

# Joyce Carol Oates on Dylan's 'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue'

Novelist Joyce Carol Oates finds a link between a serial-killer short story and a Bob Dylan song about loss

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*Joyce Carol Oates, 76, is the author of more than 40 novels as well as plays, short stories, poetry and nonfiction. Her latest novel is "Jack of Spades: A Tale of Suspense" (Mysterious Press). She spoke with Marc Myers.*

In 1965, I was writing my short story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" when Bob Dylan's "Bringing It All Back Home" was released. The album was riveting, but the song "**It's All Over Now, Baby Blue**" was especially moving and relevant.



Joyce Carol Oates

My first husband, Raymond Smith, and I had moved to Detroit in 1962 when I began teaching at the University of Detroit. At our house, I was writing in a rosy-pink room with little more than a desk and chair. It had been a girl's room, which was appropriate given that my story was about a 15-year-old girl on the verge of being abducted.

My husband and I loved music—mostly classical albums from the Musical Heritage Society. We had a small stereo with us that we kept in the living room and listened when we had dinner. I can't recall how we came to hear about Dylan's album that summer, but we bought it. We particularly enjoyed his social protest songs.

“Baby Blue” didn’t directly influence my short story, which was inspired by a Life magazine article about a serial killer in Tucson, Ariz., but the song’s soul and poetic rhythm were very seductive.

I loved the song’s surreal quality and Dylan’s couplets: “The vagabond who’s rapping at your door / Is standing in the clothes that you once wore.” Or “Strike another match, go start anew,” which suggests renewal and beginning again, only to resolve with the blunt “And it’s all over now, Baby Blue.”

The beauty of the song is that you can never quite comprehend it. We know only that something is over: “The lover who just walked out your door / Has taken all his blankets from the floor / The carpet, too, is moving under you.” A powerful evocation of losing control, of losing everything.

Essentially, the song is about mortality. In my story, which was first published in 1966 and many times reprinted, the life that my teenage character knew is about to end. It seemed fitting to dedicate my story to Bob Dylan.