

# 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

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 carped  
 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

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 corduory 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 outlets 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  
 The cows are lost, Ran offered  
 He had a scarlet nose, Flo read  
 I really liked vipers! Doug gasps  
 I ordered chocolate, not vanilla! I screamed

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 brassily  
 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 swore I'd learn to play the guitar, he fretted pluckily  
 I suppose I could model for your painting every Tuesday, she  
 proposed weakly  
 My favorite works of art are Mona Lisa and Venus de Milo, she  
 smiled disarmingly  
 Your embroidery is sloppy, she needled cruelly  
 Why would a poet ever enter medical school? he mused internally  
 Ezra and James were two famous poets, he expounded wryly  
 My field is poetry, he gnashed frostily, Get your word's worth

A half-hour under the broiler is too long for any fish, he carped  
 heatedly  
 I'm mad for fried chicken, she cackled disjointedly  
 There's bird-shot in this game, he grouched pluckily  
 And now let's hear it for carrots almandine! he rooted nuttily

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 precipitiously  
 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?