"I 'Ain't Seein' the Why: Excess and Greed in Serenity."

In “Shindig,” the crew of Serenity find themselves once again in pursuit of a job, this time on Persephone, and more specifically, in a posh, elegant ball, where they are clearly out of place (Kaylee is particularly humiliated, though she quickly makes friends). And although the episode might be read in a number of ways thanks to its layered themes, one scene in particular caught my interest, as I tend to see literature from a Marxist perspective. Mal, surveying his surroundings, notices an over the top, floating chandelier. He says, “I see how they did it. I just ain’t seein’ the why.” This image, together with Mal’s comment, reveals the show’s critique of excess and greed.

That Mal even notices the chandelier, or says anything about it, is telling. He is there to do a job. He is usually focused on the mission, yet he (somewhat uncharacteristically) stops to examine this symbol of excess. He is clearly interested in the chandelier, but not for the reasons intended. He appears bothered by its very existence and has to stop and wonder why anybody would need such extravagance. Of course, the chandelier is a microcosm of the whole ball, and really, of upper class society in general.

The inclusion of this image, and of Mal’s dialogue serves to attack greed and to further solidify the our impulse to take the side of the “losers” in the show. We see how the rich on Persephone live, and more importantly, how they behave. Their snobbery is symbolized by the chandelier, and if we need further proof of their meaness, we are shown how they taunt Kaylee, the worker who dares step out of that role. When we consider all of this, “civilization” and refined society seem less attractive, indeed stuffy and insufferable.

This episode, and the chandelier scene in particular, invites in the viewer a feeling of solidarity with the lower classes. The repulsive behavior of the ball’s attendants, the excess exhibited in the decorations, and the meaness of their character, works to not only reveal social
inequalities and injustices but to push the reader further into relating and siding with our unorthodox heroes, the rebel (I will later argue the anarchist) Mal and his crew.