

From a review of the Marie Alexander Series

By Rebecca Spears

Morton Marcus has been hailed as “one of America’s hidden literary treasures,” “superb master” and “marvelous godfather” of the prose poem. What you have heard is true. Morton’s *Moments Without Names* (2002) combines 63 new and 47 previously published poems. From beginning to end, the book stirs and enchants. For Marcus’s world is large, and he invites the reader to share in his wide-ranging knowledge of myth, history, literature, and philosophy. Each poem is perhaps an attempt to capture the moments without names, those “raindrops, all transparent sacs containing diamonds of light—valueless, transitory, gone” (title poem). The work is rife with allusions. Many

are anchored in vignettes of family history. Some are historically large yet personally intimate. “The Kiss” recalls a moment during the French Revolution on 7 July 1792 when Abbé Lamourette proclaimed to the 700 representatives of the Assembly,

“*Liberté*” . . . and everyone turns to listen. “*Egalité, fraternité*,” he says. “*L’amour*.” Only love can save us, brotherly love . . . We should pledge to hold this love as our first principle . . . and seal the vow with a kiss.

A silence follows, then cheering, kissing, and laughing. Though the abbé’s idea did not prevail just then, another idea does—of “some kind of natural order, neither moral or religious . . . at work in us—a twitch in our cells, a speck in our chromosomes—that tries to guide us back on course.”

