The basic aim of this paper is to analyze the poetics of Jiří Kolář (1914-2002), one of the most representative Czech artists in the twentieth century. He is a poet who, in partial and somewhat equivocal disenchantment with the capacity of words, extends poetry through the use of visual metaphors and that of incorporated objects. He arrives thereby at a mid position between verbal and plastic art — between poetry and art. In this paper, the author demonstrates his poetics not only by the analysis of his poems, but also by examining the technical procedures of collage.

In the Part I, the author traces his whole literary and artistic career in the context of Czech literature and plastic art. It was František Halas, poet of the poetism’s generation, who had divined the Kolář’s talent and named his first book of poems as Birth Certificate. Also J. Chalupecký, theoretician of art and founder of Group 42, admitted the affinity to his own aesthetics in the poems of Jiří Kolář. As a member of Group 42, Kolář tried to his very best to pinpoint the connection between the fate of modern art and the fate of the world of modern civilization, the city. The languages of the inhabitants of the suburbs considerably affect the verse of books such as Odes and Variations and Limb and Other Poems, predominantly written in free verse. In the 1960’s, Jiří Kolář played the decisive role in the prosperity of Czech plastic art. Especially, group Crossroad which he had founded with J. Padra, theoretician of arts, presented the notion of New Humanism which is similar to the cultural atmosphere at the époque.

In the Part II, the attention is paid to such poetic methods as testimonies, variation, paraphrase and confrontation, all of which are salient in his poetry. Jiří Kolář’s literary type is quite difficult to classify. His lyrical reflection is bound up with the poet’s extraordinary ability to evoke other people’s fates and his text appear to straddle that borderline between the lyrical, the epic and the dramatic. Poems of Silence, a book marking definitive break with language and literature, acted as an impetus for the completion of the most extensive survey of the linguistic universe ever undertaken in
modern Czech poetry. This book is symptomatic thanks to its outline of the possibility of creating poetry without verse, without words, poetry from object which are shaped the outside world and which are marked by the touch of life. Poems of silence has a volume subtitled “Evidence poetry” which needs no words, even though the word appears there after all. This is the word making up pure typographies and instrumental in attaining novel unity, a unity of words, letters, and pictures. So comprehension is no longer dependent on the knowledge of a national language.

In the Part III, the author tries to locate the collage of Jiří Kolář in the evolution of collage. The collages of Jiří Kolář owe very little to those of the cubist with their rough references to reality, or to those of the Dadaists and Surrealists, which multiplied metaphorical situations and association. The materials chosen by Jiří Kolář, some ancient but more frequently but more frequently modern, testify to the various printing techniques invented by man to communicate with his fellows, to record and spread his ideas.

The technical procedures that are Kolář’s means of expression in the plastic arts are also traceable throughout his poetry. These are collage methods, the use of quotations from other poets as well as from banal reality fragments, incomplete phrases caught in chance conversations on the streets or in the cafés; rows of statistical data and sober, non-metaphoric observations; the inclusion of documents, the revelation of manners of speech, the repetition of part sentences and the play on words. The viability, comprehensibility and expressiveness of fragments are subjected to test from the viewpoint of the collage. The poet is well aware that he needs no exceptional materials for his collages, that he can easily do with reproductions of pictures or pages from magazines, various print or written documents, in all these he finds strong poetic evocativeness. At the same time he comes to the conviction that the final result depends on the proportions, distribution and arrangement of materials. So the author comes to the conclusion that Jiří Kolář is a poet who extends not only the range of poetics, but also that of our perception.