My Personal Review:
Nathaniel Hawthorne supposedly felt such shame at this novella, written while he was a relatively young person, that he refused to acknowledge it in his lifetime, and even burned every copy of it that he could get his hands on. Bad move! The truth is Fanshawe is well worth reading. It is exciting, boldly told, and it has a sweetness to it that isn’t there in Hawthorne’s later writings, however masterful they might be. Also the story Fanshawe tells is one that clearly arises from the lingering influence the Romantics had on young Hawthorne. Even the book’s namesake and protagonist is a sort of fondly imagined stand-in for the bookish Hawthorne of his so recent school days. The setting for this straightforward Gothic adventure of kidnapping and rescue is the yet untamed American wilderness of the 1740s, which Hawthorne winsomely describes as a sort of vast, green, brooding cathedral of stone, water, sky, soil, air, and forest, filled with towering rocky hills and echoing mossy caves, free-flowing streams, and ancient trees. The countryside of his prose is a thing of stirring beauty, and his characters truly achieve a dimension few other writers would manage in a tale so brief. I was surprised at how much I enjoyed the experience of reading Fanshawe, and was also surprised at how nicely it stays in my memory. Hawthorne’s orphaned work is also one of his best, and I think it deserves five stars.