

You Feel Me?: Raising the Dead and Trauma in *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds and L'il Mouse "RIP Yummy"

When twelve-year-old L'il Mouse released his debut album *Mouse Trap* in December of 2012, he included a track elegizing Yummy Sandifer, the eleven-year-old accused murderer who was slain execution style by members of his own gang. The parallels between the two boys are hard to ignore, both grew up in Chicago's wild hundreds and have experienced incomprehensible death and trauma. L'il Mouse, in one interview, describes losing ten friends to gun violence over the course of one year. Like L'il Mouse's ode to the life of Yummy Sandifer, Jason Reynolds's *Long Way Down* also raises the dead and acknowledges the result black male trauma. The novel in verse chronicles William Holloman's ride down an elevator to avenge his brother's murder. On the elevator ride, he encounters the ghosts of people he knew who were victims of gun violence. Representing the dead, like ghosts, can be "a metaphor for the ways in which the 'Unfinished business' of the past unavoidably reveals itself in the present" (Erickson). The "unfinished business" that both L'il Mouse and Jason Reynolds make clear by raising the dead is the societal inequities that produce violence. Through their hip-hop lyrics and poetry, grief becomes deeply intertwined with their masculinity. Readers are forced to acknowledge that black boy expressions of grief are confined to certain expressive spaces. Additionally, those spaces are often misread as violence or hypermasculinity rather than grief.