

## [The Sophist's Dilemma](#) [1]

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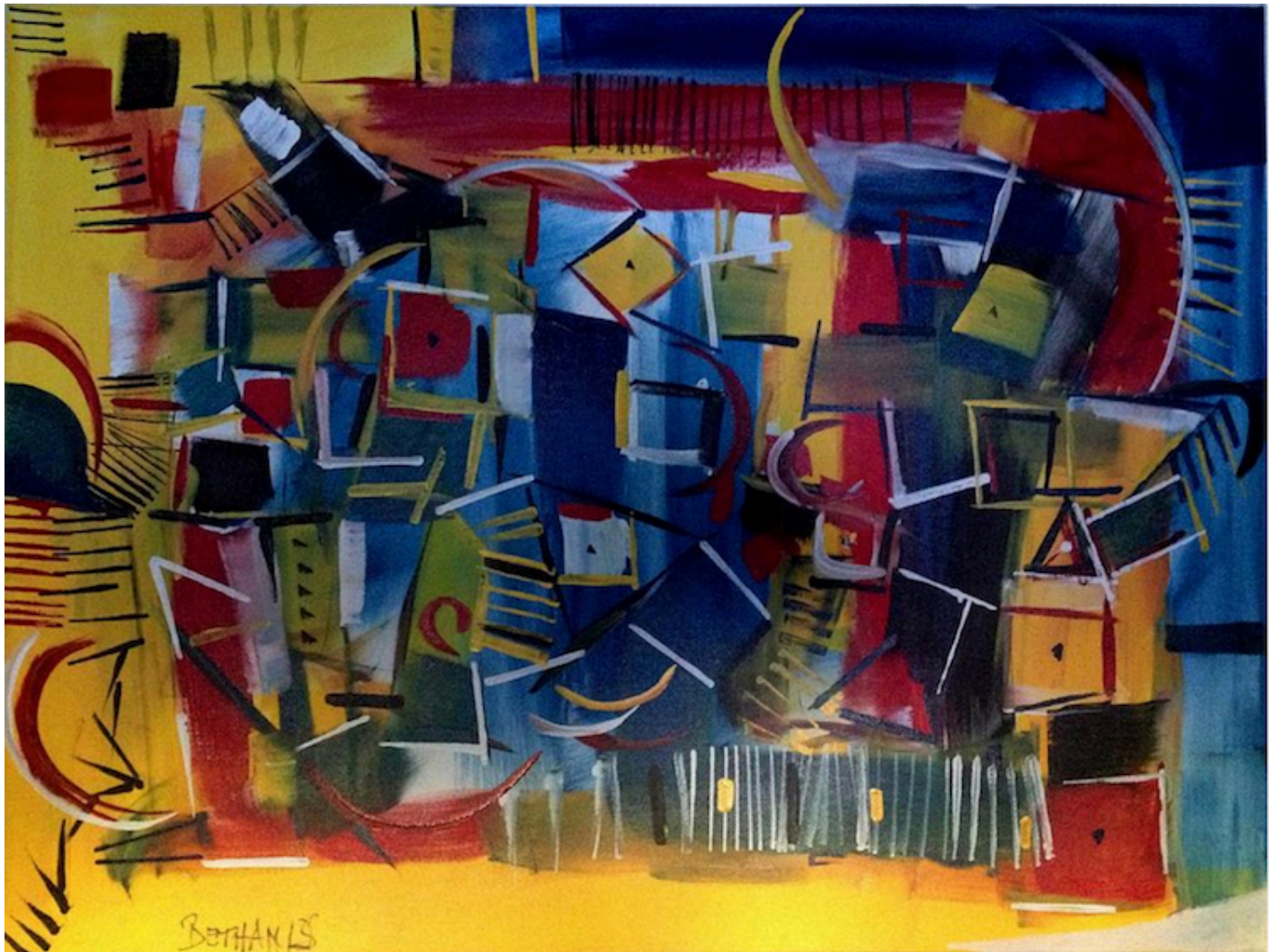
[TW Reading Series](#) [4]

## Two Poems by Peter Bethanis

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**Editor's Note:** We're pleased to republish these poems in *Talking Writing* as part of the TW Reading Series, with permission of the poet and the original print journals. Here, Peter Bethanis explores the disillusionment of middle age and the search, in suburbia, for purpose. "The Sophist's Dilemma" previously ran in the Spring 1996 issue of [The Wallace Stevens Journal](#) [5], and "The Sophist's Cellar" originally appeared in the Spring 1996 issue of [Tar River Poetry](#) [6].

Peter is also a visual artist, and as part of this TW Reading Series feature, we've included several images by him.



### The Sophist's Dilemma

Like an insect's stinger,  
the church steeple punctures the sky.  
Dusk sifts through backyards  
where porch lights burn, and the star's  
dead light returns, disillusionment finally conquering  
even the most congenial boy scout  
sometime around the age of thirty.

Along rows of houses, orange windows glow  
and a man sits half-asleep in front of the television,  
something in the workday still banging in his head  
as if he's holding on to a frazzled rope, swinging inside a bell.  
The knot of his hand  
grips the chair as he contemplates the walk  
up the stairs, as if he were a circus animal  
performing a silly charade of an act,  
his real capability held sadly behind the eyes.





### The Sophist's Cellar

With just the right amount  
of useless junk, loneliness is bearable,  
as a whole lifetime may putter by  
searching for the lost wrench  
that keeps one feeling busy.

The sophist conjures the image  
of a beautiful woman, her slender hand  
shading her eyes as she leans back  
onto his imaginary bed.  
Where can one go to escape  
the unfunny sitcom of a burned-out marriage,  
or the local minister with the nervous tic,  
who tries to sell heaven  
as if it were real estate?

Shelves of jars filled with a dozen varieties  
of nails, a stool and a workbench,  
the old television with its one fuzzy station  
are the sophist's company.



## The Sophist's Dilemma

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Spontaneity seems more suited  
to the gods or the young at this point.  
Still, desire braids itself together in the heart  
like a pair of snakes, intertwined,  
exotic, beating beneath the pulse  
that longs for intimacy  
as the weeks drone on,  
and the neighbors settle for shooting  
just over par, being born again,  
looking busy without purpose  
across the pent-up silence  
of their immaculate lawns.



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### Art Information

(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){if('GoogleAnalyticsObject'===r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){(i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1\*new Date();a=s.createElement(o),m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.insertBefore(a,m)})(window,document,'script','<https://www.google.com/analytics.js>',ga); ga('create', 'UA-18260536-1', 'auto'); ga('send', 'pageview');

- “[1](#) [7],” “[No 73](#) [8],” and “[The Architect's Tuesday](#) [9]” © Peter Bethanis; used by permission.



Peter Bethanis grew up in rural Maine and currently lives in Indianapolis, Indiana. He is a writer and an artist. Peter's writing has appeared in *Poetry*, *America*, and *Tar River Poetry*, as well as in more than sixty other literary journals. His work has been recognized by former US Poet Laureate Donald Hall and James Dickey, author of *Deliverance*. He is the author of two books, *Dada and Surrealism for Beginners* (For Beginners, 2007) and *American Future* (Entasis Press, 2009).

Peter's artwork has appeared in several galleries and in literary magazines such as the *Adirondack Review*, *Indianapolis Review*, and *HCE*, the literary magazine of University College Dublin.

For more information, visit [Peter Bethanis's website](#) [10].

**Source URL:** <https://www.talkingwriting.com/sophist%E2%80%99s-dilemma>

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