

Tucked into the corner of the Five Points District of Denver Colorado at the intersection of 22nd street and California, **hides a lost** art, so **lost** in fact that maybe it's the becoming's of the 8th wonder of the world, though on a **smaller** scale. It stands out against the ever growing homogenous Starbucks and copycat chains, paving its way through the too often **lost** coffee shop culture of 1960's America. This is the misfit in an industry of chains, and yet its **subtle** appearance **shrinks** its unorthodox statement into the **confines** of an old brick building. This sanctuary of nonconformists is so far hidden, in fact, that I drove straight by it. Twice. The third time, I found it: The Mercury Café. Housed in a classic brick building, the entirety of the Mercury Café is **compressed** behind an **understated** red door which is surrounded by a mural of a moon to the left of it, a sun to the right of it, and a deep green awning scattered with white stars above it. To the far left of the murals lives a sign tacked to the wall, "The NRA is a terrorist organization."

As a first-time **pilgrim to this shrine**, I came with my eyes wide open and my ears on alert. As a college student, I have become increasingly interested in live poetry. I don't write poetry, don't have a knack for it, but listening, I enjoy listening. My exposure to this art form has long been limited to YouTube playlists of professional spoken poets. Their art form is strategic and the words are chosen wisely. They speak of heartbreak, love, growing up, and changing moments. They are serious poets, maybe not all snobs, but all obviously proud of their practices. I have listened to their poems, and listened to them again, never growing bored, just more familiar. I could have gone on, listening on repeat, **drowning myself peacefully in their extended metaphors**, but I challenged myself to move beyond my 2D screen and into a 3D experience. My interest in poetry, and my strategic stumble on Google led me here: The **Mecca** that is the

Comment [ML1]: Throughout the essay I have included comments on my writing process and discussed the writing choices I made when composing this piece. The comments that are written by highlighted color (ex: **ML1**) are done so to show a few instances of the themes I carried throughout the piece. The more specific information about these highlighted texts follow the first instance and then are simply represented by the highlighted color in the other occurrences.

Comment [ML2]: **ML2**: In all these vocabulary choices I chose to use descriptors that characterized the Mercury Café's small. My first impression of the café from the exterior was not grandiose and I was potentially underwhelmed. Using these thematic vocabulary words, shrinking the space thoroughly, allowed me to put the reader into a similar mindset that I had been in at the moment I arrived to the café. This strategic decision allowed my readers to hopefully experience the events that followed to be unexpected and a wonderful surprise just as they had been for me.

Comment [ML3]: Although including this detail seems out of place along with the way I had chosen to describe the exterior previously, including this allowed me to convey to my reader the complexity of the space, while also providing important context into the values of the space.

Comment [ML4]: **ML4**: Throughout the entirety of this piece I build up to the metaphor that compares the Mercury Café to a holy place. It is near the end of this piece I make this point outright, but I build to that realization dropping thematic vocabulary such as this point. I did this so that the reader could follow along with me as I came to discover this truth about this space myself.

Comment [ML5]: I chose to include this poetic language as a way to diversify my telling language of my anecdote, with a visual representation. This allows the reader to attach a strong visual to my relationship with poetry.

Mercury Café. This eclectic space features music, dance, theater and spoken word. Mornings are for meditation, afternoons for salsa dancing, and on this particular Friday evening, live poetry.

Upon entering, I moved quietly towards the live poetry echoing just beyond the left of the entrance in what's known as the Jungle Room. I sat toward the back of the dim space and let its character captivate me. The room was filled with mismatched chairs and tables marked with individualized painted creations. At the center stood a supporting beam coated in vibrant paints and wrapped by a large snake wood carving. Velvet curtains hugged the walls around the entirety of the space, and Christmas lights dangled in a network from one end of the space to the other, stitching an aspect of cohesion within it. The stage at the front of the room housed an oversized piano, a sculpture of a parrot on a perch, a fake tree plant like those often found in the waiting room of a doctor's office, and a white podium accented with gold details. Completing the space were three old-school fans tacked to the ceiling of the room. The fans featured lights that hung down from their centers. As they spun, the pull wires clanked against the lights to create the perfect base tempo for the performers at center stage.

The room was quaint, no larger than a thirty-foot square. It harbored within it an audience of roughly 50 people, which filled the capacity leaving limited room for personal space. However, I would soon come to realize that personal space was an unnecessary luxury in this place of kindred spirits. The audience featured babies and old folks, extroverts and introverts, misfits and average joes. The entirety of this place was the awkward cousin of a consignment store, at first glance, nothing more than a hole in the wall, and yet the longer I sat there I came to realize this place was so much more.

Although it doesn't seem like it, the Mercury Café is actually a community.

Comment [ML6]: I have previously mentioned the complexity that is this venue. Including a brief description of the spectrum of activities housed in this space allows the reader to understand the versatility of the offered activities

Comment [ML7]: Including a greater description of the interior of the space further displays the versatile and eclectic atmosphere that is the Mercury Café. By including these strong descriptors at the beginning of the piece I am able to set a solid base environment for the reader to conceptualize the rest of the story within.

The choice of outlining this initial experience in the room as all captivating, was done so that the reader understands the vastness of the space

Comment [ML8]: Including niche details such as this point here was done so that I could give the reader early framing of the atmosphere so that the reader is well adjusted for the claims I make in the coming sections of this piece.

Comment [ML9]: This is one of my favorite descriptors from the entire piece. I chose to make this comparison to drive home the descriptions I have scattered throughout the piece up until this point. Up to this point I had done my best to truly embody the feeling and style of the Mercury Café. That being said that was done in my own words. Creating this comparison allowed me to give the reader the opportunity to create their own image of the space based on their own experiences. This statement also couldn't be any more true. I feel that whatever consignment store that came to my readers' mind would not be far off from the vibe that was the Mercury Café.

Choosing to place this descriptor here also gave me the reign to close out this section in a place where I felt the reader would be able to meet my understanding of the space with their own visualization. I think that was the best way to solidify that the reader would be able to hold onto the setting throughout the rest of the piece.

Comment [ML10]: This marks the biggest stylistic choice I made throughout the entirety of the piece. I was at the Mercury Café for three hours that evening and each moment was so vivid, and the poems so vast that displaying the night chronologically alone would have been an injustice to the piece. This was also the most unique stylistic structure I have ever compiled and I think experimenting with a new style of my own creation allowed me to really embody my experience in the most genuine way.

I first noticed the strong community I was surrounded by when the announcer, who I would come to learn is named Ricardo, invited up a seemingly timid poet in her twenties. He welcomed her up to the stage just as a friend welcomes those close to them into their home. As the poet with a fiery-red pixie haircut took place behind the podium, she appeared to find comfort in the crowd of the familiar faces that stared up at her. The poet unleashed a somber poem depicting a relationship filled with emotional abuse. An abuse she compared to the dangerous game of Russian Roulette. Her emotions filled the room and the regulars connected to her feelings she spoke about, as if it were them weighed down by them as well. When she finished, Ricardo returned to the stage and spoke into the mic, “You are worthy. We all are here with you... Let that man play Russian Roulette with himself.” His words were followed by the warmth of an applause as if the audience was embracing her. I was an outsider in that moment looking into a community that saw themselves in their fellow member’s struggles. They met each other’s vulnerability with a safe haven. Every time. Without question.

This community, I came to realize, was solidified by the “in between moments”; in between performances, in between sounds, in between each poet’s positions on stage. In these moments I heard the community support one another as the next poet moved up the stage, getting pats on the back and words of encouragement. When the poets recited familiar poems, they were still met by grandiose applauses as if all ears in the vicinity were hearing them for the first time.

I felt the love of this community when a spunky young poet in a red button up and yellow bow tie took the stage. He prefaced his performance with a call to his fellow members. “I have decided to publish a magazine because this place is special—all of you are so special. Please send me all of your work so we can keep this going. What we have created matters. Our creations all compile to create something bigger, something that needs to be shared.” If this was

Comment [ML11]: For Each of the poets I included in this piece, among the many that performed, I chose to highlight at least one strong description of the poet to show the diversity of performers across the space.

Comment [ML12]: SO many key moments that left an impression on me during my time at the Mercury Café was the thick feeling in the atmosphere. Things weren’t always explicitly said, but you could feel a belonging between the inhabitants in that room. Using descriptive voice as I did in this area was the best way for me to take something intangible such as the atmosphere and embody it in a way that was true to feeling that filled the room. Once again this was done to place the reader as close to my personal experience in the room as possible. I continue to try and embody the intangible in the following paragraph as well.

Comment [ML13]: Allow these themes I have highlighted in the three different section are unique and important in their own right, there are also some aspects that are cohesive throughout each theme. This cohesion brings the piece together to show the ability for this place to be both vastly different while also having underlying aspects that hold the place together. I have included descriptors similar to this throughout this piece in order to convey this truth.

Comment [ML14]: During my time at the Mercury café, I chose to record important blurbs of the words spoken. I was meticulous in these moments, this allowed me to include verbatim quotes that allow the inhabitants that were present that night to really speak for themselves. I think this improves my ethos as it allows the reader to understand the explicit events that helped me frame the overall experience.

a scene in a movie it would have been followed by raging fist bumps and may have even broken out in song. That didn't happen in this moment. Instead the members were humbled by this poet's gratitude, and the powerful impression of appreciation appeared to leave its mark on the community of regulars.

Although it doesn't seem like it, the Mercury Café is actually a refuge.

The atmosphere that encompassed this venue saw immigrants as valuable, homeless individuals as humans, and allowed all members a sanctuary to vocalize tough realities.

Not long after I had arrived to the café, Ricardo, an immigrant from Latin America, introduced a poet who was a fellow immigrant as well, a man born and raised in Serbia. He spoke of the world and his quest to imagine a better one; he detailed our universe as one that possesses an "irrational aspect" to it and the importance of learning to lighten up and laugh in spite of it. When the poet finished, Ricardo announced proudly, "That is an immigrant that makes America great—we are all lucky to have you here." Ricardo's tone was firm and the applause that followed reiterated the poets belonging in ways that are too often left from the mainstream media coverage.

Throughout my stay at the Mercury Café, I scanned the room often. I felt eager to catch every moment, every interaction, for I knew my portrayal of the night would not do justice unless I caught all the minor nuances. It was during one of the scans that I caught sight of a homeless man standing behind me. He cradled a backpack across his chest and a back pack on his back, and in both hands he held full trash bags. He wore a black jacket punctured with holes, and had naturally distressed Levi Strauss jeans on... backwards. He appeared tired, in his stance, in his eyes, and in his stressed breathing. I have never been homeless, so I can't know the full

Comment [ML15]: This night that I wrote about at the Mercury Café was in the Spring of 2018 and the rhetoric of "Make America Great Again" was ever present. Ricardo's statement was refreshing.

Comment [ML16]: Although I have written about my past experiences before, this was the first time that I went into an event knowing that I wanted to write a piece about it. This transformed the way I was present in the space. Having the ability to include this aspect of my presence in the café that night, without it feeling awkward or forced turned out to be a really beneficial thing.

extent of this man's daily battles. But that evening, in the back of the café **that man stood there,**
management did not demand him to leave, and he was not told he didn't belong. He existed
there, just another audience member, and possibly even experienced a blissful distraction while
he tuned in to the poets under the spotlights.

As I sat there, various other poets took the stage and spoke of controversies that have
become the ignored elephant in too many rooms. A man took the stage and spoke, "I do this one
every time I hear about a school shooting—today there were two."

I had already heard the news about the devastating attack at a high school outside of
Houston, but the poet went on to detail the events that occurred after a graduation in Atlanta that
evening. A far too common shock absorbed the room and the silence was filled by the spoken
words of the man at the podium. His words were filled with anguish and frustration:

Pull a trigger and scream

Destroy a life full of dreams

Disregard all our needs

Killing, it is the sport of the Earth

He spoke of humans as dreamers, born to create and cultivate, and all the potential that is swiped
from reality by the mindless acts of numbed killers. The setting became a **safe house** for his
anger, a place to vocalize grief, a place to question humanity, and acknowledge the catastrophes
that were rooted in moments that cannot be undone.

After the poet concluded, Ricardo met this man on stage, put his arm around this man's
shoulder carefully, and spoke about the true power of the **safe haven** that was the Mercury Café.

"Poetry truly is a medication that no prescription or therapy session can provide you." He
thanked this poet for his honest reflections and the night carried on poet after poet.

Comment [ML17]: This was an aspect of the night I chose to stress because of the news that was being shared around the media within days of my trip to the Mercury Café. The videos released showed a homeless man getting kicked out of a local McDonald's after a person had willingly offered to get him a meal. The video was harsh and the treatment towards that man seemed cruel. It was different that night in the Mercury Café and I wanted to make sure that was highlighted.

Comment [ML18]: Throughout my time at the Mercury Café I did my best to get some audio recording of some of the performances. This came in handy as I was able to integrate some very telling poems into the piece. As the purpose of my attendance to the Café that night was to listen to the poetry, I am glad that I was able to find a way to weave all the individuals craft into my own piece.

Although it doesn't seem like it, the Mercury Café is actually a holy place.

As the poets performed, the physical space became a chapel and the spoken words became their sermon, carrying messages of morals, hopes, challenges, and purpose. They left the audience purified and allowed for individualist interpretations and reflections. Their self-made scripture was compiled of scattering beliefs knitted together to create a life mantra.

An aged man stood up at the podium sporting a leather jacket and a matching leather hat. His white beard stretched down beyond the tip of his chin about a foot balancing out his long white hair gathered in a hair tie down the center of his back. This man screamed his truth and waved his arms, unable to control his message within. He spoke about life as a river. He confessed: "Jesus, Mohammad, and The Buddha are all the river and have taught us to go with the flow." He spoke of acceptance, of difference, and of unity. Too often religions are pitted against each other, placed on a playing field that encourages competition, where one must be seen as right and all others subsequently as wrong. This man moved frantically displaying the fallacy of this behavior and the possibility of co-existence, of acceptance and appreciation across differences.

The holy order of this atmosphere wasn't symbolized by body and blood, but instead by mindfulness of the present. When a poet with tattooed skin scaling from his neck to his ankles took the stage, he directed the audience's attention to the delicate assortment of flowers present at the center of each table. The man acknowledged the life that had been encapsulated in these iridescent plants: "Be present and notice the flowers at your table. They were living. Smell them. Appreciate them. Be present with them." Just as he commanded, people passed the flowers around the room. Each person held the flowers when their turn came, and together the audience

Comment [ML19]: It is throughout this section that I conjure together all of the details that left me with the impression that the Mercury Café is indeed a holy place. The decision to drop hints at the beginning of this piece and foreshadow this allows me to pull together the piece cohesively.

Comment [ML20]: I really enjoyed the juxtaposition of this man's harsh exterior of tattoos with the very sensitive action of mindfulness for the room.

took a deep inhale, acknowledging the aromas that each flower emitted. As the audience took a deep breath in, their souls were purified by a holy presence.

A staple of many religious practices is that of confession, a personal journey through one's own wrong doings and a cleansing that frees people, an ode to putting a better foot forward towards tomorrow. Confessions at the Mercury Café didn't involve a priest on the other end of a shuttered wall, or the practice of Hail Marys to assist repentance. Confessions were spoken through the mic and received by the audience. The applause, gratitude, and optimistic poems that sometimes followed these immaculate confessions were the blessings of holy water, unchaining the tattered voices on stage. The confessions were of human shortcoming, jealousy, vengeance, and regret. They were followed by poems of hope, joy, and visions of a better tomorrow. **These voices of hope purified the stains inevitably left by human behavior:**

Comment [ML21]: The Mercury Café seemed to constantly adjust to a state of equilibrium. Solidifying this truth with this description and understanding the power in people being transparent about where they stood emotionally, physically, and socially that night became a true benefit for everyone involved.

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In this place of misfits with tattooed skin and brightly colored hair, in this place of wise folks and eclectic hipsters, and in this place of seemingly average joes and uncommon wallflowers, was a place of belonging. **That night the Mercury Café truly was a mosaic that had morphed and molded continually in order to match the unique characteristics of the inhabitants present.** Hidden behind the red door and green awning, just beyond the depiction to the moon and the sun, sat an old soul-café with an all-encompassing aesthetic. It's not that the poems performed that night at the Mercury Café were life altering or pristinely written, but the atmosphere stretched beyond the compounds of the brick building and velvet curtains, beyond the clashing chairs and illustrated table tops, beyond the flowers on the table and the snake sculpture around the pole. Altogether the evening was transformative.

**Comment [ML22]:** The visual considering the Mercury Café as a mosaic allowed me to adequately bring together all the nuances of the night and show how they all worked together.

It was just past midnight when Ricardo found himself at center stage again. “Tonight we have been blessed by the creative works of many, but we are only two-thirds of the way through our lineup for the evening, so please remember to limit your time on stage to 5-7 minutes.” With that he called the next performer up and the poetry continued. I was surprised that we were only two-thirds through the lineup. I had arrived at ten that evening and throughout my time in the back of the café it had appeared the majority of the audience had already taken their turn at center stage. I didn’t want to leave; I didn’t want to miss the other quirks that were more enriching with each performance. And yet it was late, so I backed away slowly from my table, careful to not alter the fabric of the space. As I left, the locals remained, unmoved, so committed to the spoken scriptures that this extended time at this late hour left them unbothered. As I slipped back through the velvet curtains, back to a reality that was distant from the Jungle Room, the rhymes continued:

I pray that your candle stays lit  
When the heavy winds come  
Don’t let anyone put out your light  
Your lights shine like the  
Sun or the moon in the night  
Which emits the light that we are all one  
Yes, it can be hard  
Just know it’s worth it...

And with that I slid carefully through the red door, passing through the sun and the moon, leaving behind all the lights shining brightly within the Mercury Café.

**Comment [ML23]:** Including this aspect of my night allowed me to acknowledge myself as an outsider again. This night was special and although I was eager to learn and experience this special world I still was not the same as the regulars. The community welcomed me as a visitor, but a late night separated us. TAs the true locals stayed regardless of hour.

**Comment [ML24]:** I found myself struggling with creating a solid conclusion when I was first drafting this. As this is one of the first creative writing pieces I have done I struggled to break away from the tidy conclusions that analytical writing (which I am more familiar with) often includes. I originally did a classic summary ending and it felt forced. My professor encouraged me to focus on the true moment of when I left. Giving myself more space to create a conclusion let me create stronger one that left a continuing story remain, but my place in it to come to an end.

I am happy with this conclusion as I was able to naturally connect the ending remarks to the description of the mural included in the beginning of this piece.