and mailed it from Odessa on 28 February 1832 .

With no return address , Balzac was left to reply in the *Gazette de France* , with the hope that she would see the notice . She did not , but wrote again in November : " Your soul embraces centuries , monsieur ; its philosophical concepts appear to be the fruit of long study matured by time ; yet I am told you are still young . I would like to know you , but feel I have no need to do so . I know you through my own spiritual instinct ; I picture you in my own way , and feel that if I were to actually set eyes upon you , I should instantly exclaim , ' That is he ! ' " .

Eventually she revealed herself to him , and they began a correspondence that lasted for fifteen years . Although she remained faithful to her husband Wacław , Mme. Hańska and Balzac enjoyed an emotional intimacy through their letters . When the baron died in 1841 , the French author began to pursue the relationship outside the written page . They wed in the town of Berdychiv on 14 March 1850 , five months before he died .

= = = Recurring characters = = =

Because it was among the first novels he released under his own name , Balzac did not use characters in *La Peau de chagrin* from previous works . He did , however , introduce several individuals who resurfaced in later stories . Most significant of these is Eugène de Rastignac , the older gentleman who tutors Valentin in the vicious ways of high society . Thirty pages into the writing of his 1834 novel *Le Père Goriot* , Balzac suddenly crossed out the name he had been using for a character ? Massiac ? and used Rastignac instead . The relationship between teacher and student in *La Peau de chagrin* is mirrored in *Le Père Goriot* , when the young Rastignac is guided in the ways of social realpolitik by the incognito criminal Vautrin .

Balzac used the character Foedora in three other stories , but eventually wrote her out of them after deciding on other models for social femininity . In later editions of *La Peau de chagrin* , he changed the text to name one of the bankers " Taillefer " , whom he had introduced in *L'Auberge rouge* (1831) . He also used the name Horace Bianchon for one of the doctors , thus connecting the book to the famous physician who appears in thirty @-@ one stories in *La Comédie humaine* . So vividly had the doctor been rendered that Balzac himself called out for Bianchon while lying on his deathbed .

The use of recurring characters lends Balzac 's work a cohesion and atmosphere unlike any other series of novels . It enables a depth of characterization that goes beyond simple narration or dialogue . " When the characters reappear " , notes the critic Samuel Rogers , " they do not step out of nowhere ; they emerge from the privacy of their own lives which , for an interval , we have not been allowed to see . " Although the complexity of these characters ' lives inevitably led Balzac to make errors of chronology and consistency , the mistakes are considered minor in the overall scope of the project . Readers are more often troubled by the sheer number of people in Balzac 's world , and feel deprived of important context for the characters . Detective novelist Arthur Conan Doyle said that he never tried to read Balzac , because he " did not know where to begin " .

= = = Influence = = =

Balzac 's novel was adapted for the libretto of Giselher Klebe 's 1959 opera *Die tödlichen Wünsche* (*The Deadly Wishes*) . 1977 ? 1978 the German composer Fritz Geißler composed *Das Chagrinleder* after a libretto by Günther Deicke . In 1989 ? 1990 the Russian composer Yuri Khanon wrote the ballet *L'Os de chagrin* (*The Shagreen Bone*) , based on Balzac 's text , which included an opera @-@ interlude of the same name . In 1992 a biographic pseudo @-@ documentary in the form of an opera @-@ film based on his opera *L'os de Chagrin* (« Chagrenevaia Kost » , ru) was

released .

The novel has also been cited as a possible influence on Oscar Wilde for his 1890 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* , although this hypothesis is rejected by most scholars . The protagonist , Dorian Gray , acquires a magical portrait that ages while he remains forever youthful .

Russian literature specialist Priscilla Meyer maintains in her book *How the Russians Read the French* , that both *La Peau de Chagrin* and *Pere Goriot* were extensively paralleled , subverted and inverted , by Dostoevsky in *Crime and Punishment* .

In 1960 Croatian animator Vladimir Kristl made an animated short entitled *Šagrenska koža* (*The Piece of Shagreen Leather*) inspired by Balzac 's novel .

Toward the end of his life , Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud felt a special connection to Balzac 's novel , since he believed that his world was shrinking like Valentin 's talisman . Diagnosed with a fatal tumor , Freud resolved to commit suicide . After re-reading *La Peau de chagrin* , he said to his doctor : " This was the proper book for me to read ; it deals with shrinking and starvation . " The next day , his doctor administered a lethal dose of morphine , and Freud died .

In 2011 French director Marianne Badrichani staged an adaptation of *La Peau de Chagrin* in London 's Holland Park .