BENEYTO’S CASI UN POCO DE NADA:
CONTRADICTIONS, QUESTIONS,
CONNECTIONS, AND DISCOVERIES

ANITA M. HART
University of Nebraska at Kearney

Published in 2000, María Beneyto’s Casi un poco de nada offers the poet’s perspective on her process of being and writing. This collection shows what the poet has described in an interview with Mónica Jato as “la antigua voz de diálogo con el lector y conmigo misma,” evident throughout the changes in her poetic production (843). According to Rosa María Rodríguez Magda in the “Introducción” to Beneyto’s Poesía completa (1947-2007), Casi un poco de nada represents a small anthology, a selection of poems from a planned larger work of the same title (66). This editor and critic explains that this book, though not centered on one unifying theme, reveals “un desdoblamiento introspectivo en la evaluación de su vida, de quien se ha sido y se es” (66). A look at the contradictions, tensions, questions, and doubts appearing in the poems shows the speaker, whom I associate with the poet, engaged in ongoing issues as she moves toward coming to terms with the choices and circumstances of her life. The poems bring out connections with earlier works and lead to new points of view. In this study of selected poems from Casi un poco de nada I incorporate several ideas from poets who are often called the generation of the 1950s and who were Beneyto’s contemporaries. The concept of poetry as a means to knowledge and discovery, shared by many of these poets, is meaningful in approaching Beneyto’s work.

The enigmatic title Casi un poco de nada suggests a lack of substance, undercutting a notion of solidity, presence, and significance. The phrase “un poco,” when followed by the preposition “de,” and a noun or pronoun, generally produces the idea of a small amount of something, whether it be concrete or abstract. Here “un poco de,” followed by the nothingness of “nada,” strangely indicates non-existence. The adverb “casi” adds another layer of modification, both signaling and diminishing the presence of an entity with the limitation “almost.” How does this paradoxical title relate to the content of the collection of poetry? One possibility is that taking account of life and work may produce the realization that although one’s
being is unique, it ultimately represents a minute part of the universe. In a related reading of this title, evolving as a person and as a poet over a lifetime may lead to a sense of releasing attachment to daily concerns and merging spiritually into a larger whole. From a different angle, the title may indicate that the poet questions, from the viewpoint of her later years, the significance of her life’s work. Whatever the interpretation, the title and the poems engage the reader in attempting to comprehend the perspective of the speaker as she demonstrates awareness of a period of transition, one characterized by a growing acceptance of moving beyond physical existence. “En fin, me voy,” affirms the speaker in the poem “Transeúnte sonámbula” from Casi un poco de nada. Preparation for departure generates reflection on the past and at the same time leads her to pursue the work of creativity at a later stage of life.

Casi un poco de nada opens with the poem “Estrellas,” in which a parenthetical phrase including the words “la guerra mía” suggests that the speaker has experienced and is still involved in conflicting choices or directions in her life and work. The stars seem less than satisfied with her accomplishments:

Las estrellas predicen sueños inaccesibles.
No quieren verme pálida y torpe.
Lo que yo canto, siempre sonámbula,
siempre dispersa,
dando alquiler a la voz que llora,
no les complace. (761)

Identifying herself as “siempre sonámbula,” a sleepwalker—or someone existing in dream state—who in this case speaks on behalf of others, the poem’s speaker establishes continuity with earlier poems and collections, as will be shown. The phrase “predicen sueños inaccesibles” points to mysterious imagery and perhaps poetic innovation. Although the actual date of Beneyto’s composition of “Estrellas” is not available to me, it is conceivable that the writing of this poem coincided with the innovation in Beneyto’s poetry published in the 1990s, which Rodríguez Magda, Jato (in María Beneyto: El laberinto de la palabra poética), José Albi, Candelas Gala, José Mas and María Teresa Mateu, and others have studied.

The poem “Transeúnte sonámbula,” following “Estrellas” in Casi un poco de nada, captures tensions and conflicts of past experiences, viewed from a later perspective. The title combines the titles of two poems from the earlier collection Criatura múltiple (1954), “Transeúnte” and “Sonámbula.” In “Transeúnte,” a passer-by acknowledges an unidentified “alguien” who lacks a voice and who seeks assistance: “Alguien que me ha pedido la voz mía / para seguir gritando” (165). These well-known and often-cited lines
exemplify the poet’s determination to give voice to those who are suffering in the post-Civil War environment in Spain. The poem reveals the tension inherent in having a commitment to speak for others but finding it a challenge to choose involvement toward that aim. Conflicts appear in the lines “Yo, hermano, / podré llorar contigo. No quedarme. / Yo, como todos, pasaré de largo” (165). The speaker knowingly remains distant, with the words “y no es justo que un cuerpo de leproso / me acerque su contagio” (166) in spite of her having a strong desire to make known the plight of others.

In the second of these earlier poems, “Sonámbula,” the speaker affirms the vitality and the genuine nature of her song, but she questions whether her poetry will be offensive to the unfortunate whom she supports and whether her poetry will have a positive impact. The speaker’s aim is to respect the life of all: “Canto las cosas y los seres hondos / que no poseen voz o la perdieron” (170). In doing so, she describes herself as “sonámbula” and as “segura, solitaria y aislada,” residing in a world isolated from the difficult reality endured by many Spaniards. Still, she promises to proclaim hope: “Y hasta en el caos, si es que el caos llega, / dejaré en la canción mi señal viva / como medida de esto inagotable / que en humano llamamos esperanza” (171).

With these earlier poems reflecting contradictions and providing a context for a reading of the piece published later, the poem “Transeúnte sonámbula,” from Casi un poco de nada, adds another layer of background. It contains as an epigraph four lines from Beneyto’s poem “La viuda” (a los cincuenta años de Miguel Hernández),” published in La caña gris: Revista de poesía y ensayo in the winter 1960-61 issue and then in Poesía (1947-1964). In this poem the speaker honors Hernández by depicting the pain and sadness of the widow of the imprisoned poet and dramatist who died at age 31.2 Beneyto’s poem shows the woman alone and in transition, without having reached her destination:

Transúnte sonámbula

te miro
viniendo y sin llegar
de tu distancia,
siempre a tu lado un hueco que acaricias [...]

(Poesía [1947-1964] 205)

Part of the poem “La viuda,” giving recognition to Hernández’s widow, is integrated into the later poem to highlight issues of life process and loss. Beneyto chooses four lines and modifies them with a first-person reflexive verb (“me miro”) and the possessive (“mi”) to serve as an epigraph for her “Transúnte sonámbula,” published in 2000, decades after the poem written
in honor of Hernández: “Transcúnte sonámbula / me miro / viniendo y sin llegar / de mi distancia” (763). Like the poet’s wife, she has endured loss and experiences a period of transition. From the beginning, the poem generates questions about past circumstances:

El agua me veía pasar
por aquellos lugares,
donde nada se me había perdido. (Salvo el sueño,
la levedad insignificante
de los años, huyéndome hacia el caos,
las niñas que componen
la mujer que estoy siendo, o las muchachas
—tres por lo menos, que mi edad contiene,
digamos las tres gracias que no soy—
o dos madres que no están en activo
y practican silencio.
Donde nada—decía—
se me había perdido. Y quizás donde todo se me perdió. (763)

The phrase “por aquellos lugares / donde nada se me había perdido” lacks specificity but suggests an existence she would not have chosen. It likely refers to the speaker’s childhood and youth in the turmoil of Spain’s Civil War and her life as a poet in a period when women’s voices were in general marginalized. The long parenthetical section contains references to the multiple selves of various ages that comprise her being. The phrase following “las muchachas,” indicating that her age is three times that of young females, includes the slightly self-deprecating, subtle humor of claiming not to possess the qualities of the three Graces—Joy, Charm, and Beauty. Neither does she represent the mothers, though her age is equivalent to combined ages of two of them. The insistence on having lost nothing in the places or circumstances where she found herself is countered with a reversal: “Y quizás donde todo se me perdió.” The contradiction involving “nada” and “todo” suggests that doubt and questions about her path remain. She may question whether she has missed out on experiences of life.

The following section of the poem demonstrates the speaker’s frustration and tensions in regard to poetic expression:

De pájaros no quiero ni atreverme
a saber nada.
Porque si digo golondrina
—grácil adorno de las nubes,
flecha del viento—sale
de mi palabra un cuervo. (763)
What do Beneyto’s words mean when she claims that if she says “golondrina,” the result comes out “cuervo”? One or more of the following possibilities could be the case: uncertainty about her ability to express what she has in mind, concern about the insufficiency of language to capture her intention, or the fear that readers misinterpret or unjustly criticize her words. The poem suggests that she attempts to produce poetry of quality and beauty, only to see her results as less admirable or less acceptable than she had anticipated. The next lines of the poem indicate a struggle regarding awareness and consequences of decisions:

Ya florece
la primavera, y es pecado
—dicen en los conventos—
enterarse. Y es que he tenido siempre miedo
a no saber salir
si entro al laberinto. (763)

With a directive to an unidentified “tú,” who may be interpreted as the poet in dialogue with herself, she advises not becoming a victim of “las dos manos ladronas” which steal one’s time and life force: “roban a otro pulso / su latido más íntimo” (764). The poem produces a view of the speaker struggling to reconcile tensions and to write authentically. The short line “En fin, me voy” is direct and to the point, suggesting her distancing from the literary world and her approach to the end of life. With genuinely warm wishes, also directed toward the tú, for music and light, along with good luck with the bulls (this phrase bringing the poetry to more everyday cultural topics), she prepares herself for a challenge, exemplified by the word choice “maratón anual.” The poem ends with the speaker’s intention to leave behind conflicts of the past:

Yo iré al monte, a ver si allí la tierra
me acepta como árbol,
haciéndome olvidar a aquella misionera
y aquella impenitente pecadora
que quise ser, quizá a partes iguales. (764)

When the final lines of “Transéunte sonámbula” refer to her identity as both “misionera,” determined to follow her mission as speaker for those who lack voice and advocacy, and at the same time “impenitente pecadora,” the self-representation suggests contradictory life commitments. They can be seen as complementary, however, if the concept of sinner conveys the notion of questioning or not following traditional cultural patterns. These labels may lose significance after death, when her body returns to the earth. She sees that transformation in terms of becoming “árbol,” intermediary between
earth and sky, perhaps reflecting a blending of “pecadora” and “misionera.” Beneyto’s poem, ending with the indication that the speaker chose her roles “quizá a partes iguales,” emphasizes self-acceptance as she looks backward to her poetry and also forward toward the end of life. The views of the self in this poem recall the poetry of *Criatura múltiple* and Diane Fisher’s study of identity in Beneyto’s early work, with the critic’s statement regarding “the complexity of Beneyto’s poetic persona” and “the variety of ways in which she expresses that intricate and changeable subjectivity and its relationship to the world” (95).

Although in “Transéúnte sonámbula” the speaker anticipates a return to the earth, the following poem in *Casi un poco de nada* shows the speaker searching for air and the freedom it suggests. Albi has indicated that Beneyto’s early poetry features her connection with the earth and then changes to represent her as a woman of the air and water (25). Although “tierra” and “aire” refer to different orientations, both suggest spaces of belonging and personal satisfaction. The poem “Recomiendo paciencia,” beginning with the perplexing image of an aggressive, insistent “palabra” that demands her attention, shifts to demonstrate the speaker’s desire for liberation:

Una palabra que se come a las otras
las digiere lentamente, y recomienza,
me dice que me sitúe más de cerca
en las esquinas de luz, y mire. (765)

The word-devouring “palabra,” an image coming perhaps from a dream state, and other visions suggesting a confusing dream disappear to allow the poem to shift the focus to the speaker’s anticipation of life’s end. She explains her plan and her connection to air:

Y yo, que antes de irme ya construyo
sendas para volver, me afiero al aire
del que reclamo ingravidez, altura,
transparencia y distancia. (765)

With the words “ingravidez, altura / transparencia y distancia,” the speaker seeks freedom from the restrictions of life. A touch of gentle humor accompanies her promise to those who have some claim against her that she will return, but at a time of her choosing: “Les digo que me esperen, con paciencia. [...]” The poem ends with the likelihood of the silencing of the speaker’s voice and her love: “ese pobre / depósito de amor que me sostiene,
/ y que hoy quiere callarse / para que ni la luz / sepa que canta” (765).

The contradictions, questions, and uncertainty of other poems in *Casi un poco de nada* show the speaker coming to terms with her life. Several pieces
recall for this reader the work of Spanish poets of the generation of the 1950s, especially their view of poetry as a means of knowledge and discovery as well as their use of everyday language and common events to approach larger issues. Beneyto saw the publication of several acclaimed books of poetry in the 1950s, as did her contemporaries José Angel Valente, Claudio Rodríguez, Francisco Brines, and Carlos Sahagún, discussed with other poets in Andrew P. Debicki’s *Poetry of Discovery: The Spanish Generation of 1956-1971.* Their ideas on the nature of poetry as discovery relate well to Beneyto’s work. Observing Beneyto’s connection to these poets, Albi writes, in the introduction to *Hojas para algún día de noviembre,* of “una sensibilidad y una dicción más próximas, en sus poemas más cuidadosamente trabajados, a las de algunos poetas del 50, aunque su personalidad poética continúe inconfundible” (24). Sharon Keefe Ugalde’s book *En voz alta: Las poetas de las generaciones de los 50 y los 70* features women poets, thus giving a more complete picture of Spanish poetry of the mid-twentieth century, and María Beneyto is the first poet included (109-132). On the subject of poetry, Valente wrote the essay “Conocimiento y comunicación” in 1957 and revised it for Francisco Ribes’s *Poesía última* (1963), in order to emphasize the role of poetry as a means to knowledge during a period when many poets were stressing the aspect of communication. Valente is particularly well known for his statement that “todo poema es un conocimiento ‘haciéndose’” and his view of the process of poetry as an exploration in which an experience is comprehended through the act of creating the poem (“Conocimiento y comunicación,” *Poesía última* 158-59). This concept can be seen in Beneyto’s poetry, and the statement by Rodríguez in the same anthology seems particularly applicable to Beneyto: “Creo que la poesía es, sobre todo, participación. Nace de una participación que el poeta establece entre las cosas y su experiencia poética de ellas, a través del lenguaje. Esta participación es un modo peculiar de conocer” (“Unas notas sobre poesía,” *Poesía última* 87). Beneyto’s work reflects this participatory knowledge. Further, Gala points out that Beneyto, in the poem “¿Desde cuándo escribe? ¿Por qué?” (from *El agua que rodea la isla*) sees writing as a way to gain self-knowledge (“Dismantling Romantic Utopias” 287). This poem, written in response to questions posed to the poet, features a genuine, original, lighthearted, and at the same time profound statement. This piece highlights the idea of knowledge gained through dialogue with “otra forma” of the self: “Porque escribir, también es contestarme / preguntas que proyecto hacia mi misma […] Mujer astral, lejana y misteriosa, / dialoga conmigo lentamente” (*Poesía completa* 359). This dialogic approach to understanding is evident in “Autocanción de cuna,” discussed later in this essay.

Beneyto’s poem “Restos” recalls the direct, everyday language and common events typical of the early Valente and of Rodríguez, as well as the
notion that poetry is a means to knowledge and discovery stemming from the poet’s participation in the world surrounding her. Beneyto’s piece, however, combines direct language with original imagery. In “Restos” an abandoned suitcase is all that remains to represent a human life, and the speaker in the poem observes her reaction to what she sees. Written as one long, flowing sentence, the poem pictures a suitcase, disposed of and forgotten:

Una maleta vieja abandonada
en la calle,
abierta, rebosando papeles
y otras cosas
por una boca triste y como muerta
que se quedase así, momificando el gesto
que descubre un dolor
a la profanación indiferente
de tantos ojos como el día acerca
a su pequeña intimidad
deshecha, absorta [...]. (783)

Combining everyday language with creative images and choices of words (“momificando el gesto,” “la profanación indiferente,” “su pequeña intimidad / deshecha, absorta”), the poem captures the speaker’s reaction, progressing from annoyance to pain and to protest:

una maleta
que me molesta, que me hiere,
que hace que grite en mis adentros algo
como una gran protesta que no es mía,
que ha inoculado en mí su desgraciada
dispersión de secretos,
hace que ahora entienda sútilmente
el malestar que siento
cuando ya ni siquiera recordaba
el montoncillo de las cartas grises
—no blancas ni amarillas—
que el viento violaba alzándolas del suelo [...]. (783)

Something about this abandoned suitcase and its contents make the speaker want to clarify “que no es mía” as the scene brings up the issue of past relationships. The poem’s emphasis on “entienda,” in the phrase “hace que ahora entienda sútilmente / el malestar que siento,” indicates an increasing comprehension on the part of the speaker of the discomfort and distress that anyone might feel if personal communications and possessions were strewn
about in public view. The poem continues:

 [...] gafas inútiles, amortajadas
 en su funda, junto a una billetera
 y algo que fue pañuelo y es indefinible
 tela rasgada,
 la caja de bombones pretérita, vacía,
 y alguna foto fantasmal de un sueño
 que se quedó borroso y roto y sucio,
 como el muerto quizás, como la muerta
 que en la caja vacía de bombones
 guardó palabras y silencios íntimos,
 sutilezas de amor, penas lloradas [...].

Using her imagination to create a possible scenario about the deceased man
or woman whose suitcase and possessions leave a trace of existence, the
speaker seems to lament that a life can be easily reduced to a suitcase of old
possessions, that a life can be quickly forgotten. The poem draws to a close
as the speaker envisions the deceased owner closing the suitcase for the last
time, thus bringing up universal issues of the end of life:

 y encerró en la maleta para siempre
 —su siempre ya prescrito—
 una vida que queda reducida
 a eso, una maleta que después, un día,
 alguien dejó en la calle
 para los basureros,
 los perros vagabundos
 o mis ojos
 visionarios, que inventan una historia
 mínima y lacerante, allí, en la acera
de la cloaca y sus alrededores,
en la hora más pálida del día. (783-84)

The speaker as poet with “ojos visionarios” creates a story, blending everyday
language with unusual phrases such as “la caja de bombones pretérita, vacía,”
“alguna foto fantasmal,” and “un sueño / que se quedó borroso y roto y sucio”
to make the life of the unknown owner of the suitcase appear mysterious
and in some way memorable. The knowledge or discovery generated by this
poem is a thought-provoking venture into serious topics. Can the speaker
see herself as vulnerable and forgettable, as the “el muerto” or “la muerta”?
Does this scene bring up for the speaker the notion that parts of anyone’s life
may be exposed and observed by “los basureros,” “los perros vagabundos”
or someone’s “ojos visionarios”? How easily can a human life be reduced to an abandoned suitcase spilling its contents? What remains of a life? “Restos” captures an occurrence of encountering signs of a human being’s departure. Using this scene as a starting point, the speaker produces parts of a story based on traces remaining from a human life. The poem thus brings up universal issues about the fragility and the transitory nature of life, asking the speaker and the reader to face questions with no easy answers.

Acknowledging inner conflicts, Beneyto’s speaker addresses the issue of fear in the poem “Amigo íntimo.” Here the topic of a common emotional state unfolds with the poem’s use of both direct language and metaphor as the speaker claims to have moved beyond the experience of fear:

\[
\begin{align*}
Y, \text{ con todo, ya veis, no tengo miedo.} \\
\text{Lo tuve, sí, lo tuve cuando era} \\
\text{la luna un círculo de luz helada,} \\
\text{el agua una llamada irresistible,} \\
\text{los árboles un grito monstruoso} \\
\text{de la tierra, y mis manos un extraño temblor. Hoy no. Estoy libre, estoy atenta} \\
\text{a mis propias pisadas, que no evitan tropezar con los huesos esparcidos} \\
\text{de la desolación que me rodea [...]. (772)}
\end{align*}
\]

In the following section, the poem pictures fear as a younger brother requiring care and supervision:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{El miedo era un hermano muy pequeño} \\
\text{que había que cuidar de que pudiera caerse y añadirse hasta volverse un pánico feroz, era una leve suavísima ternura, tan querida,} \\
\text{que había que cubrir hasta asfixiarla para que no creciera más. (Su muerte se duerme aquí en la mía de algún modo).} \\
\text{No tengo miedo, y por lograr ahora la paz, me voy sin él. (Dadle una tierra benigna a su cadáver, casi el mío).} \\
\text{Ya veis, por no tener, ya ni siquiera tengo a mi amor de siempre, al pobre miedo que tan fiel compañía dio a mi vida. (772)}
\end{align*}
\]

The comparison showing fear as a tenderness that had to be asphyxiated to prevent further growth, produces an unsettling view. The parenthetical parts
of the poem actually emphasize how greatly fear was a part of her being, to the extent that her death means the demise of fear. The request for giving it “una tierra benigna a su cadáver, casi el mío” with subtle humor suggests that fear was an inseparable part of her identity. Ironically, the unpleasant experiences of fear are countered by the impression of her missing the loyalty and presence of this entity, which is pictured as friend, younger brother, and companion. The poetry brings the speaker a new, appreciative perspective on a part of her life that she might have preferred to avoid or eliminate.

Questions, doubts, and a discovery appear in the Beneyto’s poem “Autocanción de cuna (Algo que ofrecer al desvelo).” The words “La noche,” “la muerte,” “La desesperación,” “El dolor,” and “un péndulo / de angustia” create a scene of despair and concern, leading to the view of the self as ghost-like: “y te miras sonámbula, flotando / —fantasma de ti misma—rodeada / de huecos y de ausencias, o de espectros / que están en otra dimensión [...]” (775). The poem pictures the speaker as surrounded by holes, absences, or ghosts; these terms create mystery and uncertainty. Addressing herself and producing part of a dialogic exchange, the speaker poses a challenge with the question “¿A quién vas a acudir?” (775) This interrogative is repeated, with the suggestion that the fearful speaker express her frustration strongly: “Si es preciso aúlla, / blasfema, muerde, escupe asco, sangra, / y no te compadezcas de ti misma / en las postrimerías, en el acto / que ya es acto final, telón previsto” (776).

As one of several poems in Casi un poco de nada showing the significance of a long history of strength and solidarity in women, “Autocanción de cuna” includes the recommendation to appeal to “las mujeres hondas, las que están en tu sangre confirmando / que lo que tienes lo tuvieron ellas, / hembras de la ansiedad [...]” (776). Beneyto’s speaker in this poem turns to generations of strong women who offer support and whose stories appear in dreams: “los recuerdos que ellas ceden, / esos que despertaron tantas noches / queriéndote habitar dentro del sueño” (776). The memories offer her knowledge and understanding. With directives to the self in the words “Date la paz que ellas consienten” and repetitions of “Duerme,” the poem produces a lightly hypnotic effect. Soothing the self with the assurance of encouragement and wisdom from “tantas madres,” the speaker concludes that sleep is in order and that day will come: “Y ya, mañana, / los pájaros dirán. Será otro día” (776). The tone changes from one of insecurity to one of peace as she discovers a comforting presence in the company of “las mujeres hondas.”

Different from the comforting nature of “Autocanción de cuna,” the poem “Temporal transeúnte inadvertido” records a sense of solitude and disillusionment leading to self-evaluation:

La soledad o múltiple perfecto
de la nada minúscula, y los árboles
cansados a abrazar inútilmente
vientos errantes,
se alían al calor, se precipitan
a mi espalda, y me duelen.
He venido, trayendo
a mi ausencia conmigo. (785)

The perplexing phrase “múltiplo perfecto / de la nada minúscula” brings a hint of both mathematical specificity and vague non-existence to a scene of solitude and sadness. In what sense does the speaker carry “ausencia” with her? This language suggests a lack of presence and substance as noted in the following lines, which indicate that she has been forgotten or—perhaps even more sadly—that her presence was never significant:

Nada les dejo para que pregunten
por mí, pues nadie me recuerda.
Quizás ni me notaron
allí en sus cercanías
ni siquiera entonces,
cuando pisé calles
y lugares de luz y voz, y música,
cuando di manos o besé mejillas
y pregunté a los ojos por mi imagen.
(Cuando creí ser parte de aquel todo
en donde nunca estuve). (785)

The lines “cuando pisé calles / y lugares de luz y voz, y música” reflect her connection to and involvement in the city and recall her work Poemas de la ciudad. Even memories of human touch and greeting, “cuando di manos o besé mejillas,” seem less than authentic. The lines “y pregunté a los ojos por mi imagen” may indicate the speaker’s concern that her efforts to connect with humanity were linked to a search for recognition. The parenthetical ending of the poem projects a disappointing self-deception, at least from the speaker’s perspective: “(Cuando creí ser parte de aquel todo / en donde nunca estuve.)” The comment is not just an added thought, but rather a sobering self-representation that reinforces the sense of non-presence earlier in the poem.

With the lament “nadie me recuerda,” the poem recalls Carlos Sahagún’s “Y es de día,” from Como si hubiera muerto un niño, in which the speaker walks to the street and greets a new day, claiming:

Pero no me conoce nadie. Nadie
—la flor de aquel jardín, el agua mansa
de aquel estanque, aquellos montes grises,
tanta ceniza repartida—, nadie
sabe mi nombre. Este es el fin. Aquí
se termina la historia.”

(Antología de la nueva poesía española 434-35).

Sahagún, who shares with Valente, Rodriguez, and others the view of poetry as leading to discovery and knowledge, claims that for the poet the important point “es esa afirmación de sí mismo, esa indagación en lo oscuro mediante la cual, una vez terminado el poema, conocerá la realidad desde otras perspectivas” (“Notas sobre la poesía,” Poesía última 120). Sahagún’s speaker delves into the unknown, the darkness, in Como si hubiera muerto un niño. The issues of illusions and loss of illusions characterize Sahagún’s book of poetry, as do the subjects of quest, discovery, failures and impossibility, with these last two evident in “Y es de día” (Debicki, Poetry of Discovery 155-158). In a similar vein, Beneyto’s speaker in “Temporal transeúnte inadvertido,” with her commitments to creativity and solidarity, experiences disillusionment, becoming unsure of the validity of her existence and her work. Sensing a lack of recognition, she doubts her role in society and questions her earlier assumption that she was an individual connected to a larger whole. By undercutting her own vision, she rewrites her self-description as “Temporal transeúnte inadvertido” and invites the reader to know her inner conflicts. Her life and work may seem, from the speaker’s limited perspective at the time, “casi un poco de nada.” The reader witnesses the doubts as the speaker works through questions and concerns about her life. This is a process of “indagación en lo oscuro,” to use Sahagún’s words, or “indagación y tanteo,” as Valente describes the process of poetic creation leading to new perspectives.

Beneyto’s Casi un poco de nada offers a look at the contradictions, tensions, and questions that are part of confronting life’s mysteries. Discovery and knowledge of the self, including the conflicts and doubts endured, unfold for the speaker in Beneyto’s poems. She states in the Preface to her Poesía completa (1947-2007) that her aim was “ante todo, hacer buena poesía,” and to express “lo que me dolía y lo que amaba, además de lo que me intrigaba, me sorprendía, me sumergía en misterios inquietantes, me daba paz o me alteraba. Quería querer […]” (“Prefacio” 11-12). Casi un poco de nada invites the reader to discover the richness of Beneyto’s work and her commitment to the world surrounding her.
WORKS CITED


NOTES

1 Casi un poco de nada in Poesía completa (1947-2007): 764. Casi un poco de nada was published in Valencia by Institució Alfons el Magnànim in 2000. In this essay all quotations from Beneyto’s poetry come from Poesía completa (1947-2007), unless otherwise indicated.

2 Miguel Hernández (1910-1942) was known for his “use of visionary images and his construction of irrational effects,” as well as social themes (Debicki, Spanish Poetry of the Twentieth Century 46-47, 50-51). For Cano Ballesta, Hernández gave Spanish poetry a new direction after that of the Generation of 1927, while creating “una lírica más basada en lo instintivo, en la pasión, menos intelectual, menos refinada, pero con más fuerza y más próxima al lector corriente” (27).

3 Critics have studied the images of birds in Beneyto’s poetry. See, for example, Gala’s “Dismantling Romantic Utopias: María Beneyto’s Poetry between Tradition and Protest” (289-92) and Mas and Mateu’s “María Beneyto: la poesía se nutre de vida” (126, 129).

4 Beneyto was awarded the Accésit al premio Adonais 1955 for Tierra viva, as well as the Premio Valencia de Poesía 1953 for Criatura múltiple and Accésit al premio Boscán 1953 for Poemas de la ciudad.

5 Claudio Rodríguez writes in “Cantata del miedo,” from El vuelo de la celebración, of his relationship to fear, addressing fear as a friend and concluding with a discovery: “Perdón, porque tú eres / amigo mío, compañero mío. / Tú, viejo y maldito cómplice. ¿El menos traicionero?” (Desde mis poemas 224).