

## Bertolt Brecht: Two Poems on Dialectic

Many of Brecht's poems, and perhaps all of his plays, either depict dialectical processes or encourage a dialectical attitude. Very few of his poems explicitly mention the term *dialectic*, and one of them mentions it only in its title. There is a gap of more than twenty years between the writing of the two poems transcribed below; the second of them was written two years before his death. At first sight, the two poems seem quite different in intention and spirit: in 1930, dialectic was a technique for changing the world; in 1954, a pleasure, like comfortable shoes! But the gap between them may not be as wide as all that.

### *In Praise of Dialectic*

Today injustice goes with a certain stride,  
The oppressors move in for ten thousand years.  
Force sounds certain: it will stay the way it is.  
No voice resounds except the voice of the rulers.

And on the markets, exploitation says it out loud:  
I am only just beginning.

But of the oppressed, many now say:  
What we want will never happen.

Whoever is alive must never say 'never'!  
Certainty is never certain.  
It will not stay the way it is.

When the rulers have already spoken  
Then the ruled will start to speak.  
Who dares say 'never'?

Who's to blame if repression remains? We are.  
Who can break its thrall? We can.

Whoever has been beaten down must rise to his feet!  
Whoever is lost must fight back!  
Whoever has recognized his condition—how can anyone stop him?  
Because the vanquished of today will be tomorrow's victors  
And 'never' will become: 'already today'!

1930–31

*Pleasures*

The first look out of the window in the morning

The old book found again

Enthusiastic faces

Snow, the change of the seasons

The newspaper

The dog

Dialectics

Taking showers, swimming

Old music

Comfortable shoes

Taking things in

New music

Writing, planting

Travelling

Singing

Being friendly.

1954