



Portnoy's Complaint by Philip Roth

- 1.** Portnoy's Complaint is a novel much concerned with truth and lies, but are we totally convinced of Portnoy's honesty in what is supposed to be a confession. Does Roth actually want us to be convinced of it?
- 2.** Portnoy's psychoanalyst, Dr Spielvogel, only makes fleeting appearances in the narrative. How significant to Roth's purpose and how important to the novel's structure, is the psychoanalytical framework that carries the book?
- 3.** A large part of the earlier part of the novel is devoted to Portnoy's relationship with his parents, in particular his mother. Contrast his descriptions of his mother with those of his father. Does he mock them both equally, or is his attitude to his father different, more sympathetic? What are the long-term influences each has on Portnoy, both real and perceived?
- 4.** Portnoy treats each of his girlfriends badly, but how does he describe them - in depth or purely physically? Is he in the end blaming his long succession of girlfriends for his problems or does he take responsibility on himself?
- 5.** Does the frequent sexual symbolism that appears throughout the novel - the mixing of kosher and menstrual blood; Portnoy's mother dressing seductively in front of him - have any wider significance in the book?
- 6.** Portnoy's Complaint is a sexually explicit, funny and angry exploration of Jewish identity that caused a storm of controversy when it was first published in 1969. Was this a novel contrived to shock, and does the shock value still work in today's society?
- 7.** <http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/offthepage/guide.htm?command=Search&db=/catalog/main.txt&eqisbndata=0099399016>