

# The Oldest Living Thing in L.A.

By Larry Levis

At Wilshire & Santa Monica I saw an opossum  
Trying to cross the street. It was late, the street  
Was brightly lit, the opossum would take  
A few steps forward, then back away from the breath  
Of moving traffic. People coming out of the bars  
Would approach, as if to help it somehow.  
It would lift its black lips & show them  
The reddened gums, the long rows of incisors,  
Teeth that went all the way back beyond  
The flames of Troy & Carthage, beyond sheep  
Grazing rock-strewn hills, fragments of ruins  
In the grass at San Vitale. It would back away  
Delicately & smoothly, stepping carefully  
As it always had. It could mangle someone's hand  
In twenty seconds. Mangle it for good. It could  
Sever it completely from the wrist in forty.  
There was nothing to be done for it. Someone  
Or other probably called the LAPD, who then  
Called Animal Control, who woke a driver, who  
Then dressed in mailed gloves, the kind of thing  
Small knights once wore into battle, who gathered  
Together his pole with a noose on the end,  
A light steel net to snare it with, someone who hoped  
The thing would have vanished by the time he got there.

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