

John Grey

BEYOND THE OUTSKIRTS OF A DESERT TOWN

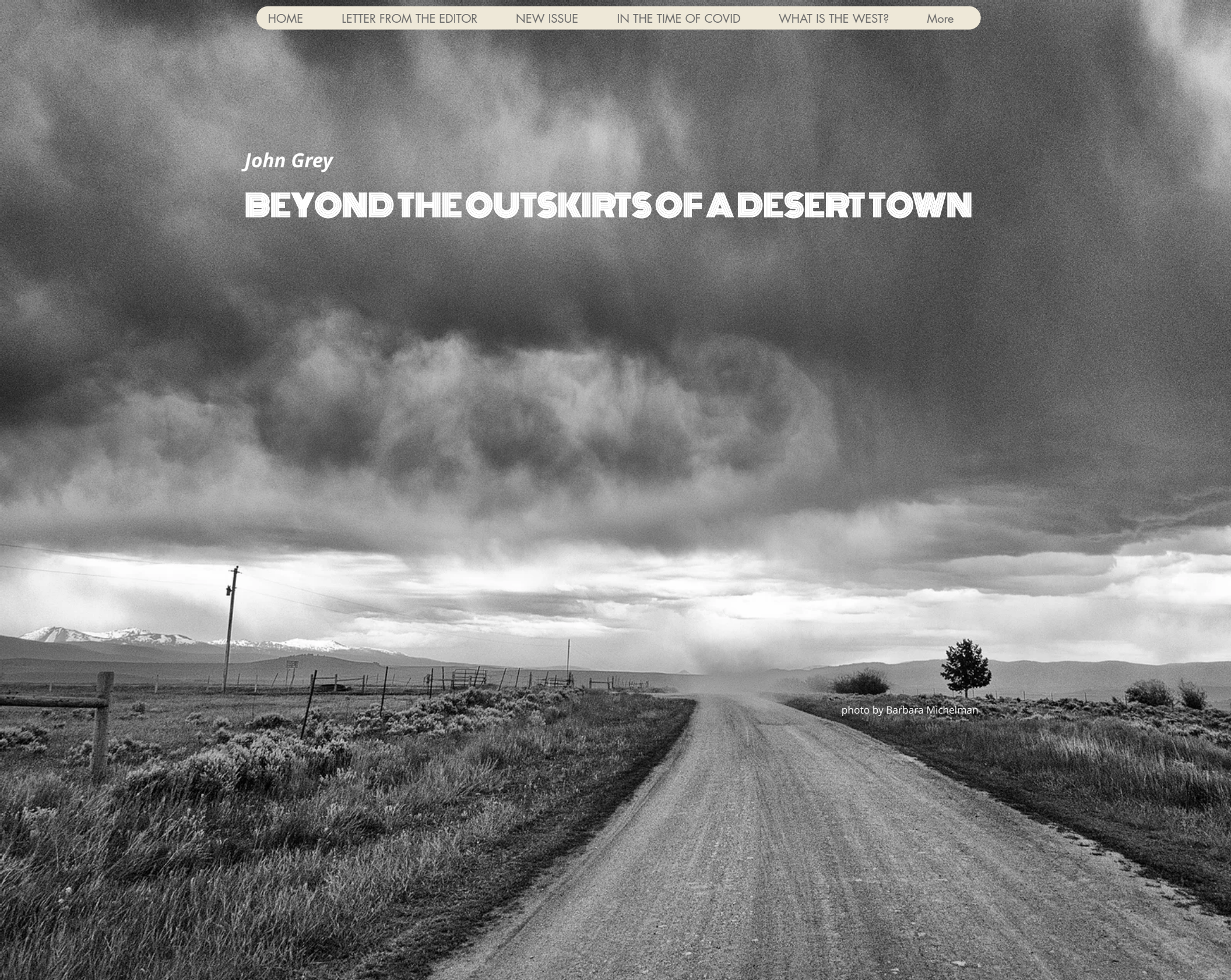


photo by Barbara Michelman

BEYOND THE OUTSKIRTS OF A DESERT TOWN

The town doesn't end
at its outskirts.
It just gives up.
Desert finds the going easier
than buildings do.
It can reach the distant mountains sooner
because it's already there.
The heat has little to do with temperature.
It's all about status quo.

A woman ran out into that swelter once.
Her bitterness figured it knew more about maps
than landscape does.
Her man stayed behind with his beer-can.
Between her bones and his regret
is a lot of rock and dirt and lizards.

God hereabouts is an air-conditioner.
His disciples gather round its cooling altar.
Religion never could survive the scorching sun.
Faith means never leaving the house.

Night's a better bargain.
The sky is nothing but a starting gate for stars.
Air is humbled by the drop in mercury.
People are out arid about.
They almost believe the town doesn't just end
where the street signs say it does.

A man walked out into that darkness once.
His foolhardiness eschewed more maps
than Rand McNally ever drew.
His woman stayed behind in her adobe hut.
Between his bones and her regret,
more rock, more dirt, more lizards.

People don't end at the outskirts
of their feelings.
But bitterness, stupidity,
is more than desert bargained for.
Hot, dry, rough, dusty, reptilian...
it just gives up on them.



John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in *New Plains Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Gargoyle* and *Silkworm* and has work upcoming in *Big Muddy Review*, *Main Street Rag* and *Spoon River Poetry Review*.

