The cover of a novel can make or break that novel. The cover can sometimes be what is standing between the reader and the story. From this, it is evident of the importance of a good cover. When I purchased The Starship and the Canoe on eBay, I had no idea I was purchasing an edition that was printed in 1979. The novel came, yellowed and water stained, looking to be the original printing of the book, but in all actuality, it is the fourth edition ever printed. I never paid much attention to the cover until I got to UMBC and realized everyone had a new edition with a very different cover. The differences between the two covers are so obvious and say so much about how things were and how they are now in the world of publishing.

While the older cover may at first glance appear simple, the content is rather sophisticated. The novel’s cover consists of two quotes, a small image, the title and author. The image only takes up a small portion of the cover, but this 2” by 2.5” image is full of imagery and symbolism. The image is a tree with a starship (representing Freeman) launching out through the top branches, while a canoe (representing George) rests comfortably within its leaves. It is important to note that the leaves are shaped like stars. This is most noticeable at the top of the tree where the starship is exiting. Another important aspect is the unique coloration of the leaves. The very top consists of blue stars. The next section consists of orange, yellow, and brown leaves. The following section is green, and the very bottom is a dark blue shade.

The different colored layers are so important to the image. The brown layer is particularly interesting. In the starship’s case, this brown layer can represent a number of things. For example, since Freeman’s project uses nuclear bombs to launch, the brown leaves could represent possible effects from such a method to enter space. The leaves could also be taken more figuratively. To Freeman, space is where real exploration is. To him, earth is dead for exploration for future life just as brown leaves are generally dead leaves. In the case of the canoe, the canoe blends in with the brown leaves. The brown canoe looks very natural next to the brown leaves, just as George is very natural in Earth’s environment.

The tree itself represents a number of things. The way Freeman’s starship is above George’s canoe is symbolic of a family tree with father above son. The tree also represents Earth. Freeman’s starship is looking to leave the tree, while George’s canoe is still a part of it. A simpler interpretation of the tree with respect to the canoe is for quite a while George lived in a tree.

The text is another major factor on this cover. The title alone takes up half of the cover. What is not used by the title or image is filled with quotes about the novel. The two short phrases give some insight into what is to be expected to come in the novel.
The newer cover lacks the depth that the older edition has. The newer cover is consumed by the image that covers the entire front of the book. The image consists of a man canoeing on a lake while a spaceship with a nuclear blast launches out of the atmosphere...