

Beyond the interdisciplinary and philosophical convergence of legal and medical science, bioethical dilemmas have been a source of inspiration for theater, cinema, and world literature. Below are some indicative milestones where Art, using its narrative tools, attempts to approach the world of scientific thought and pose its own questions to the Individual and Society.

BIOETHICS IN THEATRE & CINEMA

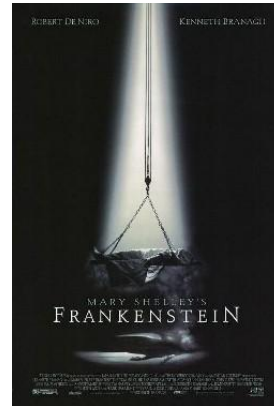
Small list of great art works...

1818 — Frankenstein



Creator: **Mary Shelley**

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) is the seminal work of science fiction and the first major text to raise bioethical questions about human creation. The work has had a huge global and timeless impact, as reflected in its numerous theatrical and cinematic adaptations. Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist, is obsessed with the desire to defeat death and creates a living being from dead bodies, which he immediately rejects as soon as he sees it. Through the myth of the "new Prometheus," Shelley explores the limits of scientific responsibility, the conflict between knowledge and ethics, and man's deep need for recognition and love. The work serves as a warning against the hubris of science that attempts to create life without taking responsibility for the consequences of its actions. Whether as an allegory of technological arrogance or as a reflection on the loneliness of the creator and the creation, *Frankenstein* remains a timeless reference point for bioethics, posing questions that continue to shock: where does progress end and responsibility begin?



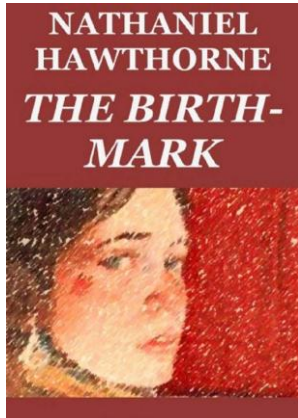
Source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Shelley%27s_Frankenstein_%28film%29

1843 — The Birthmark



Creator: **Nathaniel Hawthorne**



Nathaniel Hawthorne tells the story of scientist Aylmer, who, carried away by his belief in the omnipotence of science, attempts to remove a small blemish from the face of his wife Georgiana – the only "flaw" in her otherwise perfect beauty. His experiment, which becomes a symbol of human obsession with perfection, ultimately leads to her death. Through this tragic story, Hawthorne explores the limits of scientific intervention in nature, the price of the arrogance of knowledge, and the moral conflict between love and control. The work serves as a warning against man's ambition to transcend natural limits and is one of the first literary texts to raise bioethical questions about the pursuit of perfection and the responsibility of the scientist.

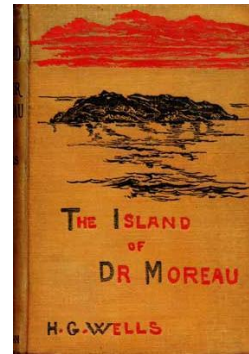
Source: <https://www.gradesaver.com/the-birth-mark/study-guide/bibliography>

1896 — The Island of Dr. Moreau



Creator: **H. G. Wells**

A dark allegory about the limits of science and ethics. A shipwrecked man arrives on an isolated island, where the eccentric scientist Dr. Moreau conducts horrific experiments on animals, transforming them into humanoid beings through painful procedures. The work explores issues of animal experimentation, genetic modification, and the fundamental distinction between humans and animals. Wells, with a foresight that anticipates today's bioethical dilemmas, denounces the cold scientific arrogance that ignores pain and responsibility towards life. Moreau's island becomes a symbol of human hubris: a place where science is stripped of its ethics and reveals the monster that is born when knowledge operates without consciousness.

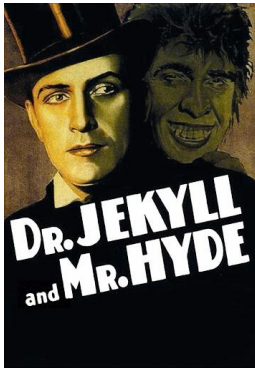


Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Island_of_Doctor_Moreau

1897 — Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde



Creator: **Robert Louis Stevenson**



Robert Louis Stevenson tells the story of a doctor who, through a scientific experiment, attempts to separate the "dark" and "good" sides of human nature, creating his terrifying alter ego, Mr. Hyde. Beyond being a psychological allegory, the work is a profound moral study of the limits of science and human identity. It raises the question of whether science can control the forces it unleashes and whether humans have the moral capacity to manage the knowledge they acquire. Stevenson, foreshadowing the dilemmas of biomedicine and psychopharmacology, presents a dark image of the scientist who experiments with human nature, undermining his own limits. The work serves as a timeless warning about the responsibility that accompanies every form of scientific and ethical discovery.

Source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adaptations_of_Strange_Case_of_Dr._Jekyll_and_Mr._Hyde

1901 — Les Avariés (Damaged Goods)



Creator: **Eugène Brieux**



Les Avariés (1901) by Eugène Brieux was one of the most groundbreaking plays of the early 20th century, provoking strong reactions due to its daring subject matter. Brieux tells the story of a young man who, shortly before his wedding, discovers that he has syphilis—a disease that at the time was accompanied by social stigma and silence. The play examines issues of medical honesty, responsibility towards one's partner and public health, while denouncing the concealment of the disease as a form of social hypocrisy. Through his realism and didacticism, Brieux seeks to awaken the conscience of the audience, transforming theater into a means of social education. Les Avariés is now considered a pioneering work of social bioethics, as it introduced issues of prevention, responsibility, and the right to information into public discourse long before they acquired a medical or legal framework.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les_Avari%C3%A9s

1906 — The Doctor's Dilemma



Creator: **George Bernard Shaw**

George Bernard Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906) is one of the first plays to directly address issues of medical ethics and social responsibility. Shaw, with his characteristic spirit of satire and dialogue, tells the story of a doctor who discovers a cure for tuberculosis but has a limited number of doses available. Faced

with the dilemma of which patient to save—a talented but unethical artist or a humble colleague—the hero becomes a symbol of the conflict between professional judgment, personal interest, and social ethics. Shaw uses comedy of ideas to expose the class and economic inequalities of the medical system, foreshadowing contemporary debates about the distribution of health resources and the relationship between medical ethics and social justice. With sharpness and humanity, the play shows that the treatment of disease is never independent of the moral disease of society.

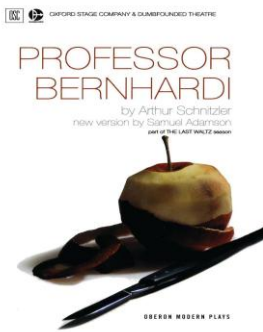


Source: <https://ontariostage.com/the-doctors-dilemma-at-shaw/>

1912 — Professor Bernhardi



Creator: **Arthur Schnitzler**



Arthur Schnitzler's *Professor Bernhardi* (1912), a doctor and writer, tells the story of a Jewish professor of medicine who refuses to allow a priest to give confession to a dying patient so that she can die in peace. His action causes a political and social scandal, revealing the tensions between science, religion, and prejudice. Through his trial, Schnitzler highlights the limits of medical responsibility, the patient's right to the truth, and the conflict between personal conscience and social morality. The play, timelessly relevant, sheds light on the roots of the bioethical dilemmas that continue to preoccupy medicine and philosophy today.

Source: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/professor-bernhardi-9781840025521/>

1925 — The Heart of a Dog



Creator: **Mikhail Bulgakov**

The Heart of a Dog (1925) by Mikhail Bulgakov is a satirical novella—and later a play—that incisively dissects the boundaries of science and human ethics. In 1920s Moscow, Professor Preobrazhensky conducts a transplant experiment, implanting a human pituitary gland and testicles into a dog. The result is a creature that takes on human form but



also the worst characteristics of human nature—aggression, arrogance, and social vulgarity. Through satire, Bulgakov comments not only on the ethics of scientific intervention in nature, but also on the Soviet obsession with the "new man." The work raises timeless bioethical questions: Can science transform man without altering his essence? Where does progress end and hubris begin? In this way, The Heart of a Dog becomes a prophetic commentary on the scientist's responsibility towards his creation and society.

Source: <https://polishposter.com/3962-heart-of-a-dog-bulgakov-polish-poster.html>

1963 — Αθώα ή ένοχη (Innocent or Guilty) (Greece)

Creator: **Nestor Matsas**



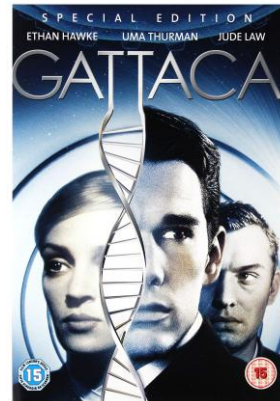
Innocent or Guilty (1963), written and directed by Nestor Matsas, is one of the first Greek films to address the bioethical issue of euthanasia. The film tells the story of a doctor and a family who are faced with the dilemma of whether to help a man die in order to relieve him from the unbearable pain of an incurable disease. The narrative, with its intense dramatic elements, examines the conflict between medical responsibility, human compassion, and the social prejudices of an era that considered the issue taboo. Matsas dares to address the issue with humanity and sensitivity, highlighting the need for dialogue about the limits of life and human dignity in the face of death. Although filmed in a conservative society, the work remains relevant today for the way it connects the moral and emotional weight of medical practice.

Source: <https://www.filmmy.gr/movies-database/guilty-or-innocent-1963/>

1997 — Gattaca

Creator: **Andrew Niccol**

The film is set in a future society where genetic engineering determines each person's social status and potential. Genetically "perfect" citizens enjoy privileges, while those who are naturally born—the so-called "invalids"—are treated as inferior. The hero, Vincent, tries to overcome his fate by using the identity of a genetically superior individual to fulfill his dream of traveling into space. The film serves as a profound bioethical allegory about freedom, the value of human will, and the dangers of a society that substitutes ethics with genetic purity and eugenics. Niccol warns of the possible mutation of scientific progress into a new form of eugenics, posing the timeless question: who defines what it means to be "human"?



Source: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Gattaca-Special-DVD-Ethan-Hawke/dp/B0011FTQ8A>

2004 — Mar adentro (The Sea Inside)

Creator: **Alejandro Amenábar**



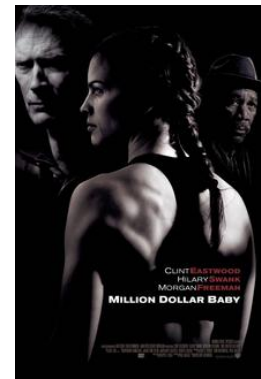
The film is based on the true story of Spanish sailor Ramón Sampedro, who lived quadriplegic for almost thirty years and fought legally for the right to die with dignity. Through Sampedro's narrative, the film focuses on the bioethical dilemma of euthanasia and the concept of personal autonomy. Amenábar poetically captures the conflict between the love of life and the desire for freedom from pain, avoiding didacticism and choosing emotional truth. Mar adentro transcends the legal and religious dimensions of the issue, transforming the protagonist's request into a philosophical reflection on the relationship between body and spirit, life and dignity. It is one of the most human and profound cinematic approaches to the right to choose death.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sea_Inside

2004 — Million Dollar Baby

Creator: **Clint Eastwood**

The story of boxer Maggie Fitzgerald becomes a powerful exploration of human dignity and the ethics of ending life. When Maggie is seriously injured and left paralyzed, she asks her coach and mentor to help her die. Eastwood uses their relationship to examine the deeper dilemmas surrounding euthanasia, autonomy, and the limits of love. The film offers no easy answers; instead, it confronts the viewer with the question of whether preserving life is always superior to ending suffering. Through its realistic simplicity and moral complexity, Million Dollar Baby emerges as one of the most moving cinematic essays on dignity, free will, and bioethical responsibility.



Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Million Dollar Baby](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Million_Dollar_Baby)

2009 — Causa Mortis

Creator: **Jacob M. Appel**

CAUSA MORTIS
OR
THE MEDICAL STUDENT

By
Jacob M. Appel

A black comedy set in a hospital that reveals, with biting humor and social insight, the pathologies of the modern medical system. A woman discovers that surgeons have left a watch inside her skull, triggering an absurd domino effect of responsibility, bureaucracy, and amorality. Appel, himself a doctor and bioethicist, uses exaggeration and satire to comment on the conflict between scientific arrogance, professional ethics, and human sensitivity. The play sheds light on the bureaucratic logic that often replaces medical responsibility with legal self-protection, reminding us that negligence and alienation can be just as deadly as the disease itself. Through laughter and irony, *Causa Mortis* highlights the need for a medical profession that remembers that people are at its core.

Source: <https://jacobmappel.com/causa-mortis-or-the-medical-student-free-play/>

2009 — My Sister's Keeper

Creator: **Nick Cassavetes**

A family faces a profound bioethical dilemma. The parents conceive a daughter through genetic selection so that she can be an organ donor for her seriously ill sister (savior sibling). However, as the child grows up, she legally claims the right to decide about her own body. The film explores the concept of "informed consent," parental responsibility, the limits of medical intervention, and the moral burden of love that turns into obligation. With sensitivity and dramatic tension, the film sheds light on the question of whether the end—saving a life—can ever justify the means, revealing the delicate balance between biotechnology, freedom, and human dignity.



Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Sister%27s_Keeper_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Sister%27s_Keeper_(film))

2010 — Never Let Me Go

Creator: **Mark Romanek**



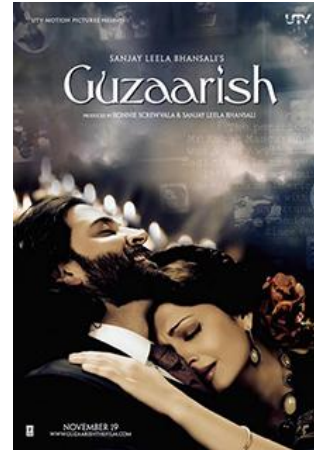
The story is set in a seemingly idyllic England, where children grow up in a boarding school without knowing that they are destined to become organ donors. When they discover the truth, they are confronted with their inevitable fate and the realization that their lives have been planned by others. The film is an allegory for the dehumanization of science and the commodification of the body, raising questions about the limits of medical progress, consent, and the ethics of cloning. Through its melancholic atmosphere and suggestive interpretations, *Never Let Me Go* becomes a deeply existential study of love, mortality, and every person's right to determine their own destiny.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Never_Let_Me_Go_\(2010_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Never_Let_Me_Go_(2010_film))

2010 — Guzaarish

Creator: **Sanjay Leela Bhansali**

The film tells the story of Ethan Mascarenhas, a former magician who, following an accident, is left quadriplegic and bedridden for fourteen years. Despite his physical immobility, he continues to inspire others through radio broadcasts, until he decides to legally seek the right to euthanasia. The film sensitively explores the dilemma between the value of life and the right to choose its end, highlighting issues of autonomy, dignity, and social prejudice against disability. With Bhansali's aesthetic and Hrithik Roshan's moving performance, the film transcends melodrama and evolves into a reflection on what it means to live "fully" when your body betrays you — and whether choosing death can ever be considered an act of freedom.

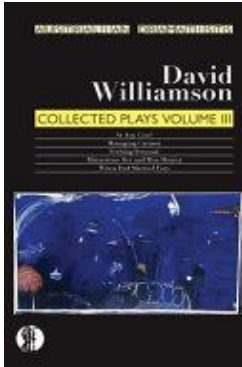


Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guzaarish_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guzaarish_(film))

2011 — At Any Cost?



Creator: **David Williamson & Mohamed Khadra**



At Any Cost? (2011), written by David Williamson in collaboration with nephrologist Mohamed Khadra, is a theatrical drama that explores with realism and sensitivity the dilemmas surrounding euthanasia and medical responsibility. Through the story of a doctor faced with a patient's desire to end his life, the play depicts the conflict between professional ethics, personal compassion, and the legal framework that defines the limits of medical intervention. Williamson, known for his social acumen, focuses on the question of whether preserving life is always the highest duty or whether respect for free will can be an act of medical humanity. The play highlights the delicate balance between science and conscience, making it one of the most important theatrical approaches to bioethics in the 21st century.

Source:

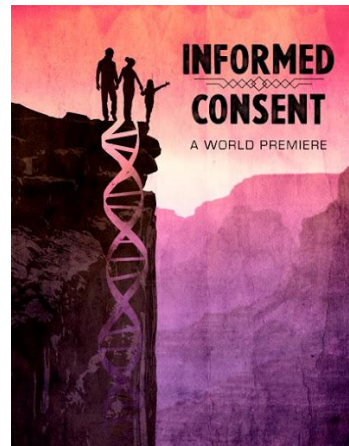
https://books.google.gr/books/about/Collected_Plays.html?id=vUa9MgEACAAJ&redir_esc=y

2014 — Informed Consent



Creator: **Deborah Zoe Laufer**

This is a play inspired by the real case of the Havasupai tribe in the United States, where DNA samples were used without the consent of the donors for purposes beyond the original research. Laufer, with a combination of scientific realism and dramatic tension, examines the conflict between scientific progress and respect for cultural identity. At the center is a geneticist who believes deeply in knowledge but is called upon to confront the ethical limits of research when her discovery threatens to destroy the lives of people she considered mere "samples." The play highlights the concepts of informed consent, ownership of genetic material, and the scientist's responsibility for the cultural and personal implications of research. With incisive writing, *Informed Consent* shows that scientific truth is never neutral when it involves human lives.

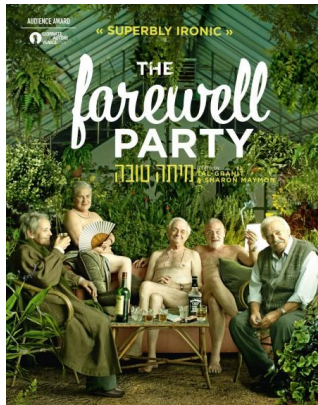


Source: <http://www.deborahzolafer.com/informed-consent.html>

2014 — The Farewell Party (Mita Tova)



Creators: **Tal Granit & Sharon Maymon**



The Farewell Party (2014), directed by Tal Granit and Sharon Maymon, is an Israeli film that combines humor with emotion to address a profound bioethical issue: euthanasia. In a nursing home in Jerusalem, a group of elderly friends build a makeshift "death machine" to help a fellow resident die with dignity. Their act, initially motivated by compassion, leads to unexpected moral and emotional consequences, raising the question of who has the right to decide on life and death. Without moralizing, the film tenderly and humanely explores the dilemma between compassion and responsibility, love and loss.

Through laughter and sadness, The Farewell Party reminds us that bioethics is not an abstract philosophy, but an everyday act of humanity in the face of another's pain and dignity.

Source: <https://movieretrospect.blogspot.com/2015/12/the-farewell-party-2014-invigorating.html>

2016 — Morbid Anatomy [Performance]

Creator: **Amy Chan**

Morbid Anatomy (2016) is a post-dramatic performance that combines theater, contemporary dance, and installation to explore the relationship between the human body, science, and the ethics of observation. Created as an educational project in a pathology laboratory, the work uses real medical objects, light, sound, and movement to confront the audience with the body not as an object of study but as a carrier of memory



and vulnerability. Morbid Anatomy brings to the fore the concept of "embodied knowledge," challenging science's cold detachment from human experience. Through artistic means, it comments on the bioethical dimension of medical education, the role of aesthetics in understanding mortality, and the need to reunite scientific practice with emotional sensitivity. This is a rare, dialogical encounter between art and bioethics, where science is observed through the lens of humanity.

Photo Credit: Fangönei (All rights reserved)

Source: <https://www.amychan-light.com/morbid-anatomy-2016#1>

2019 — The Phlebotomist



Creator: **Ella Road**



It is a contemporary dystopian work that combines science fiction with social satire, raising key bioethical questions. In a society where every citizen is evaluated based on a "genetic health index," value and life opportunities are determined by genes. The Blood Collector, who collects blood samples, is faced with a conflict between her professional responsibility and her moral conscience when love and truth clash with the biotechnological system she serves. The play highlights the dangers of a society that turns genetic information into a tool of exclusion and raises the question of whether science, stripped of humanistic values, can function fairly. With incisive writing and thriller-like pacing, Road connects bioethics with contemporary social inequality and the right to dignity.

Source [photo taken by the Greek version of the play staged at Anesis Theatron, Athens, Greece]: <https://www.marieclaire.gr/art-lifestyle/i-emoliptria-mia-parastasi-gia-ena-distopiko-mellon-pou-isos-ine-idi-edo/>

2019 — The Doctor



Creator: **Robert Icke (after Schnitzler)**

The Doctor (2019), written and directed by Robert Icke, is a contemporary adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's classic play Professor Bernhardi (1912) and transports the action to a contemporary setting, highlighting the multi-layered conflicts between medical ethics, religion, identity, and public judgment. The central character, Dr. Ruth Wolf, refuses to allow



a priest to enter the room of a dying patient, triggering a chain reaction that escalates into social and online "lynching." Icke examines the erosion of public discourse, the fluidity of truth, and the loss of moral complexity in an age of absolute identities. The play redefines Schnitzler's original bioethical question—how the doctor balances duty, loyalty, and patient autonomy—within the context of contemporary media society and digital ethics. With incisive writing and theatrical daring, The Doctor becomes one of the most important examples of how theater can renew the dialogue around bioethics in the 21st century.

Source: <https://almeida.co.uk/whats-on/the-doctor/>

2019 — The Colours



Creator: **Harriet Madeley / Crowded Room**

This is a verbatim work based on real interviews with terminally ill patients and healthcare professionals. Madeley presents, without fictional interventions, the everyday reality of palliative care: pain, dignity, acceptance of death. The work raises



questions about patient autonomy, the right to choose care, and how the healthcare system can respect personal life narratives. The bioethical dimension is highlighted in the conflict between medical protocols and the uniqueness of each patient.

**"It would be abnormal if someone didn't die.
You know, that would be very strange.
We'd pay a lot of attention, I think, if that happened."**

Source: <https://www.crowdedroom.org.uk/the-colours.html>

**Thank you for reading,
watching and
supporting Art...**