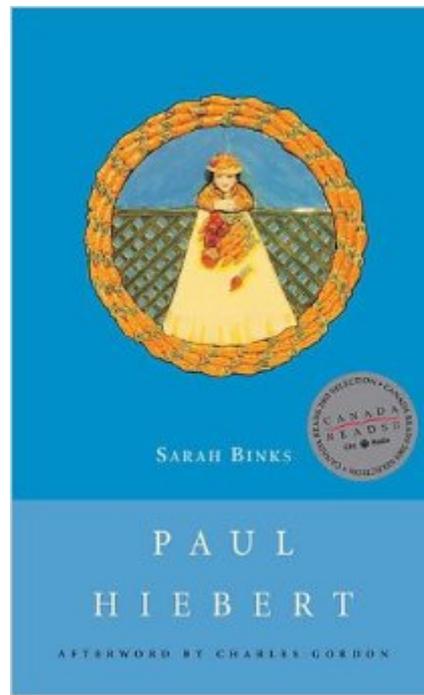


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# Sarah Binks



## Synopsis

Book by Paul G Hiebert

## Book Information

Series: New Canadian Library

Paperback: 180 pages

Publisher: McClelland & Stewart Ltd. (1995)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0771034539

ISBN-13: 978-0771034534

Product Dimensions: 4.4 x 0.4 x 7 inches

Shipping Weight: 4 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (4 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #331,462 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #65 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > World Literature > Canadian](#) #12383 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Contemporary](#)

## Customer Reviews

For anyone stumbling upon this book by accident, I feel it's my duty to point out that Sarah Binks is a fictional character. This mock biography is satire, and pretty good satire at that--for example, Binks' untimely death occurs when she bites a horse thermometer in half and succumbs to mercury poisoning. The horse thermometer was awarded to her as a prize for one of her spectacularly bad poems. The entire book is a parody of rural life in Canada.

Sarah Binks teeters back and forth between silliness and satire. Hiebert satires rural Canada, critics, and politics to list but a few targets. While I don't particularly agree with his thinly disguised views on small-town Canada (I think triviality is subjective to your reference point) and on the outsiders who try to evaluate its art (I DO think it's possible) I could appreciate the satire when it was done well. The descriptions of politicians using any opportunity they could get to campaign and use Binks to fit their various causes, had moments of wit. Too often though the satire was offset with silliness that I didn't find all that amusing. "P.R. and P.R." to describe Binks' pre-Regina and post-Regina periods? Her dog Rover's borrowing of fleas when it was getting low? Humour is a personal taste, and I just found this lame. The character of Sarah was also very one-dimensional. As "the Author", Hiebert's constant defense of her left me with more insight of his character than of Binks's. The setting descriptions were also very sparse. The occasional glimpse of Saskatchewan and life on a

turn-of-the-century farm left me wanting more. It was a gamble for Hiebert to satirize a writer from rural Saskatchewan, but it just didn't pay off. Sad irony.

Paul Hiebert is best known as a writer of light humour. As such, his suitability as a biographer of a brilliant poet could be questioned. Readers may be reassured that the treatment given Ms. Binks' life and works is serious indeed, as it should be. Possibly the best feature of this biography is that the poems of the 'Sweet Songstress of Saskatchewan' are set in the context of each crucial phase of her career: her upbringing, adolescence, young womanhood, and maturity. This context is critical for a deeper understanding of her work. For example, the knowledge that 'Dog's Heaven' was written shortly after the tragic death of her canine companion adds a rich poignance that could not be gained from the reading of this brilliant poem in a mere anthology. This biography is a piece of 'Canadiana' (hateful term!) to the extent that Ralph Ellison's 'Invisible Man' is merely a statement of mid-twentieth century Black culture. Sarah Binks, like Ellison, speaks for all humanity. Hiebert's biography brings her to life as a vibrant and feeling woman.

This gentle satire of literary criticism is amusing, although the novelty does wear off as one progresses through the volume and encounters repeated use of the same devices.

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