

# Context and Confessional Poetry

*by* Elizabeth R. McClellan

I like babies and little kids, more than some people  
but goddamn, children's laughter out of nowhere  
(in the night, when you're not expecting it) is creepy.

I don't like slugs smeared like nightmare goo on my  
summer-bare feet, I could do without them in  
my cat food and roses. Slugs will eat almost any

vegetation; if I knew their metaphor for plant perfection,  
I could cultivate it, broker a treaty maybe,  
bargain with rampion like Rapunzel in reverse

but I don't speak slug, so I squeal, and wear sandals  
when it rains. Lately I have been thinking  
about context, the background, the presumptions

and near-silence on which we build a world. Children laugh  
at inappropriate times and don't understand why  
they shouldn't tell jokes about Beethoven decomposing

during a funeral visitation, or how the sound  
of their giggles echoing in enclosed spaces at ten minutes  
til midnight is off-putting. For that matter,

the slugs probably don't enjoy dying on my carport  
in puddles of rain, without ever reaching the earthly delights  
of kibble, the rosebush that only gets enough sun

on the right side. I justify this because I don't enjoy it either;

I justify my spine-tingling tension at youthful voices because  
my older sister used to make me watch movies she was scared of,

which in retrospect I don't regret, but hasn't helped  
my paranoia of things out of context: topiary animals,  
stray balloons, mismatched architectural details, frogs out of  
water

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I'm sorry I stepped on you, I'm sorry I hated you for laughing.

