

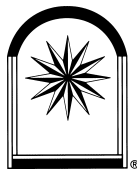
QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What did you think of the unusual voice used by Ensworth as the narrator? What clues did the novel offer as to why he “speaks” in that style? Did you enjoy Ensworth as the narrator?
2. *Lord Baltimore* was written in the picaresque tradition of novels such as *Don Quixote*, *Tom Jones* and *Huckleberry Finn*, in which a character encounters a series of usually humorous adventures. Do you feel *Lord Baltimore* lived up to that tradition? In what ways did Ensworth’s journey differ from those in the other novels?
3. What part does the Georgia coast and its Gullah population play in Ensworth’s journey?
4. Though Ensworth obviously admires his father and grandfather a great deal, he doesn’t seem much like them. Why not?
5. Do you think Ensworth would have learned something on his trip to Savannah without Lord Baltimore’s help? Do you think he would have even reached Savannah?
6. Though Lord Baltimore mostly tries to teach Ensworth how to think critically, he also places great importance on faith. What are some instances in which he tries to teach Ensworth and Brantley the importance of faith? Why do you think a character as rational as Lord Baltimore places such store by faith?
7. Though Lord Baltimore is Ensworth’s primary guide on his journey, Ensworth learns from the novel’s other characters as well. What do you think Ensworth learns from Liverpool? From Tilly? From Brantley?
8. What do you think Ensworth has learned by the time he reaches Savannah? Do you think his father’s plan worked?

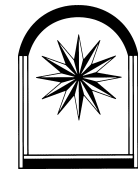


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stephen Doster was born in England and raised on St. Simons Island, Georgia. Growing up Anglo-American amidst the African-American Gullah culture provided Stephen with the unique worldview that is evidenced in his debut novel. Since earning his BBA in marketing from the University of Georgia fifteen years ago, he has called Nashville, Tennessee, home. He currently works in advertising.

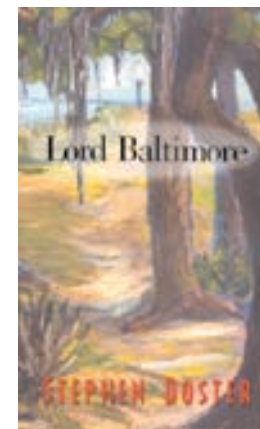


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READING GROUP GUIDE



Lord Baltimore

by Stephen Doster



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A Note from the Author

Lord Baltimore is a modest attempt at paying homage to the great road novels of the past, such as LeSage's *Gil Blas of Santillana*, Victor Hugo's *Hernani*, and Stevenson's *Kidnapped*. The prime catalyst for *Lord Baltimore*, though, is Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.

After reading *Gil Blas*, I vowed to write a picaresque novel; one that involved a young lad getting into one untenable situation after another. I successfully avoided the discipline required to sit down and bang out a book by writing a screenplay, a handful of Sherlock Holmes parodies, numerous short stories based in England or the Old South, and some other things that never got around to publishers. But while I was rubbing the *Don Quixote* lantern, the same muse that inspired Cervantes got loose again and granted me three wishes. The first wish was to write a novel. The second was to find a publisher (John F. Blair) that would give it a shot. The third wish is that anyone who reads *Lord Baltimore* will give the true classics a try.

Another great influence is P. G. Wodehouse. Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster is a cheerful heart for whom life is a continual feast. That could describe Ensworth Harding, our hero, who is a cross between Gil Blas and Wooster. No matter what life throws at him, he maintains a sunny disposition...much like Liverpool, the ancient son of a slave. And like Wodehouse's Jeeves, *Lord Baltimore* can be relied on to extract Ensworth from one fine mess after another.

British humor wants to be a part of every scene in *Lord Baltimore*, regardless of how dire the situation. One trait many British television shows possess is that they expect a certain level of participation on the part of the viewer. They require the audience to fill in some of the blanks. British comedy tends to register on the subtle side of the humor spectrum. It doesn't telegraph ahead that a joke is coming, that the joke is being delivered, and that the next joke is about to arrive. I hope that some of those qualities are evident in *Lord Baltimore*.

As for the setting, anyone who dips a literary pen in the fertile soil of the Georgia coast is going to pull it out dripping with enough interesting characters to liven up any plot. Take ten thousand years of Indian rule, add five hundred years of Western civilization, insert most of the major religions, throw in a pirate or two, and the thing practically writes itself. I have

always been attracted to winding alleyways, trails, and dirt roads that seem to beckon: "Come and see what's around the next bend." In writing this story, I had no idea what would happen around the next bend until I got there. That's what made writing *Lord Baltimore* fun. I couldn't wait to get home from work each day to see what would happen next to Ensworth.

Every journey by car starts at someone's driveway. Likewise, Ensworth's journey begins at the foot of a driveway and connects him to the world. Most people are connected to the world but never make the move to see it. Ensworth is pushed out into it. If his father were to turn left to go south on Highway 17 in Brunswick, Georgia, the novel would be completely different. But he turns north. And Highway 17 North runs head-on into history. In no time, you're in Sheriff Pooler's domain. You're in Gullah country. And Savannah, that living museum, sits on a river's edge just over the horizon.

To capture the flavor of the classic road novels, I thought it important to slow down the chief characters' mode of transportation. I knew I needed to have two guys—a Don Quixote-type and his sidekick traveling on foot from point A to point B. I also knew that they would have to get into and out of one darn thing after another. That was pretty much the plot. It wasn't until I got past three or four chapters that a real plot began to suggest itself. First, Ensworth's journey had to be justified. That justification isn't revealed until the end of the book. Second, *Lord Baltimore*'s presence had to be accounted for. That's not revealed until the end.

One thing you often hear regarding literature is, "Write what you know about." Since I grew up on St. Simons Island, Georgia, it became the logical starting point. Savannah is one of my favorite places on earth, so making it the end point was an easy call. I also wanted to write a fantastic story using elements anyone can find in everyday life. And while some of the people and events depicted might seem unbelievable, they are actually based on fact.

For instance, Ebo (Ibo) tribesmen brought over as slaves from Africa *did* march into a river (on St. Simons) chained together rather than endure slavery. Conjuring *is* still practiced among people of the Georgia coast. A sheriff in McIntosh County *was* in the thick of drug trafficking and gambling ventures during the 1970s. His exploits are well documented in *Praying for Sheetrock*, by Melissa Fay Greene.

I have been intrigued with Gullah culture for years. In particular, I have been drawn to interviews of ex-slaves conducted during the 1930s by the Federal Writers' Project. That generation of ex-slaves was probably the group of modern-era people who most closely exemplified Christ's teachings. As a people, they most likely could directly identify with Christ and Saint Paul. Like Jesus and Paul, they had few possessions. Like Jesus and Paul, they bore scars from the whip. Yet in reading their interviews from the 1930s, it seems that they have maintained their dignity and their deep religious convictions. In many ways, by having endured the worst of what mankind could do, they represent the best of what mankind could be.

On one level, *Lord Baltimore* is about two guys getting in and out of trouble. On another, it's about the rites of passage of a young man. And though its purpose is to entertain, instruct, and help people forget their problems for a while, ultimately, I hope *Lord Baltimore* brings people together regardless of race or religion. To do that, I drew on a wide array of characters from different backgrounds. Ensworth, the country-club slacker. Brantley, the country-bumpkin prisoner. Kent, the shrimper. Tilly, the root doctor. Aleph and Connie, the Baptist fundamentalist river-dwellers.

Lord Baltimore the character, like Don Quixote, started out as an eccentric. But he quickly exerted himself and became the mysterious man-for-all-seasons. However, he tended to muscle his way into scenes and take over the dialogue. For that reason, I had to put him in "time-out." When I reached 108,000 words, *Lord Baltimore* had to be wrapped up, though it was only half-complete. *Lord Baltimore* is a Knight Templar, whose duty is to guide people on their spiritual journeys. He is also scouting for recruits to take over his responsibilities and those of his fellow knights. Ensworth doesn't know that he's a recruit.

I'm not sure Ensworth really learns lessons on this trip. Like most people, it takes him two or three knocks on the head before a message sinks in. For one thing, he's a sucker for get-rich-quick schemes. But by the end of his journey, Ensworth begins to show signs that he can truly think for himself.

