Part history of Iran, part history of Iranian film and literature, and part anthropological survey; Michael M. J. Fischer’s *Mute Dreams, Blind Owls, and Dispersed Knowledges: Persian Poesis in the Transnational Circuitry* is a much needed and indispensable study of the inter-textuality of Iranian film and literature. It illustrates how producers of culture have seen Iran (and Afghanistan) in the aftermaths of revolution and war and how they have then interpreted and reproduced certain poignant moments as negotiations between normalcy and chaos, childhood and adulthood coming too soon, city and village life, expedient and ideal marriages, love and loss, and ultimately the shadowy looming presence of international politics in the politics of everyday life.

The book is divided into two distinct parts: the first presents a (brief) study of ancient Zoroastrian rituals in modern practice in Iran and treats two influential classical texts and the modes of orality that inform them and the second part focuses on the inter-textuality of modern literary and visual media. How fragmented and dispersed knowledges have been recovered and reproduced drives the first three chapters: The first chapter traces the history of practice and performance of Zoroastrian rituals after the Islamic conquest of Iran and the problematic of performing such rituals in present day Yazd. Interweaving the intimate details of the lives and beliefs of the Yazdi Zoroastrian priests, Fischer makes salient the drastic decline in the number of active practicing members in the community. The next two chapters, deal with the mythopoetic texts of the tenth and eleventh centuries – particularly the *Shahnamah* and the philosophical works of the Illuminationist philosopher Suhrawardi – that derive their subject materials, in part, from the Avestan texts (the hymns and rituals of which were the focus of the first chapter). The chapter on the *Shahnamah* is especially noteworthy for its masterful descriptions of the major character types and their functions which inform several overarching parables and recurring theme of ‘three generation units and the doublings of erring fathers, heroic but still learning sons, and transcendent or responsible grandsons’.

The focus of the second half of the book shifts gears rather abruptly to the modern period and to the novels and short stories and films that experimented with new (modernist) forms of discourse. The first chapter analyses the surrealist and controversial novel, *The Blind Owl*, by Sadegh Hedayat and two films, *Towers of Silence* and *Gav*, as ‘parables of the convoluted psyche’ and as ‘modernist discourse of the intelligentsia and the more popular religious idioms [that] paralleled each other but remained mutually unintelligible’. Fishcer’s approach to *The Blind Owl* is particularly praiseworthy since it offers a more positivistic and humanistic reading of the often misinterpreted novel. The final chapters offer rich and elaborate details on the pre- and post-revolutionary films as palimpsests that take their modernist and surrealist cues from works like *The Blind Owl* and draw from the repertoire of tropes and metaphors from classical literature to create hieroglyphs, images, and commentaries as ‘Persian humanistic responses’ to wars, revolutions, refugees, ethnic strife, and in one particular case ‘the absurdity of democratic voting as the solution to problems everywhere’.

Each part and, further, each chapter of the work stands rather independently of one another with a few key exceptions. In regards to this, the author states clearly that the book is constructed as such so that,
the chapters in this volume are companion pieces to essays on how the Qur’an is read and interpreted as a source of moral reason through parables and as a foundation for legal and political argument...; on politically charged novels as eliciting enactments; on debate traditions in the madrasah...as demonstrating the richness of immanent critique from within tradition as well as the openness to engagement with the outside world; and on the theatricality of protest demonstrations from communal ‘riots’ of the nineteenth century to those of the 1977-1979 Islamic revolution in Iran as consequential forms of symbolic politics.

While to many extents this statement holds well, one must read the work in its entirety since Fischer refers to such topics implicitly and holistically and treats them explicitly within certain limited contexts. Fischer further states that the chapters are,

companion pieces to three book-length studies: an ethnography of Zoroastrianism in Iran and India set in comparison to Muslim, Bahai, and Jewish communities...; an ethnography of the training of Muslim religious leaders in the seminary of Qum...; and a volume organised around oral, literary, and visual media of Iran leading up to the revolution...

The first and last of the aforementioned topics not only frame the work as a whole they also pervade the entirety of the work to bind the seemingly disparate chapters and divisions together. Still one wishes that for all the energy spent on important classical texts (such as the Shah namah and the elusive yet edifying philosophical texts of Suhravardi), Fischer would have devoted some space connecting these texts to the works of later poets such as ‘Attar, Rumi, and Hafez whose metaphors were taken up by Sadegh Hedayat and innovatively reworked to reflect Iranian surrealism and modernism which in turn became part of the repertoire of images, themes, and motifs that later writers and film makers used.

*Mute Dreams* is an exceptional work that fills a lacunae in comprehensive studies on Persian poesis. It simultaneously may be used by the novice as an introduction to Persian poesis and Iranian films, as a handbook by the seasoned scholar, and as an edifying and illuminating companion by students of Iranian studies who will benefit from the breadth and depth of the work and the erudition Fischer brings to the topics and texts treated.