Cladio Magris, professor of German literature at the University of Trieste (his native city) since 1978, is one of Europe’s most renowned writers, essayists, cultural philosophers and critics. His work has won him worldwide acclaim and numerous awards. His best-selling novel Danube (1986) has been translated into more than 17 languages. His internationally acclaimed works include A Different Sea (1991) and Microcosms (1997), and most recently in 2005 the novel, Blindly, (translated into English, published by Yale UP, 2012): a voyage through time and space as seen through the eyes of a lucid madman. In 2001 he was appointed to a Chair at the Collège de France. In 2009 he became Writer-in-Residence at Utrecht University where he teaches master classes. Translator into Italian of the works of Ibsen, Kleist, Schnitzler, Buchner, he has also written essays and critical studies (in Italian) on Borges, Heinse, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Kafka, Musil, Rilke, and Joseph Roth. His work appears regularly in several European newspapers and magazines, including Corriere della Sera. His essays deal with central and eastern European themes — exile, migration, and geo-cultural communities regardless of their different languages. His works analyze the laceration of the Holocaust, the cultural conflicts and affinities of the German-speaking populations of the Austrian Empire, and the instability of the former Yugoslavia. Recipient of numerous book awards including, most recently, the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade.

Blindly is a novel of poetic beauty and intensity that originates in one tragic, paradoxical and almost totally ignored event in Yugoslavia between the end of the second World War and the beginning of the Cold War on Goli Otok (Bald/Naked Island), a small, enchanting, terrible islet in the Upper Adriatic. After the war a large number of Italians left Istria and Fiume/Rijeka, which had become part of Yugoslavia, thereby losing everything in the process. At the same time 2000 Italian workers — militant communists, many of whom had taken part in the Spanish Civil War and experienced the Fascist prisons and German lagers — voluntarily left Italy for Tito’s communist Yugoslavia in order to contribute to the construction of communism. When Tito broke with Stalin in 1948, he regarded the 2000 militant Italian workers as potentially dangerous Stalinists. He imprisoned them on the islets of Goli Otok and Sveti Grgur where, as in the gulags and lagers, they were subjected to brutality and neglect. Years later, when the survivors returned to Italy, they were greeted with hostility as dangerous communists arriving from the East.

In The USC School of Social Work Auditorium,
MRF 340, 5 p.m.
Wednesday, October 17, 2012

"I have read Claudio Magris's Blindly twice, in French and in English; but the real translation is his revelation of what is in his own words "the indistinct drama of life." Never mind the literary icon-busting Modernism, Post-Modernism. Not since Joyce's Ulysses has there been great revelation of what the novel can be. Magris achieves this in fully realizing his own statement. The novel "is a voice that expresses not what we have consciously become but what we might have become and what we erupt at times, what we could be and hope and fear we can be." —Nadine Gordimer

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