DIVERSION

Welfare $X = Y$

Brian Higgins

I am a digit soon to be cancelled out.
What does it matter, an integer, more or less?
For allowance is made in the rules that the world is a mess,
Plus or minus a few perhaps, but it’s right—just about.

A knife in my guts is the line of a pen through my mark
And all my biography told in the numbers to ten
The cock of my eye to the sun and the laugh of my soul to
the dark,
For I am one of the faceless signs, one of the Welfare Men.

The decimals stutter and this is the lie they repeat.
“The years that he lived are accountable for in the main
Add him up on the left and the right and it balances neat
A few blank months—but we soon got him working again”.

Yes, ordinate and abscissa, they chose for the graph
The amount of Time spent related to What is Produced
And a line through incorrelate points is my strange epitaph
“With the usual allowance for error $X$ equals $Y$ is educed.”


**Biographical Note**

‘Born at Batley in 1930, bored at Bradford in 1940, in 1950 he had an affair with the gamma function. He was educated in 1960 at the “York Minster”, Soho.’ Thus states the biographical note on the endpaper of Brian Higgins’s first book of poems, *The Only Need*. Brian Higgins died in 1965, before his third book of poems *The Northern Fiddler* appeared. In an introduction to this book the poet George Barker wrote that Higgins ‘had perceived that the secret at the heart of affairs constituted the most ingenious practical joke, which only a man who was at one and the same time a mathematician and a poet of sentiment could start functioning for the amusement and edification of all concerned’.