

Guitars, Drinks, and Eyebrows - FLCL Symbols With Deeper Meanings

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FLCL was created in 2000 by Kazuya Tsurumaki and writer Yoji Enokido. There are six 25-minute episodes, during which viewers are pulled through many interesting events. "Episode one, and a robot sprouts from a lump on a boy's forehead. I certainly did not see that coming" (Tamplin 304). Director Tsurumaki was quoted in an interview, "I'd like you to think of FLCL as imagination being made physical and tangible, just as it is for me when I take whatever is in my head and draw it." (Surkult). Furi Kuri, or Foolsy Cooly, keeps its audience on its toes waiting for the next bizarre turn of events. However, if the viewer pushes past the first layer – which can at first be confusing – they can reach the heart of this anime. This series is, quite simply, a coming of age story. Our protagonist Naota struggles with maturity throughout the duration of the piece, and finally settles by the completion of the last episode. The characters Naota encounters – and in some cases creates – help shape who he will become. Many characters and objects within FLCL have a much deeper meaning than face value that all relate to maturity.

Starting with the objects featured and their associated themes and symbolism:

The guitars featured within FLCL each symbolize a certain maturity. Haruku and her guitar, a blue Rickenbacker left-handed bass, symbolizes the stage of adolescence. She uses her bass to, "smash Naota and, with that, starts his changing" (Gaigaia). She is literally the force of puberty colliding with Naota's childhood, and starts him on his adventure towards maturity. Haruku, "brought a whole new universe for him, of pleasure and pain" (Gaigaia), just like puberty. Also, there is the relation to the left-handedness, and how the left is associated with recklessness and rebellion – yet another reference to puberty. Naota's guitar is a white V guitar; "Its color is white and means peace, purity, virginity and childhood" (Gaigaia). It is the only actual guitar (the rest are basses) in FLCL, showing that Naota is the protagonist just as in a band the guitar would have the melody. He is a child that tries to pretend he is more mature than he is, as often pointed out by Haruku. The great bass of Atomsk is red, "war, violence, power, royalty and adulthood" (Gaigaia). Atomsk and his guitar is what Haruku (adolescence) desires – adulthood. Haruku wants Atomsk's power, but in the end it is Naota who experiences it momentarily. Near the end of the last episode of *FLCL*, the last guitar appears – a combination of Atomsk's bass and Naota's V guitar – symbolizing the struggle between life stages. Amarao's guitar (bass) is small and black, "the color of death, infertility, lies, lost hopes" (Gaigaia). Amarao is physically a man, but mentally less mature than Naota. He puts up a front, saying he has done many grown-up things like taxes, and wears ostentatious eyebrows to cover his weakness. "Although he talks about manhood, adulthood, maturity, he acts like a child, a narcissist and a egotistical baby" (Gaigaia). His bass is a reflection of this; he never really grew up, so his guitar is diminished in size in comparison to Naota's. Each guitar or bass has a distinct relation to maturity.

Throughout the series, Naota comments on his opinion towards drinks. He prefers the sweet drink over the sour drink. Mimi enjoys the sour drink more; she is more mature than he is. Later on he tries the sour drink, a fact that Eri comments on – she thinks Mimi has influenced him, since Mimi enjoys the sour ones. "The fact that Naota still didn't like sour drinks at the end means that he is still a child, as Haruku said" (Gaigaia). When he denies the sour drink, he is denying growing up, preferring to stick with the sweetness of childhood he is familiar with.

There is also the Medical Mechanica – the giant iron that is eventually accompanied by a giant robot hand. The iron, "stands for the force that tries to hold on everyone and everything. Its smoke don't let anyone goes beyond. Its robots stop anyone that tries to change" (Gaigaia). Naota eventually stops this when he bonds with Atomsk (change, maturity) to pull the iron off.

One can also relate maturity and adulthood to space – "The Satellite falling to the earth in the 4th episode is a part of adulthood hitting Naota's childhood. Haruku flying at the end means that she is going to the adulthood. Atomsk, and all aliens, means 'adults' or 'the path to the adulthood'" (Gaigaia).

Now for characters and their associated meanings and themes:

Quite simply, "Amarao represents Naoto's idealization of adulthood, while Naoto sees Canti as stupid. Over the course of the show, Naoto realises that Amarao is a fake [...] and that Canti is the real mature one that doesn't need to be manly to prove he is mature" (Monkey J. Luffy). Amarao even puts his eyebrows, his front of masculinity and maturity, on Naota's forehead to stop Haruku (puberty) from accessing his brain portal. He is a future version of Naota showing what will happen if he does not mature.

Canti is a very important part of this anime – he is *not* just some robot that comes out of Naota's head! Canti is Naota's brother, Tasuku, who Naota looks up to and aspires to be. He doesn't let Haruku sleep in Tasuku's bunk because it is his. He doesn't want to "swing the bat" - in a series rife with sexual metaphors and symbolism, this example stands out and viewers can interpret its relation to maturity. Tesuku is in America for the sole purpose to play baseball; that is what his brother is good at. So, if Naota never swings the bat, he can't disprove that he will never be as proficient as him. Naota emulates his brother by sticking around Mimi, Tesuku's (ex)-girlfriend. Mimi loved Naota's brother, just as she loves 'Lord Canti', "her god, her savior, her master and lord" (Gaigaia). Mimi can't let Tesuku go, and names everything after him. "His brother is exactly what he want to become, the perfection for him" (Gaigaia). Canti, in relation, is Tesuku, "and what Naota wants to become. Or, maybe, he is a reminder to Naota of what his brother is" (Gaigaia).

"In *mecha*-like works such as Gainax's idiosyncratic *Furi Kuri*, which includes a robot growing out of the protagonist's head, the effect is more surreal than sci-fi" (Napier XV). In fact, "We can consider the whole world of FLCL as a physical world or as a metaphor for a adolescent head" (Gaigaia).

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