

The “Rise” and the Social Realism in William Dean Howells’s *The Rise of Silas Lapham*

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Abstract

Money Club! Money Talks! Money is everything! Without money, you execute nothing. This is the idea that determines the social and cultural circumstances in William Dean Howells’s era.

The Colonel Silas Lapham, exemplary figure of a new self-made class on the ‘rise’, gains his money during the rise of industrialization. As a prominent artwork of American Realism, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* firstly creates a detailed story about the rise of Silas Lapham’s business and his subsequent bankruptcy and moral rise. Secondly, its subplot focuses on a trans-cultural marriage between Penelope Lapham and Tom Corey. In this realist fiction, Howells is concerned with exploring the historical shift of capitalism: “Howells presented a Marxian philosophy in his ‘economic novels.’” Observing the social background of American industrial expansion, Howells calls the rise of economy “‘the industrial consciousness of the 1880’s and 1890’s’” clearly indicating that for him the problem of American Realism is the problem of economy. After moving to Boston in 1866, Howells makes Boston the central place in most of his novels. In fact, the problem of Boston is the problem of American Realism and Howells sees the shift of social change and the emergence of the lower and middle classes. For instance, as a very successful businessman, Lapham reads ‘The Events,’ earns money by himself, and has “the pride which comes of self-making.” On the contrary, as an aristocratic clubman, Corey’s prosperity is inherited from his father, and always reads the old-fashioned Bostonian publication—‘The Daily Advertiser.’ Bearing in mind the cultural contrast alluded to by Howells, this paper intends to firstly discuss Lapham’s rise which will be related to the term: ‘economy of paint.’ Next, this paper tries to analyze Lapham’s bankruptcy and his plunge into what can be termed an ‘economy of pain.’ Then, the final discussion will focus on Lapham’s moral rise, exploring what Howell’s text suggests is ‘the symbolic meanings of the hole.’

Keyword: economic paint, *rise* (moral/economic), economic pain, American Realism, transculture, cultural contrast, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*

"I guess you wouldn't want my life without the money."—William Dean Howells 3.

Lapham 'could not rise' to unselfishness in his dealings with Rogers and Lapham's own words at the close which indicate a concern for the 'rights of others.' The subplot thus contributes to the 'education' of Lapham in the correct solution of moral problems. His moral rise is the product of more than a conscience troubled by his earlier treatment of Rogers.—Donald Pizer 432.

Introduction

Money Club! Money Talks! Money is everything! Without money, you execute nothing. This is the social and cultural circumstance in William Dean Howells's era.

The Rise of Silas Lapham has always been and will continue to be William Dean Howells's most renowned work, the work that connects him to most of his readers. Generally speaking, most critics agree that *The Rise of Silas Lapham* has justly been defined as one of the masterpieces of popular American Realist fiction.¹ Firstly, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* mainly intends to provide a detailed story about the rise of Silas Lapham's business and his subsequent bankruptcy but its denouement is to explore the protagonist's moral rise. Secondly, its subplot focuses on a trans-cultural marriage between Penelope Lapham and Tom Corey. In fact, the subplot blends with the main plot which has been praised as a "tour de force by means of which Howells introduces his main character and provides a masterful resume of his personality and origins" (Seelye, p.48). Lapham's 'rise' relates to the economic prosperity of American society and is product of the historical shift in the later 19th century. A shift which aroused a new sense of euphoria concerning the "conditions of social and economic life" (qtd. in Bell, p.2). The shift of social change saw the economic emergence of the lower and middle classes with their growing dominance on the market economy. In this Realist novel, Howells is concerned with exploring the historical shift of capitalism. For George Arms, who asserts the importance of the historical shift of capitalism in his work, "Howells presented a Marxian

¹ Realism is a kind of response to the shift of social change, which concerns on a new interest in industrialism. Put simply, industrialism provides people from the lower class and the middle class a chance to earn money in the market economy. In 1866, Howells moved to Boston where "he was seeking a place where he could be a 'man' and a 'writer' at the same time" (Bell 36). While moved there, Howells claimed that "Nothing in a story can be better than life" (qtd. in Bell 19) because he saw the shift of social change and the rise of capitalism. As a writer and citizen, he wrote the problem of Boston to the public, and what the problem of Boston he wrote had been called the problem of American Realism. Michael Davitt Bell, "The Sin of Art: William Dean Howells," *The Problem of American Realism*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993, 19, 36. Furthermore, Alfred Habegger remarks that "Business destroys peace in Howells' fiction for a very simple reason: business is the war of each against all. In the mid-1880s, Howells gave a very favorable picture of the American businessman in the person of Silas Lapham" (226). In fact, in the period of industrial expansion, investment may be a very risky business, which will change our stable life because business destroys the calm, trust and helpfulness between people. Alfred Habegger, "Ambition vs. Selflessness," *Gender, Fantasy, and Realism in American Literature*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, 226.

philosophy in his ‘economic novels’” (p.2). From the social background of American industrial expansion, Howells calls the rise of economy “‘the industrial consciousness of the 1880’s and 1890’s’” (qtd. in Arms, p.3), clearly indicating that, for him, the problem of American Realism is the problem of economy. In 1866, Howells recognises that Boston is the central place in most of his novels, including *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. Howells’s Boston connotes an era of capitalist expansion, rapid urbanization and industrialization which are the main issues that preoccupy American Realism. While describing Lapham’s rise and fall in moral and financial terms, Howells perceives the rapid social change this way: “‘The style of a novel is part of the execution of a work of art; the execution of a work of art is part of its very essence, and that, it seems to me, must have mattered in all ages in exactly the same degree, and be destined always to do so’” (qtd. in Bell, p.20). Ostensibly, we learn that *The Rise of Silas Lapham* explores a dramatic contrast between two traditional American families. Silas Lapham, who comes from the lower class, is the character to best witness the economic rise in Boston whereas the rich Bostonian Bromfield Corey, who belongs to aristocratic and rank-ordered society, is forced to see his own gradual demise. This is how Howells stresses the cultural contrast between Lapham and Corey. As a very successful businessman, Lapham reads ‘The Events,’ earns money by himself, and has “the pride which comes of self-making” (p.94). On the contrary, as an aristocratic clubman, Corey’s prosperity is inherited from his father, and always reads the old-fashioned Bostonian publication—‘The Daily Advertiser.’ Bearing in mind the cultural contrast alluded to by Howells, this paper intends to firstly discuss Lapham’s rise which will be related to the term: ‘economy of paint.’ Next, this paper tries to analyze Lapham’s bankruptcy and his plunge into what can be termed an ‘economy of pain.’ Then, the final discussion will focus on Lapham’s moral rise, exploring what Howells’s text suggests is ‘the symbolic meanings of the hole.’

Lapham’s Rise: “Economy of Paint”

At the opening of the novel, Bartley Hubbard at the “Solid Men of Boston” series in “The Events”, reports that Silas Lapham, whose success is due to the rise of economy in American society, is a “fine type of the successful American” (p.4). To be more precise, Lapham best exemplifies the idea of the American Dream. While talking about the American Dream which reflects the glorification of business, Lapham, a new self-made businessman on the ‘rise’, deservedly wins his honorable title, as the mineral paint king. While managing his business, he always keeps his business principles in mind. “Business is business” becomes the Golden Rule, his central business principle which acts of course as an efficient method for him to be a self-made man. Lapham not only sells the mineral paint but also ‘paints’ his colorful career, as he is “bound to be an American of *some* sort, from the word Go!” (p.4). As a typical American who is devoted to his search of the American Dream, Lapham is unmistakably of the Emersonian frame of mind.²

² Silas Lapham is a typical Emersonian hero because when he returns to his original self, to his past, to the Lapham village and to self-sufficiency, he becomes a comic figure and self-reliant Lapham. Paul A. Bove

The American sort he [Lapham] becomes is the wealthy, self-made businessmen who moves to Boston because of the demands of expansion and organization in the rapidly growing post-Civil War industrial economy when his paint business takes off. (Thompson, p.5)

Put simply, Lapham, an independent and self-reliant American, is a traditional Emersonian. It is true that Lapham's rise is due to his introduction of the Nehemiah Lapham Mineral Paint to the mass market. When Lapham introduces a new business product to the mass market, he suddenly gets his financial prosperity even though the whole country is too poor to paint their houses with anything. The subtext informing his successful business is of the rise of industrialization. Actually, Lapham's rise has been defined as an "economy of paint" (Barton, p.160). While talking with Tom, Anna Corey's words strengthens the argument about Lapham's rise being due to an 'economy of paint': "if you come to money, there is the paint princess. She [Irene Lapham] will have plenty" (p.83). To Lapham, his rise indicates that he must go back to another world: "The day of small things was past" (p.15). The meaning of paint loaded here simultaneously referring both to material and money as, to Lapham, paint becomes his heart's blood, passion and religion. The dialogue between Lapham and his wife illustrates that his money come from the mineral paint: "That paint was like my own blood to me" (p.15). Hence, it figures that the driving force of his religion and heart brings him to wealth and power: "He believes in mineral paint, and he puts his heart and soul into it. He makes it a religion; though we would not imply that it *is* his religion" (p.19). To Lapham, paint is energy and matter that not merely allow him to 'create and destroy,' but also the cause of his 'rise' to 'fall', both financially and morally speaking. His rise is due to the mineral paint whereas his fall is because of his paint, too. After being a successful businessman, the name of Lapham's country—Lumberville—has been changed into 'Lapham.' As one of the new risen self-made businessmen, Lapham still keeps to conventions specific to his social and cultural background. In spite of his financial prosperity, none of the Laphams is interested in taking a trip to Europe. Their holiday destinations are limited to mountains and seaside resorts, and at the novel's opening the reader becomes conscious of their conservative lifestyle. In their new prosperity, the Laphams plan to build a new house and buy a great deal of books that they had never had the opportunity to read. 'Without money, you execute nothing.' The Laphams believe that they can buy what they want if they have enough money. To them, 'money is everything or money talks': "The principal thing looked at now is the amount of money" (p.88). As a very successful businessman, Lapham in his dealings with his only partner, Milton K. Rogers, are

asserts that "Like Emerson's 'American,' Lapham had 'lost relation to the laws of nature, converting them instead into forms of self-interests" (p.40). P. A. Bove, 1991. "Helpless Longing, or, the Lesson of *Silas Lapham*," *New Essays on The Rise of Silas Lapham*. Edited by D. E. Pease, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 40. It is true that at the closing of the novel Lapham as "Howells's 'nature's nobleman' (as Bartley Hubbard calls him) is put where he belongs—back in nature" J. Seelye, 1991. "The Hole in Howells/The Lapse in *Silas Lapham*," *New Essays on The Rise of Silas Lapham*, Edited by Donald E. Pease, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 63.

determined by the notion that that money is first and important. In fact, Lapham's attitude toward him is very cruel and selfish because, according to his Golden Rule, it is not possible for him to share the interests with his business partner Rogers. Therefore, while he handles his business, Lapham claims that the monopoly enterprise is his own goal. What he thinks is exactly the idea of the modern capitalism.

By contrast, when Bromfield Corey, a "symbol of splendor" (p.80), hears the story of Lapham's rise, he thinks that Lapham, whose name means "'man of the woods'" (qtd. in Seelye, p.58), will not be a man to his taste. The elder Corey lives his life following traditional aristocratic rules and considers that modern business is not good for the world of aristocracy. According to him, the prosperity of capitalism will cause the invasion of the bourgeois into the social scene of the nobility. Clearly, to the elder Corey, it is true that neconomic prosperity destroys real aristocracy. The elder Corey always tells the young Corey, "It [economic prosperity] strikes at the root of the whole feudal system" (p.59). But why does the elder Corey maintain such conventional ideas? Education and social status are two main factors. Firstly, the elder Corey insists that he gets better education than Lapham who is an uncultivated person from a farm family in the State of Vermont and whose only topic of conversation is his own rise. Consequently, the elder Corey considers that they [he and Silas Lapham] have different tastes and belong to two different social spheres. Secondly, in the typical rank-ordered society, the elder Corey still keeps his "old fashioned Bostonian sense" (p.126). For the elder Corey, being in society with Lapham is impossible: "Society is a very different sort of thing from good sense and right ideas. It is based upon them, of course, but the airy, graceful, winning superstructure which we all know demands different qualities" (p.121). As a matter of fact, the dinner party between the Laphams and the Coreys has presented an obvious contrast of two different cultures. James M. Cox records the contrast between these two different societies this way: "Culture, in this social sense, is the refinement that may give grace to the natural man. The middle class wish would always be that this grace is somehow inborn, a quality that 'money can't buy'" (p.117). For example, Lapham just drinks water whereas the elder Corey drinks wine. Whereas the elder Corey and his relatives talk about arts, novels and European trips, Lapham talks about everything related to his family, his past and his paint business: "he means paint first, last, and all the time" (p.79). Money! Money! Money! Before the Laphams visit the Coreys, they just worry about what kind of clothes they should wear when they are invited to the former's formal dinner party for the first time. After the dinner party, Lapham observes that when the elder Corey had gone Europe to improve his painting ability, he exactly represented a fading tradition of rank-ordered society, "had spent his youth abroad and his father's money everywhere, and done nothing but say smart things" (p.80). By contrast, for the elder Corey, Lapham's behavior is that of a drunkard. Next day when the elder Corey visits Lapham at his office, he "tries to pass off Lapham's behavior—'There was nothing—really nothing'" (Thompson, p.13). It is true that "Social difference erupts during the course of the dinner party which Lapham and his family are invited to" (Thompson, p.13). From their different manners the class

distinction becomes obvious and ““may have led Howells to privilege character as the unifying bond of American realism”” (qtd. in Barton, p.162). Thus, we realize that the dinner party episode reflects “Howells’s sense of being an ‘imposter’ in Boston” (Seelye, p.58), as the dinner party for the aristocracy class is a key social behavior.

Lapham’s Bankruptcy: “Economy of Pain”

While dealing with Rogers’s problem, Lapham’s overextension in his business plays an organizing role to his economic decline. After being a successful and rich businessman, Lapham builds a new house because he believes that money can buy anything. By contrast, the burning of his new house significantly symbolizes his financial falling. At the dinner party Lapham proudly tells the Coreys about his prosperity and the success of mineral paint: “And when everybody is shutting down, or running half time, the works up at Lapham are going full chip, just the same as ever. Well, it’s his pride” (p.240). Unfortunately, Lapham refuses Rogers’s business proposal when Rogers comes to ask for his economic help: “I [Rogers] want that property, and I’ve got the money to buy it” (p.290). To Lapham, everything is change, since Rogers’s words remind him of his lapse: he is a thief who steals Rogers’s money. In the past, Rogers had been his business partner who had put much money in their business investment. Lapham’s attitude toward him, however, was quite cruel, never sharing his interest with him. Lapham excuse for his refusal is that Rogers’s crooked approach to business: “And do you think that I am going to steal these men’s money to help you plunder somebody in a new scheme” (pp. 282-283)? When he takes an interview with Bartley Hubbard, Lapham fails to speak the name of his sole business partner Rogers. This is why while asking for Lapham’s help, Rogers attempts to get the land of Lapham’s hands and plans to dig out a ‘hole’ for him. To put it crudely, Rogers is a good representative of a “self-conceited and cold-hearted” (p.278) man who plots against his business partner. Soon however the reader realizes that mineral paint not merely brings Lapham success, but also makes him fall. When Rogers plans to plot against him, his scheme recognizes that where Lapham vulnerability lies is with the very same thing that brought him success:

I began to throw good money after bad, just as I always did

with everything that Rogers ever came within a mile of. Well, what’s the use? I lost the money that would have carried me out of this, and I shouldn’t have had to shut down the Works, or sell the house, or—. (p.262)

Lapham’s selfishness in relation to Rogers is of course the major factor of his falling. This is why when Lapham’s career is falling into the ‘hole’ of trouble, everyone attempts to drive him to the wall. The only exception is Tom who gives him courage and hope. “Nobody wanted to lend money on the plant at Lapham without taking time to look into the state of the business” (p.280).

With its description of Lapham’s breakdown, John Cyril Barton explicates that Sewell’s

statement—“economy of pain”—becomes the “paradigm of Howellsian realism” (p.160). Lapham’s financial collapse related to Swell’s ‘economy of pain’ has been regarded as “one of the most touching moments in *The Rise of Silas Lapham*” (Dimock, p.67). The standard of ‘economy of pain’ is the sense and justice that expresses Lapham’s self-assertion after he refuses Rogers’ business proposal. At the beginning before his business blooming, Rogers, his sole business partner, returns to borrow money from him, attempts to feed out his sense of guilt and brings him to lose his base of assets. It is sure that Lapham’s borrowing from Rogers determines the collapse of his business. His ambitions, the huge investments on the building of a new house and the expansion of his enterprise, bring him to economic breakdown. For instance, Lapham, a self-made businessman, makes a tidy profit with some shrewd investments on the stock market and spends much money to build his new house. Lapham’s overextension in investing the stock market and building the new house play a pivotal role in him losing his property: “Silas’ house-building enterprise becomes an example of overextension” (Thompson, p.2). Due to his overextension and financial imbalance, Lapham’s bankruptcy indicates, “accidents will happen in the best-regulated families” (p.258). Already facing his financial disaster, Lapham accidentally sets a fire which burns his newly built house. Lapham’s dejected state is apparent in the way he relates the disaster to Penelope: “I set it on fire myself” (p.276). In the meantime, everything that mattered to him evaporates as he loses his money and self-confidence. As a way of resolving his business trouble, Lapham considers selling his new house, but decides against it because, in his mind the new house is a symbol of hope. Howells gives the reader an insight into what is going on inside Lapham’s mind, unmistakably showing “it was the hardest, and to sell his new house” (p.271):

The broker’s statement to Lapham: . . . it was a pretty dull time in real estate.

Lapham’s answer: Yes. (for few while. . .)

Lapham’s monologue 1: But he found it hard to get his voice up out of his throat, when he said he guessed he would get the broker to sell that new house of his on the water side of Beacon.

Lapham’s monologue 2: . . . he should not sell at a sacrifice, and he did not care to have the broker name him or describe the house definitely unless parties means business.

Lapham’s monologue 3: . . . , it did not seem to him that he could part with the house. So much of his hope for himself and his children had gone into it that the thought of selling it made him tremulous and sick.

Lapham's monologue 4: They were not merely a part of the landscape; they were a part of his pride and glory, his success, his triumphant life's work which was fading into failure in his helpless hands. (pp. 272-273)

Doubtless, Lapham's new building house symbolizes his rise; however, the burning of the building ironically indicates his fall as well. Having burned his new house with his own careless hands, his pride and success become things of the past. James M. Cox explains the representation of Lapham's new house this way:

The house is for Lapham not so much the sign of his success as it is the expansive embodiment of his upward social mobility. His relation to the house is thus but further evidence that the emotional center of the novel lies not in Lapham's business but in his advance upon the social world above him. The profit of his business is the very house he is building; small wonder that his investment in it threatens to go beyond interest onto the principal. (p.119)

As a matter of fact, Lapham gets a moral shock while he witnesses the burning of his pride and joy. After telling his wife, his behavior is strange but nevertheless indicative of the shock: "He went to bed, and fell into the deep sleep which sometimes follows a great moral shock. It was perhaps rather a torpor than a sleep" (p.276). At this striking moment, he suddenly understands that the other side to his 'economy of paint' is an 'economy of pain' which is revealed as he loses his property and goes back to where he started. "Everything else changes but this is just where it was a year ago. It don't go backward, and it don't go forward" (p.311). Lapham learns that the burning of his new building house is the final chapter of his 'rise.' Lapham knows that at the end of all this, and after all his debts are paid, he is going to be left with nothing. "He went out, and Lapham remained staring at the door which closed upon him. This was his reward for standing firm for right and justice to his own destruction: to feel like a thief and a murder" (p.292). Of course, Lapham is puzzled and confused. Lapham's finance and liability achieve a good balance after his bankruptcy. This kind of phenomenon between what you pay and what you owe generally exists in American society in the later 19th century.

'Paying' is what someone always ends up doing because society works by 'the balance of the account,' and 'the advantage of some is won by an equivalent loss of others.' . . . from the 1840s through the 1880s, . . . 'different types of people differed in their sensitivity to pain,' obviously had 'implications reach[ing] far beyond anesthesia.' (qtd. in Dimock, pp. 68-69)

Ironically, when Lapham's mineral paint business begins to prosper and when he begins to build

his new house, his morals take a plunge. By contrast, when he loses his finance and sets fire on his new house, his morals begin to rise.

Lapham's Moral Rise: 'The Symbolic Meanings of the Hole'

As a ruined Lapham revisits his past, he is able to apply a new perspective to what happened. He becomes aware that his financial rise went hand-in-hand with his moral fall. This idea allows him to view his economic ruin as the thing that helped him escape the death of his morality: "Seems sometimes as if it was a hole opened for me, and I crept out it" (p.321). Actually, Lapham's character throughout the novel reflects the effects of his "self-deception and self-discovery" (Hart, p.441). Moving from the former state to the other, Lapham undergoes a process of spiritual transformation. "It seems to me I done wrong about Rogers in the first place; that the whole trouble came from that. It was just like starting a row of bricks" (p.320). Hence, after burning his new house and learning a moral lesson, Lapham becomes fully conscious of the fact that while his business prospered, he was in 'hole'; after his financial breakdown, he is able to creep out of the 'hole.' To him, the notion of the hole has a strangely rich symbolism. The 'hole' partly refers to his father's discovery which led to the creation of Lapham's successful mineral paint. However, it also refers to the economic hole that American society eventually got itself into during the capitalist expansion in the later 19th century. Graham Thompson's words are revealing here: "It is the paint that turned a hole in the ground into a 'gold-mine'" (p.10). The 'hole' means that when his business reaches its zenith, his morals are at their nadir. However, when he loses the base of his assets, his morality is takes an upward turn. Donald Pizer remarks on Lapham's transformation this way:

The main plot of The Rise of Silas Lapham concerns Silas's financial fall and moral rise. It revolves around his business affairs and social aspirations, and it concludes with his decision to sacrifice wealth and position rather than engage in business duplicity. (p.430)

Lapham's transformation proves that if he faces his financial collapse with an honest attitude, he could creep out the hole from his economic disaster: "I don't know as I should always say it paid; but if I done it, and the thing was to do over again, right in the same way, I guess I should have to do it" (p.321). But if he faces his tough situation within the wrong attitudes, he has no hope of creeping out the 'hole.' From one point of view, the 'hole' is that metaphoric space where he falls and where he creeps out of. From another point of view, Lapham's story is ironically balanced as his success begins with the mineral paint, and his failure ends up with his mineral paint as well.

The overextension in business leads to Lapham's failure, but his conduct throughout his decline is sufficiently exemplary that, in terms of this plot, he gains in moral stature as he loses his financial base. . . Lapham is morally falling as he is rising financially, and morally rising as he is financially falling. (Dimock, pp. 118-119)

Quite clearly, Lapham's extreme ambition and greed help him run a very successful business; however, his ambition and greed also bring his moral decline and financial bankruptcy. In the midst of his economic disaster, Lapham is informed by his wife Mrs. Lapham of the existence of a love triangle relationship between his beloved Irene, Penelope and Tom. As a 'self-made' businessman, Lapham has little knowledge of his daughters' love affair. He and Mrs. Lapham come to seek Father Sewell's assistance. Father Sewell consoles and comforts Lapham's spirit: "Sewell was intensely interested in the moral spectacle which Lapham presented under his changed conditions" (p.319). During their interview, Lapham and the Father Sewell become the best friends. To some extent, Howells's "Sewell is the production of a collective reality" (Barton, p.172). Like a gentleman who gives his spiritual consolation to the Laphams, Sewell also serves to create a clear picture of the mineral king's moral spectacle. In his spiritual guidance, Sewell's assistance in dealing with a love triangle relationship among Tom, Penelope and Irene really helps Lapham to get his moral education. After the initial shock Lapham is inspired to rethink his life experience. Thus, Lapham must paint his own life, sincerely confess his guilt, and deal with Rogers's problem by himself. Awakened by the moral shock, Lapham returns to his country, to his past, and to his original self where he obtains both the ability to speak of his failure, and to regain his self-confidence. It is true that Sewell's moral instruction resolves the moral puzzle of Lapham condition: "We can trace the operation of evil in the physical world" (p.320). The moral instruction also refers to Lapham's 'economy of pain,' which is equal to his moral expenditure. To Lapham, such kind of economy not only makes him reach a balance between his liabilities and assets, but also strikes a balance between his finance and his morality.

The reader, from this point onward will learn to view Lapham as an innocent person involving himself in the mineral paint business, who has undergone a process of spiritual transformation and gets wisdom.

Yet the very events that bring destruction serve as the series of tests and trials that enable him to recognize the nature of pride and greed, and to understand that real values come, not from external possession, but from moral and spiritual resources that lie within man's nature. (Hart, p.441)

What is more, Howells' ability "to recognize and convey the heroic in 'poor Real life'" (Hart 440) becomes clear because the whole plot connects money and trouble; 'paint' and 'pain' are meaningfully set to reflect each other. John Cyril Barton views the novel's deliberate conflation of morality and economics this way: "Howells not only makes morality a vital issue in business dealings, he also makes economics a vital instrument in moral arbitration" (p.169). Thus Lapham's character functions as a mouthpiece for the lower class and the middle classes who also had been caught up in Lapham's movement of rise and fall. Howells is a realist writer who expresses the ups and downs of

American society to the public. Lapham's rise and fall stresses the fact that Howells believes capitalist expansion to be at the root of all social phenomena in America. Without a doubt, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* is Howells's best-crowned work.

Conclusion.

It is quite clear that in *The Rise of Silas Lapham* Howells integrates 'paint' and 'house' as the symbolic meanings of Lapham's rise and fall. Paint both determines and connotes his affluence. The House represents his money and stands as a wider allusion to real estate. From his 'paint' and 'house,' Lapham draws a moral lesson which is relevant to numerous Americans at a time when economic expansion triggered the rapid changes in people's social circumstances. Put simply, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* relates to "the yoking together of pleasure and pain" (Dimock, p.81) and expresses a specific story. In this story, Howells tells Lapham's business history, as the character is a good example of one who is both beneficiary and victim of the economic boom. "What is lost—or turned into an open secret—in this process is the struggle by which heterosexual romance has to erase all knowledge of same-sex desires from its field of vision" (Thompson, p.16). Through Lapham's story, Howells firstly explores the excessive focus on money and gold. Secondly, Howells finds the opportunity to tell a story that would easily relate to the different kings of industrialism, in every field in American society, past and present. Thirdly, Howells gives the readers an elegant sketch of real social life in American society in the 19th century. "He [Howells] was the first of our important imaginative writers thoughtfully to consider and intelligently to comprehend what was happening to the form and quality of American life [. . .]" (qtd. in Bove, p.29). Of course, the case of Lapham, illustrates that Howells, far from being merely a realist writer who replicates reality to the public, is a writer whose work belongs to and reflects upon contemporary society. There can be no doubt that Howells attacks "the great field of American life on as many sides as you can" (qtd. in Lynn, p.239). Last but not least, Howells teaches us that although money can buy lots of things, it is not everything. To his reader, 'Money Talks' is not 'Money Talks' anymore. Consequently, we know that while Lapham experiences his rise and fall in the mineral paint business, he draws a moral lesson from it. To Howells and his readers, Lapham is a small potato whose devotion in the search for wealth is an attitude typical in an industrialized world. This unexceptional character, like every character in the world stage, gets his opportunity in the way of success. Hence, without a doubt, the 'rise' of Silas Lapham becomes the byword for a wider social phenomenon that characterizes capitalist society.

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