

THE INDEPENDENT

JANE SHILLING TELEVISION REVIEW



IN MANY ways, Manon Lescaut is the most psychologically interesting of all fictional female archetypes. Far less self-destructive than, say, Emma Bovary or Anna Karenina, she is someone in whom sentiment and amorality are so finely balanced that neither is quite able to overcome the other.

Manon adores her lover, Des Grieux, but he is poor. And as clearly as she understands that she loves him, she knows that she cannot live with a poor man. So she takes up with a richer one. To her it seems perfectly logical. To everyone else, it is perfectly outrageous.

When one thinks of Manon, it is of her surrounded with all the pretty trappings of early 18th-century immorality, so it comes as a bit of a shock to find her picking her way through a seedy trailer park attached to a funfair on the Welsh coast. But that is where she was to be found last night, in the person of Kelly, heroine – or rather anti-heroine – of the first of a BBC Wales three-parter, *Tales from Pleasure Beach* (BBC2).

Kelly, a plump, voluptuous, sulky little ex-jailbird, played to perfection by Joanna Griffiths, had just been released from prison, and had come to find her boyfriend, Drew, who, when not busy surfing, worked on the dodgems for Alan, a quietly spoken, rather avuncular old figure who seemed to have a bit of soft spot for the lovers.

One's first impression of Kelly – that she looked a right little handful – proved exact. Hardly had she torn Drew's clothes off and ravished him on the floor of their caravan (sending small objects flying from every horizontal surface

as she did so), than she started having a bit of a moan.

"Couldn't you have found anywhere smaller, then, Drew?" she said, pouting at her beloved's shipshape, if compact, living quarters. Drew, who was a sweet boy, and clearly besotted with his thunderous little butterball of undiluted sex appeal, reminded Kelly that money was tight. Though he had, he added, been saving. He'd got more than £100 stashed away.

At this, Kelly's sharp little eyes began to glisten. The drama had scarcely begun, but so concentrated were the character portrayals of Griffiths and Mark Letheren, who played Drew, that already you could read the coming tragedy, and something of the shape it would take.

It proved, of course, a real heartbreaker: greed, lust, betrayal, nastiness of every kind – but lodged right at the bottom of it all, a tiny speck of something uncorrupted. Kelly's love, like Manon's, was of a hopelessly compromised kind, but it was real, in its way.

Tales from Pleasure Beach is a project drawing on the skills of new writers, and it showed at times. There was a certain amount of creaking from the plot devices of Roger Williams's script, and moments when the irony was applied with too generous a hand. These slight drawbacks, though, were balanced by a freshness and energy which was echoed not just in the acting of all three principals, but in Edmund Coulthard's direction and Tim Palmer's ravishing, intelligent photography.

Robert Hanks is away