CROAKERS AND SWIFT CROAKERS

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As readers of John G. Fuller's Games for Insomniacs (Doubleday, 1966) recall, Tom Swifties are sentences in which the adverb echoes the subject-matter of the quotation: "I can't drink any more pineapple juice," said Tom dolefully. In a February 1972 Word Ways article, J. A. Lindon showed several ways in which the classic Tom Swiftie could be generalized, all within the adverbial format.

However, old Tom Swifties never die -- they just mutate. A recent Saturday Review article transferred the echo from the adverb to the verb: "I'm dying," he croaked. Croakers are extremely habit-forming (and may be dangerous to your health); for several of the offerings in this article we are punfully indebted to Harry W. Hazard of Princeton, N.J. and to Dave Silverman of West Los Angeles, Cal. Some standard Croakers:

That's a dogwood, he barked
Nuts! she cracked
I'm losing my mind, she cracked
It's a gas! he fumed
I prefer Bull-Durham, he spat
I love spearmint gum, she bubbled
Your cigarette has ignited my fichu! she flared
You've forgotten the parmesano, he grated
Just one little drink won't hurt, he snorted
That's Moby Dick, she blubbered
I'm Gale Storm, she blustered
You're my kind of guy, she typed
I'm languishing in jail, he penned
Turn on the fountain, he spouted
You snake! she rattled
You've simply got to eat more, Louis, she crabbed
You know how I loathe fish, he carp ed
I'll have squab, she cooed
The kitten got into the knitting, she snarled
That gun really backfired, he shot back
Someone's at the door, she chimed
I can't get the car started, he choked
Dom Perignon! she bubbled
I've not packed the talcum, she puffed

No c...
That's my horse you're harnessing, she bridled
What a peculiar furry beast, she yakked
Single file, he rasped
That's Lost Crater, he judged
I just popped two shirt buttons, he burst out
You sure can sing, he noted
You're no angel, she harped
That's corny, she husked

No doubt the reader is muttering that last sentiment by now -- but be patient. There is more to the art of Croaker construction than meets the eye (or ear). All the above examples rely on two different meanings of the word represented by the verb. Suppose that the spelling as well as the meaning must be changed; then a homonymic Croaker appears:

Company's coming, she guessed
Pass the sauterne, she whined
I've ruined my corduroy peignoir! she wailed
It's going to be a lovely ceremony, she writes
Dawn came too soon, she mourned

Alternatively, the spelling can be left alone but the sound changed, leading to a heteronymic Croaker (which must be seen and not heard):

I've never seen a lovelier peninsula, she gasped

Purists of the Croaker form will probably object to ones in which only part of the verb refers back to the earlier sentence:

I've never seen such gorgeous conifers, she opined
Think mink, he inferred
One million dollars won't be nearly enough, he agreed
Ring the bell, she appealed
I already did, he harangued

They'll groan even louder at the liberal use of the prefixes de-, re- or ex- to get the point across:

Have another drink, Honey, he replied
Come across and I'll raise your grade, the professor remarked
To get there I turned left twice, he reported
Then I carried the canoe again, he reported
I'll have the cutlets again, she revealed
Sing it again, Seeger! she repeated
Put another turf on the fire, she repeated
Your brain transplant was a success, the doctor reminded him
Shall I take this worm off the hook? he debated
I just had my face lifted, she explained
I once ran a dry-cleaning shop, he expressed
... only one life to give for my country, he exhaled
It's a bit more challenging to construct Croakers in which the verb is a synonym for a two-word phrase:

You deceitful little devil! he implied
Your last paper was superior to this, the teacher berated
I see that's the letter after M, she envisioned
Ask me to the school dance, Theodore, she prompted
That poem was written in prison, he conversed
That stencil came from the prison shop, he contemplated
The prisoner planted my lawn, he conceded
Karl Schranz is no amateur, Brundage proclaimed
Don't try for game in spades or hearts, she forbids
I had three lovers before you, he held forth

However, our favorite Croakers are ones in which the speaker as well as the verb participates:

I think I'll end it all, Sue sighed
Hey, Snow White, here's Ichabod Crane! Sleepy hollered
I'm a witch, Ann chanted
I'm a concert pianist, she recorded grandly
The cows are lost, Ran offered
I ordered chocolate, not vanilla! I screamed
I had three lovers before you, he held forth

Finally, we introduce Swift Croakers -- sentences in which both the adverb and the verb echo the subject-matter of the quotation. The classification of Swift Croakers into the above categories is left as an exercise for the reader. Instead, we group them by subject-matter: art-music-literature, food, drugs-liquor:

Take me to the rock festival, she trumpeted brashly
I've lost my sheet music, he noted tunelessly
I'm a concert pianist, she recorded grandly
Our choir will present a special program, they chorused concertedly
I play the oboe, he noted reedily
That Xmas song is pitched too high, the soloist caroled sharply
I suppose I could model for your painting every Tuesday, she proposed weakly
I'm mad for fried chicken, she cackled disjointedly

A half-hour under the broiler is too long for any fish, he carped heatedly
I'm supposed to be playing the guitar, he fretted pluckily

This is a Croaker in which the verb is a synonym for a two-word phrase:

You've been lying to me!
I'm not a believer!
You're a liar, Bob!
I've heard that before.
Don't you dare tell me that!
I forgot to say hello.
No more excuses.
Be still.
You said you'd call.
I think I missed it.
I'll make it up.
I'm sorry.
I, of course.

Had enough, anyway, with the three Swiss.

We saw You later.
What are you doing?
That must have been an hour ago.

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This isn't much of a steak, he beefed toughly
How many calories in this cutlet? she grilled thinly
I'll have another piece of cake, he retorted sweetly
One must eat a souffle on the dot, she prompted lightly
Black coffee for me, he ground darkly
Did you like the sole? she fished flatly
My cakes have mounds of icing, she topped sweetly
Eat your custard, she egged smoothly
Where did you get this meat? he bridled hoarsely
This cheese is hard as a rock, she grated stonily
I asked for seedless grapes, he spat pitifully

You've been drinking, she sniffed wryly
I'm perfectly sober, he fumed groggily
Have a drink, Baby, it's cold outside, he cracked icily
You're tipsy on Cointreau, she branded sweetly
I've had only three, he totted cordially
Don't tell me we're out of beer, he frothed uncannily
I forgot the sugar in this drink, she gulped sourly
No more, he scotched mistily
Be still, he retorted cornily
You said this was only fruit juice, he swallowed punchily
I think I'll have another, he shot glassily
I'll make another martini, he shook boozily
I drink Scotch, he granted icily
I'm smoking opium, she piped dopily
I, of course, never use drugs, he injected pointedly

Had enough? Well, almost. We can't let the dazed reader go, however, without calling attention to the summit of the Croaker art form: three Swift Croakers in which the speaker participates:

We saw the Eiffel Tower and the Tower of Pisa in the rain, the latter listed precipitously
What a mournful bell, Nell told appealingly
That newspaper serial will have four episodes this month, Toby continued weakly

Can Word Ways readers find additional specimens?