

## MANHOOD AT THE OVAL

there was no teargas today  
just an interminable string of singles  
the english batsmen hit over hours  
that made my eyes water from yawning  
i had no idea  
i was reprising a manly ritual  
when i agreed to take my godson  
to the fifth test at the oval  
whispering my inability to answer  
his string of earnest questions  
because although i can trick him  
into upholding my adult dignity  
by dint of the agecraft we practise  
with children who are charming  
enough to pretend to be fooled  
there is no such hoodwinking  
the men everywhere within earshot  
for whom cricket is incubated  
in vesicles between their legs  
who hold this masculine knowledge  
(transfused to them by uncles brothers peers bullies  
and the occasional father)  
as casually as they might grab their crotches  
i had no idea my dead father  
when i left home this morning  
would be a memory sitting in  
the same stand i am sure he took me to that once  
like always  
when we never got to be male together  
because the match started late  
and the crowd got unruly  
and this was the jittery 1970s  
(before prices and highways and  
containers of bulletproof children in shaven vests

kept people out of their place)  
and a young policeman hurled a canister  
and there was a stampede  
and the crowd broke down a gate  
i do not remember  
if it was football  
but i remember the press of people  
and the stinging in my eyes and throat  
and the fear in my stomach  
and the panic all around  
i do not remember my father  
with nostalgia or warmth  
that he was my safety my pride  
his funeral a place of awkwardness  
erasure margins  
not tears like that day  
at the oval  
chris is awkward with me always  
sometimes ashamed  
when i challenge him to multiply or remember  
but this shrunken wizened 14 year old  
is my pride  
and shame  
he makes me smile  
try hard feel bad  
when i am just as neglectful  
as my father  
i have never felt safe in manhood  
and thirty years since  
i last set foot in queens park oval  
just below the surface  
of my grand gesture of godfatherhood  
is the panic like that day  
at being discovered as a fake  
or worse  
discovered to be faking

until behind me a male voice talks loud  
on the phone in a trini accent  
shares that england have declared  
“we” have gone in to bat  
and chris guyle  
is at the wicket  
*gayle*  
another voice  
corrects him  
and i am the man  
laughing