The Joy of Learning

my father's dictionary
is big and black
the print is tiny
the pages are yellow with age
teeth dirtied with black specs
devoured words
they cannot escape

i fear proximity

perhaps if I get too close
it's leatherbound jaws might snap
closed

and what if I lost my head
in a sea of 5-dollar words
in a search for syllables
an overshadowing taskmaster
his whip cracks on my soft back
my skin yelps
i am repulsed