**The Language of the Fan**

The 17th and 18th Centuries were the heyday of the fan. It was an essential accessory for the ladies of the times. Fans were made in every medium: ivory, painted silk and paper, lace, even chicken skin. Women had fans for every occasion, painted or printed with picturesque landscapes and topical allusions.

A fan, due to its compact structure and frequent deployment due to uneven temperatures or even olfactory issues, served many purposes.  In some instances, a fan could be decorated with jewels much like a necklace, in others it could be a means to make a simple political statement.  Often fans were used as a form of expression to communicate unspoken sentiments across a room. The fan becomes an ideal instrument of communication in an age on which freedom of speech for women was absolutely restricted.

The “secret” language of fans is really a matter of understanding and interpreting body language and gestures.  Just like a skilled poker player learns a person’s “tells”, so can an astute observer interpret another’s use of the fan to discover underlying intent or emotion.

The main gestures and their respective meanings that together configured what it was known as “the language of the fan” were:

**1) THE FAN PLACED NEAR THE HEART:***"You have won my love."*

**2) HALF-OPENED FAN PRESSED TO THE LIPS*:****"You may kiss me."*

**3) HANDS CLASPED TOGETHER HOLDING AN OPEN FAN:***"Forgive me."*

**4) COVERING THE LEFT EAR WITH AN OPEN FAN:** *"Do not betray our secret."*

**5) HIDING THE EYES BEHIND AN OPEN FAN:** *"I love you."*

**6) DRAWING THE FAN ACCROSS THE EYES:***"I am sorry."*

**7) TOUCHING THE FINGER TO THE TIP OF THE FAN:***"I wish to speak with you."*

**8) LETTING THE FAN REST ON THE RIGHT CHEEK:***"Yes."*

**9) LETTING THE FAN REST ON THE LEFT CHEEK:***"No."*

**10) OPENING AND CLOSING THE FAN SEVERAL TIMES:***"You are cruel"*

**11) FANNING SLOWLY:***"I am married."*

**12) FANNING QUICKLY:***"I am engaged."*

**13) PUTTING THE FAN HANDLE TO THE LIPS:** *"Kiss me."*

**14) OPENING A FAN WIDE:***"Wait for me."*

**15) PLACING THE FAN BEHIND THE HEAD:***"Do not forget me"*

**16) FAN IN RIGHT HAND IN FRONT OF FACE:***"Follow me."*

**17) FAN HELD OVER LEFT EAR:***"I wish to get rid of you."*

**18) DRAWING THE FAN ACCROSS THE FOREHEAD:***"You have changed."*

**19) CARRYING THE OPEN FAN IN THE RIGHT HAND:***"You are too willing."*

**20) CARRYING THE OPEN FAN IN THE LEFT HAND:***"Come and talk to me."*

**21) DRAWING THE FAN THROUGH THE HAND:***"I hate you!"*

**22) DRAWING THE FAN ADROSS THE CHEEK:***"I love you!"*

**23) PRESENTING THE FAN SHUT:***"Do you love me?"*