

It comes through the air – a contrapuntal

'The rice blast fungus Magnaporthe oryzae is a textbook example of a rapidly adapting pathogen...'

Pierre Gladioux, American Society for Microbiology, April 2018

like any organism	<i>disorder</i>
it just wants to survive	<i>endurance fits</i>
it creates its own flaw, fissure, fault	<i>gaps</i>
to enter the host, open	<i>deepen</i>
low and gentle at first	<i>quiet, slow</i>
the pathogen steals in, sidles	<i>transfers</i>
into and pegs itself among	<i>the timeline of</i>
cells, through walls	<i>perspectives and</i>
into next cells	<i>framework</i>
not a prison, but a field	<i>that breaks out</i>
enclosed but borderless	<i>and merges</i>
the exact point at which everything	<i>complicates also</i>
escalates is unspecified	<i>coverage unidentified</i>
the disease knows its business	<i>which discharges</i>
and executes it	<i>irreversibly</i>
when I say poor weather I mean	<i>lack</i>
the opposite of rain	<i>of hydration</i>
hot, dry, thirsty	<i>parched</i>
your collar too tight, your neck	<i>weakened</i>
itchy, shockingly choked,	<i>lessened</i>
your survival quieted	<i>plagued</i>
its offspring broadcast	<i>transmissible</i>
it cultivates recurs	<i>breeding</i>
it ranges pervades	<i>options</i>

we adapt	it adapts	<i>increasing</i>
we acclimatise	it competes	<i>resisting</i>
we evade	it contends	<i>reducing</i>
we develop	it matches	<i>vulnerability</i>
repeat morph	mutate	<i>virulence</i>
adjust revise	change	<i>triggers</i>
rework amend	defamiliarize	<i>catching, seizing</i>
exchange transform	evolve	<i>contagion</i>
only constant	adaptation	<i>stratagem, attack</i>
can succeed		<i>avert</i>
an ever-evolving		<i>durable, communicable</i>
opposing species		<i>survival</i>
compulsion		<i>pressure pre-empts</i>
rupture		<i>occurrence, incapacity</i>
transition		<i>strikes outcome</i>
invasion		<i>inoculum</i>
unyielding		<i>variable/ variables</i>
the air is unavoidable		<i>negotiable</i>

The pandemic pathogenic plant fungus *Magnaporthe oryzae* (rice blast fungus, rice rotten neck) destroys crops that would otherwise feed 60 million people each year. It devastates smallholders, farmers and families worldwide, especially in food-deprived countries. Its spread is escalating across continents, and a related disease is a major threat to wheat. Scientific consortiums are urgently trying to curtail it.

A contrapuntal poem comprises elements that are distinct, but in conversation. The intention is to create a reading of dis-ease. The left column creatively tracks blast growth in a rice plant. The right contains words concerned with sickness prevention, occurrence and treatment.

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