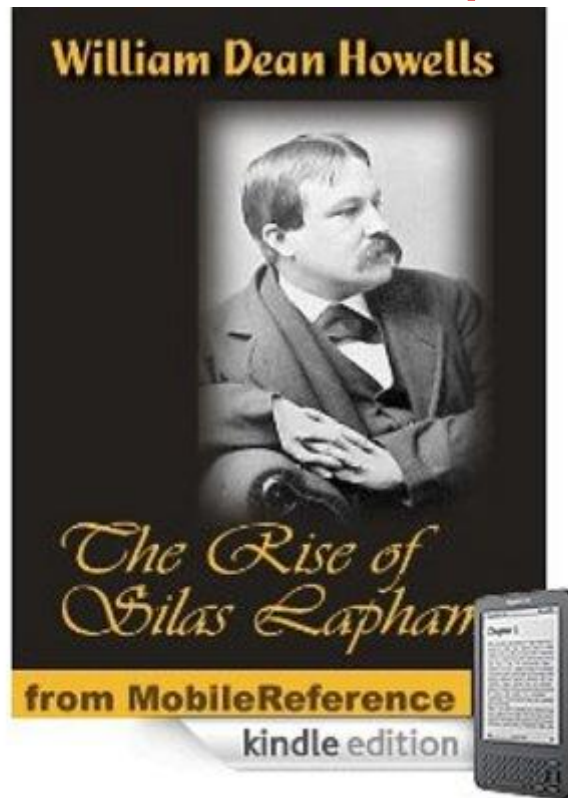


## The Rise Of Silas Lapham



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When reading and studying *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, recognition of the existence of a plot and subplot is necessary. Knowledge of how they relate to each other is also important. In the William Dean Howells novel, a business story dominates a secondary love triangle. Silas Lapham earns a fortune in the paint business through opportunism, greed, and driving ambition. He wants his daughter to marry into the aristocratic Corey family to gain the social prominence the backwoods Laphams have never attained. Silas' conduct in managing his business and Irene's love affair are based on the same materialistic set of values which draw the two stories together. Silas' rise to fortune and the contrived love affair of Irene are romantic aspects of the novel which are only temporary and end tragically. Silas loses his business because he loans too much money to a former partner to redeem his soul from the sin of greed; he had used his partner's money to make the business profitable and then forced the partner out of the enterprise. Irene's love affair is tragically ended when her supposed lover, Tom Corey, reveals that he loves her sister instead. Silas' moral rise after his tragic downfall and Irene's similar realistic development after her love affair are somewhat parallel. Silas will not save his business by continuing to extort money

from unknowing parties; he now thinks of others rather than himself. His daughter also compensates for her lost lover by helping and thinking of her father at the time of his financial crisis. Being realistic, the novel presents characters who have both tragic and comic qualities and fates. Together these stories reveal some of Howells' comments on society and art. All of these aspects tragicomedy, romanticism, realism, morality, society, and art, plus Americanism and universality, will be investigated in relationship to the plot and characters.

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