Rupert Arrowsmith

Villanelle (Lament for an Airport)[[1]](#footnote-1)

Invisible things are the reason why

Your passengers, missionaries, all have fled:

An empty temple is an empty sky.

No words or music disturb the dome high,

Your shrines, duty-free stores, memories dead:

Invisible things are the reason why.

Empty your scanners, your vestments untied,

Verse-chanters, page-stampers, have all deserted

The empty temple against an empty sky.

Do priests and professors usually lie?

When the breath’s gone, both together have said,

“Invisible things are the reason why.”

In veils, in masks, we hope not to die

Miles up above when the test-kit turns red –

If empty temples mean an empty sky.

Faith is what’s missing, but we have to try

To touch what’s beyond the dome overhead:

Invisible things are the reason why

A teeming temple is a teeming sky.

1. First published in The Mekong Review, vol. 6, no. 21 (Nov 2020), p.24 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)