

Three Colors: White

Three Colors: White ([French](#): *Trois Couleurs: Blanc*, [Polish](#): *Trzy kolory. Biały*) is a 1994 Polish-film co-written, produced, and directed by [Krzysztof Kieślowski](#). *White* is the second in [The Three Colors Trilogy](#), themed on the [French Revolutionary ideals](#), following [Blue](#) and preceding [Red](#).

Starting in [Paris](#), the film depicts Karol Karol, a shy man who, after being left by his wife in humiliating circumstances, loses his money, his residency, and his friends. As a deeply ashamed beggar in [Warsaw](#), Karol begins his effort to restore equality to his life through [revenge](#).

Plot

This film illustrates the second theme of the *Three Colors* trilogy, [equality](#), through the two desires of the [protagonist](#) Karol Karol: improving his station in life, and revenge. In contrast to the introspective, melancholy, and eventually hopeful stories of *Blue* and *Red*, *White* is a [black comedy](#).

After opening with a brief, seemingly irrelevant scene of a suitcase on an airport carousel, the story quickly focuses on a [Paris divorce](#) court where Karol Karol ([Zbigniew Zamachowski](#)) is pleading with the judge — the same legal proceedings that [Juliette Binoche](#)'s character briefly stumbled upon in *Blue*. The immigrant Karol, despite his difficulty in understanding [French](#), is made to understand that his wife Dominique ([Julie Delpy](#)) does not love him. The grounds for divorce are humiliating: Karol was unable to [consummate](#) the marriage. Along with his wife, he loses his means of support (a [beauty salon](#) they jointly owned), his legal residency in France, and the rest of his cash in a series of mishaps, and is soon a beggar. He only retains a 2 [Franc](#) coin that he got as change from the phone while trying to speak with his now ex-wife.

In a [Paris Métro](#) station, performing songs for spare change, Karol meets and is befriended by another Pole, Mikołaj ([Janusz Gajos](#)). While Karol has lost his wife and his property, Mikołaj is married and successful, he offers Karol a job consisting of killing someone who wants to be dead but does not have enough courage to do it himself. Through a hazardous scheme, Mikołaj helps him return to Poland hidden in the suitcase shown at the beginning of the film, which is later stolen by employees at the airport. He returns to working as a [hairdresser](#) with his brother ([Jerzy Stuhr](#)).
[\[footnote 1\]](#)

Karol takes a job as a bodyguard in a seemingly innocent cash exchange office. Mikołaj meets Karol in a [Warsaw Metro](#) tunnel for the execution of the "suicide", it turns out to be that Mikołaj is the intended victim and asks Karol to kill him. Karol shoots a [blank](#) into Mikołaj's chest and asks him if he really wants to go through with it as the next bullet is real. Mikołaj refuses and is able to feel alive again. Using his position as a deceptively foolish bodyguard, Karol spies on his bosses and discovers their scheme to purchase different pieces of land that they knew were going to be targeted by big companies for development and [resell for large profits](#). Karol beats them to it, and then tells his ex-bosses that if they kill him all his [estate](#) shall go to the [Church](#), and they are therefore forced to purchase all the land from him. With the money he gained from this scheme and with the payment from Mikołaj, the two go into business (of a vaguely defined but possibly illegal nature) together. Karol becomes ruthlessly ambitious, focusing his energies on money-making schemes while learning French and brooding over his wife's abandonment. He uses his new financial influence in a world where, as several characters observe, "you can buy anything" to execute a complex scheme to first win back Dominique, and then destroy her life by faking his own death after which she is imprisoned for his 'murder'. The final image of the film shows Karol staring at Dominique through the window of her prison cell, while crying.

Production

The climax of the film was shot months after the rest of the film, and was intended to soften Dominique's image; Kieślowski has said that he was dissatisfied with the ending shot previously and wanted her to seem less of a monster.

Soundtrack

Main article: [Three Colors: White \(Soundtrack\)](#)

Analysis

The film has a political subtext, in which Karol's impotence and financial helplessness in France, and subsequent rise as a somewhat shady [capitalist](#), mirror the attempts of Poland to advance from its disadvantaged position within Europe. Though Kieślowski had cheered the downfall of Poland's former [communist](#) regime, in later life he expressed a nearly equal distaste for the [free-market](#) adjustments that followed, believing that opportunities for real equality had been passed up in the pursuit of money and European prestige.^{[*[citation needed](#)*]}

Like *Blue*, the film's cinematography makes heavy use of the title colour: the sky is almost always white, and a scene in Poland is filmed in a white snowscape. An explosion of white is also the colour of the long-awaited orgasm. As with the rest of the *Three Colors* trilogy, *White* contains numerous images that at first appear unconnected but are revealed to be flashbacks, flash-forwards, or references to other films in the trilogy. In the opening scene in the courthouse, [Juliette Binoche](#), playing Julie from *Blue*, briefly enters the courtroom by accident, as she had been seen doing in the earlier film.

A symbol common to the three films is that of an underlying link or thing that keeps the protagonist linked to his/her past, in the case of *White* the items that link Karol to his past are a 2 Fr. coin and a plaster [bust](#) that he stole from an antique store in Paris. The first inexplicably sticks to his hand when he tries to throw it away, and he keeps it until he buries it with "his" corpse. In the case of [Red](#) the judge never closes or locks his doors and his [fountain pen](#), which stops working at a crucial point in the story. In the case of [Blue](#) it is a lamp decoration of blue beads and a recurring image of people falling while bungee jumping or sky diving.

A recurring image related to the spirit of the film is that of elderly people recycling bottles; in *Three Colors: White*, an old man in Paris is trying to recycle a bottle but cannot reach the container and Karol looks at him with a sinister grin on his face (in the spirit of equality). In *Three Colors: Blue*, an old woman in Paris is recycling bottles and Julie does not notice her (in the spirit of freedom); in *Three Colors: Red* an old woman cannot reach the hole of the container and Valentine helps her (in the spirit of solidarity).

It has been interpreted as an anti-comedy, in parallel with *Blue* being an anti-tragedy and *Red* being an anti-romance.

Reception

Three Colors: White was met with critical acclaim by film critics, but is considered by many to be the weakest film of the trilogy. It holds a 90% rating on [Rotten Tomatoes](#), while the first and third films hold 100% ratings.

Awards

- "Silver Bear" Award for *Best Director* at the [Berlin International Film Festival](#)

wikipedia

Movie review

From Time Out Film Guide

After the visual sheen and spiritual uplift of *Blue*, part two of Kieslowski's trilogy may at first seem raw, even slight. The story, hung loosely round notions of political and personal equality, concerns the despair and desire for revenge felt by Polish hairdresser Karol (Zamachowski) when his French wife Dominique (Delpy) divorces him after six months of unconsummated marriage in Paris. Initially, having lost everything, he has no idea what to do with his life. But, after a macabre transaction with fellow expatriate Mikolaj (Gajos) enables him to return to Poland, Karol starts afresh and directs his newly developed cunning to re-igniting Dominique's love. A droll black comedy that takes a scalpel to the impoverished ethics of the new money-obsessed Poland, and to the selfish impulses tied up with our desires for a balanced sexual relationship, *White* is at times reminiscent of the satire of the last episode of the *Dekalog*. It's often cruel, of course, and cool as an ice-pick, but it's still endowed with enough unsentimental humanity to end with a touching, lyrical admission of the power of love. Essential viewing.