



# London's Overthrow

*China Miéville*

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## London's Overthrow China Miéville

London's Overthrow is a potent polemic describing the capital in a time of austerity at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Award-winning author and essayist China Miéville cuts through the hyperbole of our politicians to present a view from ordinary London – of the inequality, oppression and indignity and the hidden, subversive sentiment pervading throughout our streets.

## London's Overthrow Details

Date : Published 2012 by Saqui Press

ISBN :

Author : China Miéville

Format : ebook 96 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Writing, Essays, Politics, European Literature, British Literature

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## From Reader Review London's Overthrow for online ebook

### tomwrote says

A personal and perceptive essay on London. Written in 2012 and still relevant today, Mieville walks us through the city, glancing caustically at the moneyed spires while opening the doors to the world of poverty, squats, survival and despair on the streets themselves. There are magical and mystical touches of his fiction in the writing style but the overall voice is clear, concerned, humorous and often indignantly angry.

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### Frank Jacobs says

Described with lyrical anger, this London is a city you won't recognise from the tourist brochures – but arguably much more real than the heritage core drawing all the visitors; the night city illuminated by mystery, as in Mieville's own fiction (and by the author's own, suitably blurry snapshots in this little book), the humdrum city maintained by its poor, huddled masses, as it has been since before Dickens, and as such a useful antidote to another fiction, much more dangerous because it masquerades as this era's accepted wisdom: that London will be reduced to a mere playground for the criminally rich, and that everything else is of no value, slated for demolition.

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### Evan Leach says

I have been a fan of Miéville's fiction for some time now, but this was my first taste of his nonfiction writing. Miéville is active in left-wing politics - he stood for the House of Commons in 2001 - and his socialist leanings can be detected in many of his works (especially the Bas-Lag novels). This photo-essay from late 2011 describes some of the problems afflicting London on the heels of the Great Recession, particularly the changes in the city's physical landscape (including a growing dearth of affordable housing) and conflicts between different cultures within the city.

An interesting and insightful essay by a talented writer. I knew little about London's problems going into this piece, but still found it engrossing. **4.0 stars**, recommended!

Available free here for the curious: <http://www.londonsoverthrow.org/index...>

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### Markus says

*Outside, north London gets on with its dark. There's an apocalypse more wintry than Martin's conflagration. At the end of all things, Fenris-wolf will eat the sun. Its expression will be of nothing but greed, and it will look out at nothing.*

An extraordinarily powerful little essay, especially for a resident of the grey and dreary city of London (already so grey and dreary even without the outrageous scenes described by Miéville).

There are many things I would not see eye to eye with this author about, many disagreements. In this little text, however, about all facets of London's social injustice, he is entirely right.

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I'd heavily encourage Londoners and non-Londoners to give this (quite short) eye-opener a read.

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### **Simon says**

Outraged and intelligent analysis of some of the things going wrong in London (and, by extension, the UK) at the moment. Specifically austerity, but also racism and other related issues. A bit of a rant, it jumps from topic to topic with a fact here, a statistic there, snippets of interviews and lots of poetic-apocalyptic grumblings. I'd probably have preferred a longer, more detailed analysis which was less concerned with dark, weird imagery. Talking of which, the photos the author has taken on his phone are mostly incomprehensible blurs and seem to be there mainly to pad out the pages.

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### **Dan Coxon says**

Nicely written, with Mieville's characteristic eye for a beautifully turned phrase. My only issue would be with the subject matter. Despite first-person interviews and other exclusive material he offers little new insight on London and its post-millennial woes. The unrepentant bleakness becomes wearying after a while too. Still, as an extended (nihilistic) prose poem to one of the world's great cities, London's Overthrow feels like a natural successor to William Blake. Dark, grimy, but unexpectedly beautiful. Much like London itself.

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### **Charlotte says**

A perfect bus-read for whizzing around London. Interesting format with poetic, often humorous chunks of text interspersed with pictures of London taken from a blurry phone. A succinct and necessary portrait of the political times that straightforwardly talks about the "balieuisation" of London and the other effects of the current coalition government. It was a bit tragic to be reading it just as the student protest on Wednesday got so severely drizzled on...

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### **Malcolm says**

Miéville's excellent essay on post-GFC, Con-Dem coalition London is a wonderful unpacking of inequality, injustice and resistance. Written in late 2011, this takes in Occupy, anti-fees and anti-austerity protests, homelessness and immigration, riots, the Olympics and not-quite-psychogeographical takes the current state of the city. Miéville has a fine eye for juxtapositions of injustice and for the voices on the receiving end of the decisions that bring about and sustain that injustice – here woven into the everyday artefacts and spaces of city living: laundromats, Tube stations and the residue of once present or unfinished structures of urbanity.

Not only does he expose the neoliberal meddling and destruction that is London, both he and many of those to whom he gives voice give sustenance to those seeking and building a better London. Not exactly and call to action, but an excoriation of one of the world's world cities. Highly recommended.

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## Tom says

Comparisons to the likes of London Orbital are headed off at the pass fairly quickly in this, a short trip around each point of the Capital's compass by Mieville. Iain Sinclair has a walk on part, and another of the cameo appearances during the writer's journey more-or-less snorts derisively at the concept of "psychogeography." The sci-fi author, socialist academic and lifelong Londoner explores specifically a City in a time of crisis, immediately post-Credit Crunch, dipping into Occupy LSX and speaking directly with an intersectional cast of fellow Londoners with both a righteous fury against inequality and a reverential, illogical love for the city which allows both them and it to flourish. Illustrated with blurry cameraphone photos, it was only a matter of time before he talked about Burial, really (about 40% of the way through by my reckoning).

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## Nataliya says

China Miéville does not really look like your "average academic type", does he? When I look at him, I don't necessarily think "*PhD thesis in Marxism and international law*".

VS.

*Stereotype vs. China Miéville - looks can be deceiving indeed.*

And yet CM is an academic, and when he writes a **passionate, angry, taking-no-middle-ground political photo-essay about the impact of recent economic and political decisions and trends on London and on the country as a whole**, I am not only willing to pay attention but also feel tempted to take copious notes, like a good student should.

*"London, buffeted by economic catastrophe, vastly reconfigured by a sporting jamboree of militarised corporate banality, jostling with social unrest, still reeling from riots. Apocalypse is less a cliché than a truism. This place is pre-something."*

This guy is no stranger to politics and its implementation and consequences, and I am more than willing to take his opinions seriously. **And now I know that I have tremendous respect for him not only as a talented writer but also as a person**, and I admire the strength of his political convictions and his willingness to not just take the often easy compromising middle ground on troubling issues (*having said that, I do believe that quite often middle ground is the only reasonable way to go, but I don't have to agree 100% to appreciate his views*).

*"The pay gap between the highest and lowest paid in the UK has grown faster than in any other developed country, spiking since 2005. In 2008, average income of the top 10 percent was 12 times that of the lowest. Their riches grow. We others are told to tighten belts.*

*We're approaching Victorian levels of inequality, and London's more unequal than anywhere else in the country. Here, the richest 10 percent hold two thirds of all wealth, the poorest half, one 20th[...] Almost a quarter of young Londoners are out of work. A wrenching 40 percent of London children live in poverty."*

Now, I don't know that much about current British politics or economics. But the climate is not that different in the US - the country, where, interestingly, 'socialist' is a slur employed by our own right-wing political party. **And so I feel that I can understand and relate to the issues that Miéville so angrily yet eloquently brings up.**

*"People, though, refuse to forget that the filthy riches of the filthy rich are not unrelated to the filthy poverty of others."*

Miéville tackles the uncomfortable here. He attacks **the huge and still growing economic divide between the rich and the poor**, aptly noticing that *"Still, in London, defenders of privilege aren't quite so prone to open swagger as their US counterparts"*.

*"The Olympics are slated to cost taxpayers £9.3bn. In this time of 'austerity', youth clubs and libraries are expendable fripperies; this expenditure, though, is not negotiable."*

He questions the rationale behind **severe cuts to the welfare and education systems** while at the same time dropping huge amounts of money on the upcoming Olympics. Seeing the similar things happen across the board in my own country, I do share the indignation.

*"Everyone knows there's a catastrophe, that few can afford to live in their own city. It was not always so."*

He addresses "feral" youth rioting, questioning the motives behind viewing the young people as danger and the actions of police dealing with them. Miéville thinks police actions cross the line more often than not. When I read his angry words, I can't help thinking about the police actions in the two public universities in California that I've attended - UC Berkeley and UC Davis; the Berkeley police beating the Occupy protesters and the **infamous UC Davis pepperspraying incident** (pictures below. Google it). I'm sure there's something to be said about the behavior on both sides of the virtual barricades, but when do the police actions cross the line? Here:

He takes on **racism** as well - the ultimate uncomfortable subject that most politicians would rather pretend doesn't exist.

*"Racism, of course, endures, adapts. According to the exigencies of ideology, casts around for one, then another first-choice hate [...]The government's official counterterror strategy includes asking lecturers to report depressed Muslim students."*

I loved this **passionate and highly intelligent** (would you expect anything different from CM?) essay about the wrongs of the society. I'm reading his politically charged fiction book *Iron Council* now, and reading this essay made me appreciate the events he portrays in his story even more, seeing what he thinks of the real-life events. **I highly recommend this essay - but be warned if your political views are closer to the right-wing - you will not like it.**

Miéville's photo-essay is here, free on his website.

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## **Mika Lietzén says**

**London's Overthrow** is a wonderfully eloquent rant by **China Miéville**, touching on subjects such as the 2011 London riots, youth, banks, olympics, multiculturalism, food, housing, city planning and birds. The account freewheels through the city's streets, interspersed with shaky nocturnal photographs. It's a decidedly leftist tirade, but never tiresome; Miéville's way with words keeps it going, even if the ideas conveyed by the words don't break any new ground, not sure if they even scratch the surface. It remains a superficial treatise, a slightly blurred snapshot of London in our time.

But it does set the reader thinking, it pushes buttons and elicits reactions, something better essays often do. And there's humour, humour's always good. Certainly it offsets some of the dystopia Miéville seems to reveal in. He might be saying he doesn't like what's going on, but he damn sure loves to depict it. And that he does very well, very well indeed.

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## Richard Derus says

Rating: 5 outraged stars of five

This call to arms has been revised and can now be found at Expendable Mudge Muses Aloud.

Content Warning: If the idea of a civilization being strangled by sado-monetarism causes you to froth at the mouth, you need to read this book.

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## Neon Snake says

Very short (about an hour's read) politically charged essay about the 2011 riots and the aftermath, covering the criminalisation and demonisation of London's youth, especially minorities. There's nothing that hasn't been said before, but it bears saying again - mostly, the unanswered questions of what led up to and caused the riots (and no, Theresa May, it wasn't pure criminality, unless you're talking about the police killing Mark Duggan).

There's also some very interesting commentary too about the then upcoming 2012 Olympics, the huge non-negotiable spending of the tax-payers money on a spectacle, in a time when those who can least afford to be austerity are being ordered to be so be those who can afford not to be austere.

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## J.P. says

This is the first time I've read non-fiction from China Miéville. He does an amazing job of portraying the side of London that doesn't get into print often. As he writes:

*We're approaching Victorian levels of inequality, and London's more unequal than anywhere else in the country. Here, the richest 10 percent hold two thirds of all wealth, the poorest half, one 20th. A fifth of working residents in the London boroughs of Brent, Newham, Waltham Forest, Barking and Dagenham earn less than a living wage. Unemployment in the city is above 400,000, and rising. Almost a quarter of young Londoners are out of work. A wrenching 40 percent of London children live in poverty.* Talk about a chasm between economic classes.

I found this much more readable than George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* which was authored on the same topic in 1936. George Orwell is by no means a hack writer, but I found his diatribe on economic problems and advocacy of socialism to be more like a dry lecture delivered by a college professor by comparison.

There are lots of striking passages here, like:

*The lion looks out from its apocalypse at the scrag-end of 2011. London, buffeted by economic catastrophe, vastly reconfigured by a sporting jamboree of militarised corporate banality, jostling with social unrest, still reeling from riots. Apocalypse is less a cliché than a truism. This place is pre-something.*

I'm behind the author 100% when he blames part of the economic problems on big businesses. While some

people struggle to put food on the table, the CEO of a company can afford to spend \$5,000 on a shower curtain as they rake in profits by getting astronomical sums for finished products compared to the cost of manufacturing them.

Thanks to whoever found this online. It's very well written and thought provoking. Check it out.

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### **Silvana says**

Love the format of this photo essay. I started paying attention to urban issues especially the rights of its citizens only last year, so I enjoyed the way Mieville outlined the problems when the citizens are no longer the owner of the city, when their freedom of expression is banned/curbed, when public properties are abandoned for the sake of the rich and powerful, and finally, when state-sponsored violence spread yet undisturbed and a police state begins. I think I would love it more if I knew more about the environment and/or having been there myself. However, this remains an insightful, thought-provoking essay. 3.5 stars rounded up.

Available for free at <http://www.londonsoverthrow.org/>

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