CHAPTER III
EARLY NOVELS
Estelar
Letting Go although is a long novel of 630 pages consisting seven chapters but Roth is seen to be inefficient and immature. If compared to his debutant novella this novel is longer than it but very weak in construction. Presence of too many characters, shift in settings, and shift in narrative technique altogether makes it very weak as it limits itself by not pointing out one unified dramatic action. The prose of the novel is very lifeless unable to grab attention as Portnoy's Complaint does. But Roth has tried to picturise the minute details of American life.

Letting Go is the story of a person Gabe Wallach who with the succession of the novel gets connected to other lives, how he deals with those relations and what is the outcome of them is what the novel is all about. Throughout the novel we see him helping others in resolving their lives’ conflicts. The first half of the novel is narrated by Gabe Wallach and the second half is told by Philip Roth as a third-person.

After the death of his mother Gabe suffers from immense loneliness. This loneliness is mitigated to some extent when he becomes friend with Paul Her, who is fellow English Instructor and his wife Libby Herz .

Gabe Wallach who had been serving in army as a second Lieutenant is recently discharged from it. He is ongoing the pain and loneliness from his mother’s death. While the death of his mother, Gabe promises to himself that he would do no violence to himself and to any other human being.
He chooses instead of New York, the Iowa City as his destination for studies because he after his mother’s death wanted to stay away from his father. His father was a dentist, whom he hated since long as he thought he never cared for his mother. But the truth was something else. His mother had once confessed in one of the letters written to him that:

“He never once admits that I’ve done him injustice being his wife.. He holds my hand fifty times a day…”(Letting Go 1)

While in Iowa, Gabe comes closer to the Herz family, Paul Herz who is a fellow Instructor and Libby, who is irrational and unpredictable and hysterical patient. Paul and Libby gets married against their family wishes. His family members including uncle Asher were all against the marriage, as Libby was a catholic and Paul was born in a Jew Family. Paul defends himself by saying that he was in love with her. At start they both lived together without marriage later they married when Paul was 21 and libby was 19. Paul loved Libby very much and he doesn’t allow her to have a baby and gets her abort pregnancy just because her kidneys were weak. But the other hand, Libby desperately wanted a child and she thought that it was a baby who can complete life.

Although Paul’s love for her did not ended:

“I love you. I want you to know I love you, Libby, I love you I’ll do anything for you, Lib, I love you.” (Letting Go 3)

Gabe was greatly concerned towards Paul and Libby when he comes to know about Libby’s miscarriage
When Gabe meets Libby for the first time he finds her eccentric but when he comes to know about the mental pain that she is going through after abortion he feels sympathetic about her as she was in need of child whom she was unable to give birth to.

He thinks about her that:

“that girl was not a nut and that knowledge in me produced a feeling of helpless that was almost present in my limbs” (12)

Gabe suggests Libby to start a family she was so upset that taking Gabe to be someone very close breaks the news

“I had a miscarriage in Detroit” (55)

When Libby was crying whether for assurance or for sympathy he comes close to Libby and kisses her in the absence of Paul.

Afterwards Gabe switches over to Chicago from Iowa for teaching where after sometime he meets a young, enthusiastic, self-dependant divorcee, Martha Reganhart in one of the dinner party. Martha was a mother of two children Cynthia, her daughter and Mark, her son. She worked as a waitress in order to take care of her family. Her lawyer, Sid Jaffer, who is trying to get her divorce, is immensely in love with her and wants to marry her although Martha had no such interests.
Sissy, Martha’s sister, was married but her husband was an impotent. So she was staying with Martha. Martha doesn’t like her way of living and have various arguments like

“Please Sissy don’t walk around here half naked, will you?” (197)

Martha doesn’t want her daughter to get inspired by Sissy as she has now started to understand things. Sissy is involved with Blair Stott, a negro she allows her to sleep with her which Martha opposes by saying:

“I don’t ever want Blair to sleep over here again, ever-” (197)

Sid Jaffe is very interested in her and takes care of her children very nicely. He comes to Martha’s house on Thanksgiving and proposes her “Marry me”(211)

When she doesn’t reply he tells her

“You don’t have to give me an answer in sixty seconds”(212)

Martha did not love Jaffe and neither wanted to marry him. She tells him that

“If I let everybody hand travelling down my blouse, what kind of mother would I be?” (210)

Martha seems to be uncomfortable with Sid so when Gabe calls to wish Thanksgiving, she invites him for dinner.
On Gabe’s invitation Paul joins Chicago University where in one of the meeting develops an argument with a senior person and afterwards realizes that he shouldn’t had lost his temper. Gabe goes to meet his father; his father was going around with a widow Fay Silberman, who was a divorcee. First they get engaged later they get married. But Gabe never liked her as she was addicted to drinking and smoking.

Gabe had started thinking about Martha day and night, she had began to loom in his head and subsequently in his heart. Gabe looks forward to Martha’s invitation and goes to meet her. But due to his tiring schedule of the day had no intention of staying there but Martha insists and takes him home.

“I felt strange and separate pleasure. I felt called for, labored over. I felt used. Above she was me now, and below I was her. Man, woman, mother, child all distinctions melted away.” (254)

Gabe falls sick and was unable to even move so he stays back at Martha’s place. Sissy leaves saying if Gabe can stay why not Blair.

Martha never needed a husband but she looked up at Gabe as her boyfriend whoo could fulfill her desires. she was very clear with her needs Martha had already told Gabe that “I don’t need a husband, sweetheart- just a lover.” (13)

He was the person who could fulfill her carnal longings and she could get that very easily. She tells him:
“Every goofy girl in the street has someone who can stay all night, but mine has to leave at three in the morning, does that seem fair” (24)

After some days Martha and Gabe fights over money and Gabe goes back to his apartment. But misses Martha and calls her back.

Martha Its me, Martha. I have missed the hell of you, I made a damn weak, silly error”. (14)

To which she replies,

“Oh, you are drunk baby- but come, come anyway” (300)

Martha asks Gabe to call someone for dinner and he invites Paul and Libby. Martha shows no interest in the guests which annoys Gabe. Paul and Libby to behaves abnormally. Gabe tries to manage the situation-

“Let’s all at least try to be civil. Let’s get through thing like human being” (314)

Martha and Gabe comes to know that the Herzes were planning for adoption since Libby had weak kidneys due to which she was unable to get pregnant. Frustrated with all day’s activities end up having a very bad day when he finally has an argument with the Herzes, who go from their place unhappily.

Upset with her last night behavior at Gabe’s place, Libby goes to see a psychiatrist Dr. Lumin whom she confesses her irrational behavior of getting angry at ‘Everybody’ and ‘Everything’.
Gabe meets the Herzes and tells them about a nineteen year old girl who’s pregnant and doesn’t want to have a baby.

It was Theresa Haug who was pregnant. Theresa was 19 years old and was Martha’s friend, both were working as waitresses. Gabe meets Martha and tells her that the Herzes will be great parent.

“They are very decent people. I assure you. They are very anxious to the baby a home.” (372)

Theresa too agrees to give her baby away to the Herzes, who were ready to bear the hospital charges in return for the baby.

Dick Reganhart re-enters into Martha’s life. He was going to marry a millionaire, June from New York. He had gained power as his new father-in law was once ambassador to china. He wanted his children and blames Martha to be an “immoral mother”.

After some time dick takes his children with him of which Cynthia seemed to be very excited to meet her father. And Gabe’s father too decides to get engaged to Fay Silberman.

After sometime Paul’ father dies of heart attack. In the concluding part of the novel Theresa gives birth to a girl. Sid Jaffe had been a great help to the Herzes in all kind of formalities and offered his service to them free of cost.

The Herzes names the child “Rachel”, “because we had to wait so long” explains Libby (471).
In the end Martha gets ready to marry Sid Jaffe in order to get her child back as Dick had divorced June. She tells Gabe that

“Sid Jaffe happens to be a fine man. He is not jelly either, he is going to get my baby back do you know that? And then I am going to have an orderly life- don’t try to get me in bed again. You”

Gabe Wallach concludes the novel through his letter to Libby which as as follows:

“It is only kind of you, Libby, to feel that I would want to know that I am off the hook. But I’m not, I can’t be, I don’t even want to be-not until I make some sense of the larger hook I’m on.”

*Letting Go* is a harshly satirical account of many other characters in many different walks of life. Mr. Roth is amusing and touching and shocking by turns. He writes with a fine combination of sympathy and mockery of middle class New York Jews, Gabe’s and Paul’s relatives. He is savagely satirical about the academic opportunists. He is dexterous and amusing in his thumbnail sketches of American types like an abortionist; a Negro hipster; a pregnant girl of 19, mentally subnormal; a bellicose, suspicious, ignorant and dishonest factory worker out of a job.

But the critics called her:

“a . . neurasthenic wisp of a lapsed Catholic wife . . . one of the most accurately outlined kvetches in recent fiction” and The Time Reviewer declared that
“Libby runs away with the book. Perhaps Letting Go should have been her novel: certainly novel comes fully to life when she is present.” (85 Allan Cooper)

Highlighted in the confession letter of his mother “I was always doing things for another’s good” (1) becomes the major theme of the novel and the real virtue of Gabe’s life. Wandering in search of happiness his life gets entwined with the life of the Herzes and the Lady of his concern Martha Reganhart. Gabe is kind, simple and a very helpful person and this nature of his brings him close to other families and their problem.

The bitter life of the Herzes and their family struggle of everyday becomes life is the sub-plot of the novel.

Paul Herz is a struggling writer who while studying at college marries a catholic girl name Libby Dewitt. This mix marriage is the reason of most of the troubles in his life. Paul is a gentleman, because of his marriage he faces troubles and is shunned by his family and faces a financial crunch and he go through all this just because he loved his wife.

Libby is portrayed to be an ornamental lady. She spends a lot of time in front of the mirror and takes care of her looks which is not liked by her husband. When she goes to meet Paul’s uncle she spends dollars for pleasing them which is rejected by her.
Letting Go is a long with numerous series of dialogue, somewhere slow. All of the characters are drawn beautifully. The drawback of the novel is that Libby’s family and background has not been brought into light.

Libby is hysterical and neurotic, whatever is she, she is for Paul and whatever she does, she do it for Paul. The concept of mix marriage was quite new to that time which is now an obsolete idea.

Paul is a gentleman, he takes care of his hysterical wife very well. He infact always tries to improve her and make her a real woman which is later confessed by Libby. In courting her, he had changed her, he had worked at changing her.

Libby’s pregnancy disturbs their relationship. Paul didn’t want to have child and he abandons Libby’s pregnancy by saying

“How are we going to afford you pregnant? How are we going to afford a baby?” (107)

He wants her to have abortion but Libby at some point of time wanted to have the child which she tells Paul indirectly.

Paul takes over the discussion with abortionist which shows that he was all set for the abortion. However he poses himself as such he is not forcing Libby to get it done.
He didn’t like the child as he calls it to be a ‘rotten thing’. Libby gets emotionally broken with the idea of not having a baby that she accuses her father for that.

Gabe was sorry for other people's troubles and sincerely tried to be helpful. But he couldn't see why he should become deeply involved, why he should let go and become responsible for the health, happiness and economic security of others.

Gabe was not liked by the Herzes but he always protected and helped them as he could. He gives away his car to Herzes for their comfort, invites Paul to Chicago University. When Paul gets into an argument with one of the faculty member gabe supports him. When Libby asks him to meet Paul’s parents he goes to meet them and in concluding chapters Gabe tries his best to get them baby adopted. Still he is not liked by them. He rejects Theresa’s offer for Martha but finally Martha marries Sid Jaffe.

Paul is very calm and quiet person. He handles his wife’s hysterical and neurotic behavior so easily that no one else could. Libby too accepts that she behaves abnormally. “All I do lately is argue with people. And cry. I mean that keeps me pretty busy, you can imagine.”

She admits that she argues with “Everybody” and “Everything”. But its Libby who loves Paul very much and whatever she does or the way she behaves is most of the time to “protect” Paul.

“Not Paul- that’s right, not Paul. For Paul.”
Martha is just opposite of Libby, Libby seeks for support but Martha was an independent single parent to her two children. She is a diplomatic woman, knows how to use situation in her favor. Being a mother she rejects Sid Jaffe’s proposal by saying- “If I let everybody’s hands go travelling down my blouse, what kind of mother would I be?”

On the one hand, Martha did not like Sissy bringing Blair home to sleep with her but on the other hand she calls to Gabe to sleep with her:

“All day I’ve been saying to myself: tonight I am going to have illicit relations with Gabriel Wallach”

She infact rejects Gabe’s proposal of marriage by saying-

“I don’t need a husband, sweetheart just a lover, Gabe, just to plain and simple love me.” And in the end breaks off with Gabe and decides to marry Sid. She treats people depending on her need and desires.

Roth has been an anti- Semite. In Letting Go he talks about ordinary Jew is life he criticizes Jewish life through Libby. She tells that what she had always taken for granted about Jewish life was the warm family environment. And what an irony.

Roth had even very finely utilized Freud’s Theory of psychoanalysis. The coach concept, where Libby confesses her problems of her neurotic behavior to the Psychiatrist.
No debutant writer been greeted with such acclaim as Philip Roth has. His first, book *Goodbye, Columbus* was a collection of short stories published three years ago when Mr. Roth was only 26. It made Roth famous and won him no less than four awards: a Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship, the National Book Award for fiction, a prize for the year's best book of Jewish interest from the Jewish Book Council of the National Jewish Welfare Board, and one of the eighteen $1,500 awards given by the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

*Letting Go* is Philip Roth's first novel and second book. It is disorderly distributed in 630 pages talks about sex, money, religion, family, children, love and a dozen other crucial matters.

*Letting Go* is further proof of Roth’s amazing talent as an effective storyteller. This is a clumsily constructed novel, but a morbidly fascinating one. He uses colloquial dialogue for showing families emotional tension, and the psychological impacts. Roth’s ear for dialogue, for capturing the different voices of his characters is fully developed here. One can see various themes coming out of the novel. As in his habit Roth has again projected the middle class Jews for his satire. He writes with a fine combination of sympathy and mockery about middle-class New York Jews, Gabe's and Paul's relatives. He touched the middle class from various point of views like: an abortionist; a Negro hipster; a pregnant girl of 19, mentally subnormal; a bellicose, suspicious, ignorant and dishonest factory worker out of a job. He has also tried to put forward the satire about academic opportunists.
The book is divided into seven chapters

- Debts and Sorrows
- Paul Loves Libby
- The Power of Thanksgiving
- Three Women
- Children and Men
- The Mad Crusader
- Letting Go

The basic theme of the novel is the disagreements arising between the characters because of the social constrains of 1950. Abortion, divorce, remarriage and adoption affect the lives and psyches of Roth's characters’ as the plot unfolds. Paul Herz and his wife Libby become estranged from their families due to the fact that one is Jewish and the other is Christian (religion reemerges as an issue towards the end of the novel).

A literature professor himself, and a lover of Henry James, Gabe Wallach, an ex-G.I. still mourning the death of his mother and drifting apart from his ailing father, enrols in college where he becomes attached to the lives of Paul and Libby Herz, a Jew and a Catholic respectively, a miserable couple shunned by their parents for religious reasons. Gabe, a student of means, tries to help
them out, but the sour, manic Herzes reject it. Not one to let others stop him from being a good person, Gabe manages, years later, to get Paul hired as a teacher in his college, setting the stage for further miseries in all their lives.

As Gabe, a man of feeling, gets pulled to the emotionally draining marriage of the Herzes, he also meets Martha Reganhart, a divorcee and mother of two, a woman who left her wife-beating husband, a painter living in Mexico. Martha is also poor and overworked and struggling to raise two kids in a decent and happy home. Gabe moves in with her, getting him involved in a whole new slew of problems.

Libby is an ailing, needy, weepy woman with bad kidneys, which makes her prone to illnesses. Libby and Martha, two contrasting personalities: one a hysterical, manic, depressive woman; the other an inexhaustible source of energy devoted to her children and capable of juggling all the problems in her life without sinking into depression. Gabe is shown to be the centre of attraction for both the ladies. Libby too was attracted towards Gabe; at one point of time she felt that Gabe could be a better husband than Paul.

Roth has efficiently managed to draw whole characters and invent necessary details about them in order to explain their behavior.

Roth has various inspirations and one of them is Henry James who has been a throughout influence on Roth. He has explained in his memoir The Facts that The Portrait of a Lady “had been a virtual handbook during the early drafts of Letting Go,” his first novel (157). Alike Roth, Gabe too was an admirer of
Henry James. He is shown to be a person who in his difficult times has with him his copy of *The Portrait of a Lady* and is writing a dissertation on James.

McDaniel finds Roth "... a writer whose artistic intentions are 'moral,' whose artistic method is 'realistic,' and whose central artistic concern is with man-in society (P.Ramaswamy, Preface xi).

Since the book came during the second blow of feminism it had something of being called as a feminist oriented novel. The book portrays two strong and main leading ladies of the novel, Libby Herz and Martha Reganhart. Both of them are beautiful and charming middle-class women. The protagonist of the novel is attracted to both of them at different times in his life. Both suffer from patriarchy and male dominance. Libby does anything to please other people as well as her husband. She goes for abortion even when she was very desperate for the child just because Paul was not ready for the baby due to their depressive financial conditions. On the other hand, Martha suffered in the hand of a torturous husband who later marries someone else and at the same time takes away the children from her and calls her an ‘immoral mother’. One contrasting thing that can be noticed with the time period is that the women painted by Roth are extremely blunt, neurotic, possessive and dictating. Very few of them are mature enough who are able to handle their lives efficiently but most of the time they lack understanding, completely incapable in providing stability to the man in their lives and Libby Herz can be one of the best examples of that.
Letting Go (1962) is written in a more straightforward jamesian realism – Roth has said that when writing his first novel, he had a copy of Portrait of a Lady beside him. But whatever the reasons may have aroused it is the most underappreciated texts in Roth criticism today. There can be various reasons like Dr. Wallach, becomes less of a plot element (and less involved in son's life, as he prepares to remarry). Literature which was the main theme in the first section of the novel, as characters discussed it to some pages as the main characters are literature professors. Portrait of a Lady was almost wiped out from the plot. Because of the fact that the book is over-written and lengthy, the novel many times lose its track therefore grabbed comparatively less attention than the novels written prior (Goodbye Columbus) and later (Portnoy’s Complaint) than it. Also, his characters seems to talk and talk for pages, with no inter-linking story telling technique never sounding like anyone other than themselves. In this novel he has told many separate stories rather than one unified story all inter-connected.

Continuous re-appearance of psychiatrist in most of the novels is casual thought of Roth. Not only men but he has played with the psyche of his female characters too. The psycho analysis is an attempt to vent out the feelings of their unsuccessful marriage or unfulfilled relationship. In Letting Go, Libby runs to Dr. Lumin and tells him that Paul ignores her and she is not stable. We can see that the characters who go to the analyst are extremely dissatisfied by their lives, or their partners and rejects happiness and imposes blame on others. Either the patient runs away from the doctor or the therapy is yet to begin or the patient is
very much annoyed by his analyst as the doctor has quietly published his case. In every novel we see the lady either shrieking, behaving hysterically, crying or going through the metal pain of abortion, accident or suicide. We can see that neither the male-hero nor the female end up in a happy life.

The feminist movement in the United States and abroad was a social and political movement that sought to establish equality for women. The movement transformed the lives of many individual women and exerted a profound effect upon American society throughout the twentieth century. Lucy is also a rebel who breaks the governance of patriarchy; Roth depicts feminism which was due to the feminism wave going on throughout the world. When She was Good can be called to be inspired by Betty Friedan’s enormously influential novel The Feminine Mystique (1963), preceding the decade of sixties in the mid of the twentieth century the first blow of feminism was seen in the year 1949 when The Second Sex (French: Le Deuxième Sexe), a 1949 book by the French existentialist Simone de Beauvoir was published. One of her best-known books, it deals with the treatment of women throughout history and is often regarded as a major work of feminist philosophy and the starting point of second-wave feminism. Beauvoir researched and wrote the book in about 14 months. In The Second Sex, she produced was an attack on the fact that throughout history women have been relegated to a sphere of submissive acceptance of roles assigned to them by society.
When She Was Good (1967) is Philip Roth's only novel with a female protagonist, Lucy Nelson.

The setting in the novel is a small town in the 1940s Midwest, and the subject is the heart of a wounded and intensely moralistic young woman. It derives its title from a line in a nursery rhyme composed by American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

There was a little girl  
Who had a little curl  
Right in the middle of her forehead;  
And when she was good,  
She was very, very good  
But when she was bad she was horrid.

Roth starts the novel with indicating the theme in the first sentence: “Not to be rich, not to be famous, not to be mighty, not even to be happy, but to be civilized— that was the dream of [Willard’s] life” (WSWG 3). In other words, Roth warns, this novel is about why people live as they do, how they consider of themselves and their wishes, and how they instill those desires with a moral connotation.

That such values are not entirely selfless is another theme immediately introduced in When She Was Good.
In the opening pages of the novel Willard is shown waiting in the cold for Whitey, Lucy’s father—his son-in-law. The book opens with a wintry evening where Willard Caroll was sitting by the side of the graves of his sister Ginny and his grand-daughter Lucy. Willard Caroll had seen difficulty in his life. He memorizes how he grew up in the “Iron City” and then how he came to “Liberty Centre” and got settled there. (WSWG 6) Throughout his life he had been taking the rough with the smooth. He became a clerk in a post office, got married to Berta, had a daughter Myra and one day he got fully satisfied with himself when he bought a house of his own.

He keep remembering what he has survived. Here what he survived means by the harsh childhood time he underwent and the teachings Willard learned at the hands of his ignorant and drunkard father. He remembers how he escaped the hard-hitting life of childhood spent in the symbolically named Iron City—a purpose he feels he has met through his new life in Liberty Center, which was, “as far south as Willard had gotten when at the age of eighteen he had decided to journey out into the civilized world” (5). His life’s hard time ended when he reached Liberty Center as being a place that offers him freedom from “that terrible tyranny of cruel men and cruel nature” that was Iron City, he also appears to conceive of his own “goodness” as something that should cushion him from the harsh realities of life (6).

The life in Iron city was filled of distress and yearnings and shattered dreams. Willard’s father was a drunkard. Ginny his sister didn’t have a good
mind development and was unable to learn addition. The reason for it was terrible fever that she had suffered when she was one or any other thing that nobody knew his mother was a house wife who thought “it was not prudent to speak of hers desires in front of her husband.”(1)

Lucy, the grand-daughter of Willard, Myra’s daughter and the protagonist of the book grew up playing with Ginny. Lucy’s father Whitey was a dispomaniac and a derelict, so Willard “had opened the door” to Myra, Whitey and little Lucy who was only three years old at that time. Lucy stared growing up with Ginny, playing with her, running with her. Ginny even followed Lucy to school and whole day kept on calling her name “Loo-cy…Loo-cy” (11)

When Ginny’s following Lucy to school started affecting her studies, Willard decided to restrain her from doing so by leaving her back to Beckstown Vocational School where she died after three years due to the epidemic influenza.

Lucy never liked her father. She somehow hated her father because he was irresponsible and a drunkard. She grew up seeing her mother giving piano lessons and working hard and her father coming home every night, drunk.

One night, when Willard and his wife were out for “Friday rummies”, whitey like always came home drunk and could not see his wife soaking her feet in “warm water with Epsom salt” (20). He calls her “suffering martyr” (19) and pulled her leg out and then threw the water on rug.
Lucy gets so irritated seeing this that she calls the police and gets her father arrested. Next day when Willard asks him why she didn’t call him she replied:

“I called for someone to make her stop!”

“But calling the jail, Lucy—”

“I called for somebody to make him stop!”

“But why didn’t you call me? I want you to answer that question.”

“Because.”

“Because why?”

“Because you can’t.”

“I what?”

“Well,” she said, backing away, “you don’t . . .”

[. . .]

Willard opposed her and even Berta seemed to reject her act of sending Whitey to police station.

“We are civilized people in this house and there are some things we do not do, and that is number one. We are not riffraff, and you remember that. We are able to settle our own arguments, and conduct our own affairs, and we don’t require the police to do it for us. I happen to be the assistant post-master of this town, young lady, in case you’ve forgotten. I happen to be a member in good standing of this community—and so are you.”
“And what about my father? Is he in good standing too, whatever that means?” (21-22)

Whitey wished to take his family along and work, which he kept telling his wife every night.

“You are the best thing I have, Myra. Myra don’t hate me. Oh, if only we could go-” (25)

One night Myra suggested Whitey, if he was interested in electrical contracting equipment from Briscoll falls that was soon going to retire and was thinking to sell everything he owned. Listening to this he gets so angry that he swung his trousers towards her the buckle of the belt nearly took out her eye.

When Willard comes to know about it he makes Whitey out of his house. Three days pass, Whitey didn’t come but Lucy comes from university, seeing her mother’s eyes blackened she gets very angry. Just after that when Whitey comes and was rapping the glass Lucy stood and shut the bolt against his entering and after that he never comes back.

Throughout her life Lucy didn’t have many friends. She had very few friends and one of them was Ellie or Eleanor. Lucy was used to visit Ellie at her house where she got to know about Roy Bassart, Ellie’s cousin. Roy had
completed his army services and was confused what to do with his future? And this was the issue that had made Lloyd Bassart worried about too.

At first Roy was interested in becoming an artist to which his father had contrary view. Then he thought of working with his uncle which was also later dropped by him.

After discharging from army Roy spent lot of time with his Uncle Julian Sowerby at his house. There he got to meet Lucy. Lucy had been a very conservative child since childhood Lucy had been a very conservative child. She felt ashamed of telling other children about her father and family condition.

Lucy develops feeling for Roy Bassart whom she used to see from behind the curtains of Ellie’s room. Ellie came to know about Lucy’s feelings. Roy gets a new camera and wanted a girl to shoot he asked Ellie but she denies and tells him to take Lucy with him.

Gradually meeting everyday they became friends and developed liking towards each other and one day Roy went all the way with Lucy.

A week before Lucy’s graduation Roy received the news of his being accepted at the Britannia School of Photography & Design and Uncle Julian throws an impromptu party to honor Roy where his family also gets to meet Lucy.
After graduation she starts her daily routine at Dairy Bar from ten to six again. One day Ellie tells Lucy about her father having some other woman in his life, when she overheard him on phone talking to her. Ellie decides to go to Northwestern and Lucy and Roy go down to FortKean to begin their further studies.

Just within her three months of joining FortKean, Lucy comes to know about her pregnancy when one day she goes to a doctor for her medical check-up. She decides to abort the child and asks the doctor to do so but he rejects her requests and tells:

“But there are limits. On all of us. People may want things that don’t mean that we can give them.” (144)

Lucy breaks the news of her getting married to Roy at her home and asks Roy to do the same. Roy’s family raises objection towards his idea of getting married to Lucy.

When Roy tells Lucy about it she feels bad, but they decide to get married on Christmas. Next day Lucy goes back to Liberty Centre and tells her mother about her pregnancy and asks her not to disclose it to Whitey. But Myra tells him about Lucy’s pregnancy so Whitey asks her to visit one of her uncle in Florida. But finally after lot of chaos both of them get married as earlier decided.
After their marriage it was hardly any Sunday when Lucy and Roy didn’t visit Liberty Centre. They both continued their studies. After some time Edward was born and Roy finds a job in Wendell Hopkins as an assistant and after some time they get shifted to a new apartment.

Lucy and Roy have an argument when Roy proposes his idea of opening a studio at their dwelling place, the idea comes to his mind just after visiting his Uncle Julian.

She mocks his ambitions to start his own photography studio but continually criticizes him for not bringing home enough money. When he tells their young son stories of his time in the army, she resents his harmless exaggerations, made for the benefit of the child’s amusement, as outright lies.

Again they both have an argument when Roy gets the business cards printed for his studio at Fort Kean. The argument gets worse and Roy leaves for Liberty Centre and do not come back till the following afternoon. Edward gets so scared to see all that he hid himself in the bathroom under the wash basin. Just after a week’s span at the dinner table Roy “grumble again about being shoved around by Hopkins”. At this Lucy burst at this saying:
“Must you whine! Must you complain! Must you be a baby in front of your own child!”

After a terrible argument and a brief separation, during which time Roy’s Uncle Julian, Ellie’s formidable father, supplies Roy with a lawyer and advises a legal separation. Roy doesn’t return for two whole days and asks for a temporary separation. Later when the Bassarts come to know about it they get the matter settled and Roy goes back to Fortkean where Lucy tells Roy of Uncle Julian’s extra marital affairs. After Whitey had gone for three good year Blamshard Muller, an established businessman proposer Myra and asks her to divorce Whitey on the grounds of desertion and Marry him.

Such violence is exemplified when, in a crucial development that heralds the tragic climax of the novel, Lucy discovers that her father is in a Florida prison for stealing from an employer. She also discovers that her mother has been in contact with her father for the years he has been missing. Myra has even broken off an engagement with a successful local business man who promised to be the, “stern, serious, strong and prudent” father Lucy had always wanted (225).

Lucy is so enraged by this news that she conflates her feelings for her father and mother with her feelings for Roy. When Roy comes to pick her up from her family home, her thoughts reveal her confusion:
“Mom was what [Roy] called Lucy’s mother. Mom! That weak, stupid blind . . . It was the police who had put him there. It was he himself who put him there!” (259).

In Lucy’s mind, the figures of her husband and father become confused, and she punishes Roy in Whitey’s stead. On the drive home, she begins screaming. Roy tries to soothe her, but she continues screaming, to the evident distress of Edward. Upon their arrival home, Roy does his best both to comfort Lucy and to remind her that their young son is present. But Lucy has lost all control and lashes out at her husband with all the years of anger and resentment built up against her father:

“You worm! Don’t you have any guts at all? Can’t you stand on your own two feet, ever? You sponge! You leech! You weak, hopeless, spineless, coward! You’ll never change—you don’t even want to change! You don’t even know what I mean by change! You stand there with your dumb mouth open! Because you have no backbone! None!”.

She grabbed the other cushion from behind her and heaved it toward his head.
“Since the day we met!” He batted down the cushion with his hands.

“Look, now, look – Eddie is right be–”[..]

But she pursued him. “You’re nothing! Less than nothing! Worse than nothing!”

He grabbed her two fists. “Lucy. Get control. Stop, please.”

“Get your hands off of me, Roy! Release me, Roy! Don’t you dare try to use your strength against me! Don’t you dare attempt violence!” (262)

After her violent outburst over Whitey’s letters, Roy waits until Lucy is asleep and then escapes with Edward back to the Sowerby’s and the protection of Uncle Julian—the one character in the novel who is able to stand up to Lucy’s on slaughts. When Lucy arrives at the Sowerby home, she tries to appeal to Uncle Julian by talking to him of Roy’s “duty,” her own “rights” as a mother and her own responsibility to see that her son “is not misused by all the beasts in this filthy world” (276, 274, 276).

Julian responds by calling Lucy “a real saint,” a designation she accepts, until he amends it to “Saint Ball Breaker” (267, 277). Confronted with Julian’s wrath, Lucy loses all composure, tells Julian’s family about his affairs with his employees, verbally attacks her former friend Ellie, and finally charges up the stairs, only to hit Roy hard enough to draw blood. All of this again takes place in front of her horrified young son, who shrieks in terror at the sight of his
mother. At this point, the reader knows that Lucy has doomed herself by attacking Roy so violently in front of his family and their son. After Lucy’s violent outburst at the Sowerbys, her grandfather brings her home and tries to convince her that she needs medical care. Enraged that her family believes her to be having a mental breakdown, Lucy flees into the freezing winter. She dies of exposure in the cold weather, seeing enemies everywhere, and clutching a recent letter from her father to her mother. In the letter, Whitey begs Myra’s forgiveness and declares his love and faithfulness—while also hinting that he needs a sponsor and a job to be released from prison.

And in the end her father’s letter to her mother is used to end the book which is as follows. Her father’s impact on Lucy was so worse even his letter made her to meet worst end. When she discovers that her father has been writing her mother for years, all along without her having a little bit of hint Lucy finds herself to be mortally undone. The letter written by whitey that finished her was as follows:

As years go by—with accelerated speed,
We find with us, an ever growing need
To recall to mind, and a wish to live,
In that glorious past—to re-have and re-give.

We bring to mind—the mistakes we made,
The aches and hurts—that we’ve caused, I’m afraid
Are brought in distinctly—with increasing pain
Till we wish, with all heart—to re-do it again.

Only to do it better—so that the pain is gone,
And make them all the good things, all along.
At least the great wish that would be really mine,
That I could just once more—be your Valentine.

Lucy was her own judge she decided what was right and what was wrong
and her insistence on her own goodness made her suffer so much. We can notice that Whitey used to come in the house when Lucy was not there. She did not like her grandfather giving him any kind of support, he lost dignity in Lucy’s eyes or she thought that was not manly. She hated when she finds that her mother has been in correspondence with her father even after so many years. This event marks such an impact on Lucy that she finally yells at Roy whom she finds the only way to vent out her feelings. She had set her own ideals for a perfect man and she wanted everybody to fit into it. In an attempt to make right her mother’s life she destroys hers. Lucy wants Roy to be the responsible father figure that Whitey failed to be, and yet any attempt at decision making on Roy’s part, such as moving them in with his parents for a summer to save money, leads inevitably to fierce marital disputes in which Lucy finds him to be attempting to manipulate or oppress her. Lucy wants Roy to be the opposite of those men in her life who so he feels have wronged her. She wants him to be
the opposite of brutes such as Uncle Julian and her father, but also the opposite of cowards such as her grandfather. This entirely reactive attitude cannot generate any alternative definitions of manhood, and Roy is trapped between Lucy’s dueling definitions of masculinity as feeble and masculinity as oppressive. Just how far Lucy’s rage has infected her perception of reality becomes obvious in her further confrontation with Roy’s Uncle Julian.

But if seen a man coming home drunk, giving excuses of his past events for being a failure and destroying his present as well as future. Taking shelter in his in-laws house since the failure and still dependant on them. Coming home drunk and beating his wife in front of his little girl. People in family although talking about civilization and teaching young ones civility but cannot tame the savage man. The wife meekly accepting everything and the little girl hating her mother do this instead of opposing him. When he leaves the house becomes a thief, what impact does it puts on the growing up people. Lucy sets her own ideologies of right and wrong influenced by what she has grown up seeing, she doesn’t have many friends and is almost lonely. She tries to see her husband fulfilling what her father hasn’t as her mother’s husband as she has told her mother that she doesn’t want to live her life. But she is unable to detach her father’s image of a husband from Roy. She yells on Roy for her father’s misdoings that ultimately destroys her and the family. It was her father’s impact that makes her behave neurotic and enraged.
Lucy is Roth’s only female protagonist in thirty-nine novels, his female characters rarely come off very well, and the reason behind it can be that while portraying a woman character, Roth always had Margret Martinson on his mind so that is the reason his female characters are very similar to one another in various aspects. For example Lucy and Martha had various attributes that made them resemble the first women in Roth’s life. Both Lucy and Martha had an alcoholic father, both got pregnant at college level. In fact their professions were same, they both worked as waitresses and dominated the man in their lives. In *The Facts* Roth even called Margret as the serpent in his life. The characters such as Brenda Potemkin, Libby Herz, Lucy Nelson, Mary Jane Reed (aka "The Monkey"), and Maureen Tarnopol were criticized as unflattering representations that served merely as passive and vapid reason for the men in their lives to behave as such, complicated, albeit neurotic.(a)

“that exhilarating, adventurous sense of personal freedom that had prompted the high-flying freshman-composition teacher, on a falling evening in 1956, to go blithely forward in his new Brooks Brothers suit and without the slightest idea that he might be risking his life, handily pick up on a Chicago street the small town blond divorcee with two little fatherless children, the penniless ex-waitress whom he’d already spotted serving cheeseburger back in graduate school, and
who’d looked to him like nothing so much as the All-American girl, albeit one enticingly at odds with her origin.’(Facts 160)

_When She Was Good_ consists of many of the themes that will continue to preoccupy Roth’s fiction. There is a kind of repetition of the character Lucy Nelson in _Merry Levov_, from _American Pastoral_ (1997) The relation that Lucy shares with her grandfather is similar to the one that Merry Levov and her father. Lucy’s grandfather and Merry’s father Swede, both are raised of their own ideology of civilization. Indeed, the relationship between the saintly Swede and his daughter, Merry, can be seen as the thematic culmination of the relationship between Willard and his granddaughter, Lucy. Like Lucy, Merry unambiguously discards the values of her family. Take, for example, the motto, attributed to the Weatherman, that hangs in Merry’s room and that her father—an ideal of American “family values”—”tolerates”. Similarly in an attempt of Willard to make his granddaughter civilized she becomes an angel of destruction. Both the Swede and Willard—self-created, “civilized” men—raise lovely girls who frames their own beliefs. The only difference between both of the girls is that merry has no intentions of showing of pretentious nature of goodness. The girls follow their own ideals.

“We are against everything that is good and decent in honky America. We will loot and burn and destroy. We are the incubation of your mother’s nightmares”  
(Pastoral 252)
Roy has to pay for his father-in-law’s misdoings and careless nature. The girl in his life judges everybody with her father who is a failure in everything. Every time she tries to transform Roy who according to her is irresponsible and still immature. The anger that is craving inside her for her father for being unsuccessful comes out on Roy’s failure of not getting a good job. She yells at him: “Must you whine! Must you complain! Must you be a baby in front of your own child!” (212).

“If Roy obeys her, he is weak. If he doesn’t, he has fallen under the influence of others, especially his confrontational Uncle Julian, and is again weak. If he defends himself, he is attacking her and is therefore a brute. If he doesn’t defend himself, he is guilty of being unmanly. For Lucy, being a man is being a brute, so Roy has no positive identity to embrace”. (Derk Parker Royal 39)

Lucy is an unreliable narrator, in a way. While she doesn't get first-person treatment, we are entrenched in her thoughts throughout, and it's her perspective that Roth delivers. What we thought was indignation to her surroundings, to the failings of those around, we find to be her shrill, demanding, bratty nature. There is something of a point made here in regards to religion and family, but it doesn't quite have the resonance now that it may have in the late '60s.
She discards her grandfather’s ideologies of civilization because he himself never followed him. Throughout his life he supported a man who is extremely irresponsible, drunkard and dependant. So she frames her own sets of virtue and figured out every one according to that. Lucy is the strongest women portrayed by Roth. Although the way she behaves is something absurd but what she tells is right. She does not like her father because she hated him for being a failure and then beating his wife who earned something for their family. She did not like his habit of drinking, she wanted him to realize and bear the responsibilities of two women, which he never did. She hated her mother’s nature of being weak and submitting herself to her father’s torments. She hated Roy’s indecisive nature and being dependant on Julian to settle on things for him. Julian who himself was cheating on his wife. What she did? she exposed everyone’s truth without giving importance to relations and that made her wrong. In order to protect her family she finally loses it and loses her life too.

The characters of Roth’s fiction were majorly taken from is own life and majorly in the sixties and seventies. It is exposed in The Facts that the major characters were fictionalized in the novels in the form of friends relatives, lovers etc. in real the Josie Jensen of of the Facts can be traced in various different characters of Letting Go, Portnoy’s Complaint.
Stanley Cooperman called “Letting Go is a major American novel in spite of its jewishness, but because of it.” (14) As Alan Cooper quoted in his Philip Roth and the Jews:

“that libby divided the critics… as indeed and perhaps within the novel she evokes gabe’s contrasting responses herz . the atlantic’s Barrett saw her as heroic and the time reviewer declared that libby runs away with the book. Perhaps Letting Go should have been her novel: certainly the narrative comes to life when she is present” but Hentoff called Libby a “…neurasthenic wisp of a lapsed catholic wife”

William Barrett said in the Atlantic, called it a Paul-Libby story and Paul was “the melancholy and rabbinical Jew . . . [with] . . . a penchant for getting blogged down in troubles. Yet at the end it is Paul and Libby who have won through human solidity. . . .” (83)

Roth was accused of abandoning the serious style of Letting Go and When She Was Good to achieve popularity; he wrote a cheap string of night club shtick that could not pass the test of readability and what is more hurting is that people tried find flaws with his character.

"When She Was Good" is not simply a period piece. Roth has added a coat of psychologizing to the old structure. The progenitor of the story is a man called Willard Carroll, who shelters people from life, a slightly stock creation, Mary Worth as played by Spencer Tracy. It seems that Willard's sister was a defective; and when he discovers, age
7, that neither his wishes nor an Indian crone's magic roots are going to make her any better he concludes that God is deaf, that everyone is fundamentally helpless and that the best thing is to hack along quietly, keeping mischief to a minimum. This conclusion has disastrous effects all down the line--through a wistful daughter and feckless, boozy son-in-law to a hysterical granddaughter, who forms the book's centerpiece.

The fiery female malcontent has always made a good windowpane to the WASP world. But Mr. Roth has some trouble with his version. Lucy Nelson's outside is, to put it temperately, much more probable than her inside. The author doesn't seem quite to know what makes her tick so dolorously. She bursts on the scene a full-blown bitch; and much as we back and fill with her, reading her mind fore and aft, we never get much further than that. She is forever a-twitch with nameless grievances; eventually, these become as frustrating to us as they are to her--especially as the likes of Doris Lessing have named these grievances all too clearly, pushing well beyond Roth's Ptolemaic projections into the female psyche.

On the other hand, her opacity gives her a certain melodramatic force, like Cathy in "Wuthering Heights": a woman wailing for her demon father-figure. If we knew much more than that about her, we would be back in Franzblau's world for sure. In any event, the strength of the book is not in its psychic interiors but in its verbal relationships, at which Mr. Roth is an exquisite, and in its unabashed emotionalism, which reminded me, at times, of a barbershop quartet.

The dramatic center--after everyone is reared and in place, and all the clues have been strewn--is the story of Lucy's marriage to a dreamy weakling. At least, to hear her tell it, Roy Bassart fits that description. (And hear her tell it, we certainly do.) The
splintering break-up of this marriage is told with excruciating fidelity, both in the close-ups and the long-shots. The relatives lining the wall with their long necks and blood-shot eyes, the husband blustering and whimpering his way to disaster--all the flatness and bleakness Mr. Roth professed to find in the Midwest a few years back (Esquire, December, 1962) have finally found themselves a fable.

All of which may seem a long trip from the jolly uncles and aunts of "Goodbye, Columbus," not to mention the routine East-coast neurasthenia of "Letting Go," and nervous well-wishers may try to head Mr. Roth back to Newark at this point; certainly he handicaps himself, ties up one good hand, when he tries to go it all the way without comedy. And yet, this is recognizably the same writer at work. The trademarks are visible--and not just the quirky ones like his tendency to compare his characters to movie stars (this time we have a Jennifer Jones, a Dick Haymes and a Bob Hope--very period), but the spareness and sobriety of tone, the genuine untheatrical melancholy that undergirded the gags in the first book and gave it its quality.
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Roth has taken the title from the rhyme: "when she was good, she was very very good, but when she was bad, she was horrid” (qtd. in Rodgers 74),


Wilfrid Sheed “Pity the Poor Wasp” The New York Times, June 11, 1967