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# For Robert Grosseteste

Robert Bringhurst

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# *For Robert Grosseteste* \*

ROBERT BRINGHURST

The abrasive: light. The particles  
embedded in the darkness grind the lens.  
And immaculate light left miraculous rings  
in the Bishop of Lincoln's retorts and beakers

one autumn, when he added alkaline  
light to black acid, yielding  
something that seemed only  
a new allotrope of nothing.

*An infinity of nothings is all somethings,*  
said the Bishop. *These calculations . . .*  
(Oxford was livelier in his day, and his logic  
quicker than that currently in fashion.)

*Light distils, into interminable  
decimals. Light condenses  
into chemicals.* Light solidifies into  
instantaneous darkness—which

may sublime under the interstellar  
emptiness or the right formulation of words.  
*Light extends, carrying with it  
matter and form, into the ultimate*

*circumference of its sphere, where  
matter lacks all potential of further  
impression, due to its physical  
condition: utter rarefaction.*

*Lux*: the corporeal,  
spherical, fully elastic crystal.  
*Lumen*: the emanation, a spiritual  
body or, if you prefer, a corporeal

spirit, beyond which one finds the reflections  
of light against light, the refractions  
of light in illumination, and the darkness  
on the heath this day in Lincoln.

\* Robert Grosseteste (c. 1168-1253), *magister scholium* of the University of Oxford from c. 1215 to 1221 and Bishop of Lincoln from 1235 until his death, is the author of a number of works in Latin and in 13th-century English. He began to learn Greek at the age of 60 and made several translations from Aristotle in his later years. His essay *De Luce*, a treatise on the corporeal nature of light with an aside on transfinite numbers, has attracted the attention of several authors.