New Age Men seem to be to feminism what Vanilla Ice is to rap music—an easily digestible something substituted for something challenging. This media-created male ideal implies that wealth and the questioning of gender roles are somehow linked. Involvement in the home is rather like a new hobby taken on, not a response to a demand.

Nevertheless, the evolution of this creature from the dank swamp of masculinity is not totally without its positive aspects, if we are to accept that the New Man is a symbolic embodiment of certain questionings. Just when you think you’ve worn off your English degree, out comes a sentence like that...). This supposedly New Man does not openly harass secretaries. He does not send pornography over the office fax. He perhaps knows one end of his baby from the other. And inevitably, proudly and publicly, he asserts his ability to bake bread.

Baking bread is so replete with notions of 1950s style motherhood that it was bound to be a hit with those who have taken up domesticity as a choice. For men, baking bread is not problematic. Pastry-cooks aside, it is not replete with problems of oppression or forced presence in a kitchen. Pregnancy and bare feet do not loom from the loaves as they burst over the top of the pan. Men are free to rise with the dough, with images of fecundity providing a pleasurable accompaniment to the magical yeast. Better still, excess testosterone can be expended in thumping into the nascent loaves, which beats taking it out on Constance.

"M looks so maternal in his apron, dusted with flour. Plus we save a lot of money in gym fees as his biceps get a good workout during kneading." That’s how one besotted woman of my acquaintance described her partner for life’s yeast-infested skill. But the truth of the matter is that breadmaking talent definitely rates high in the New Age Seduction Platform, so long as any hippie vestiges can be eliminated. Women, poor creatures that we are, feel pathetically grateful at any sign of domestic skill in men. And, as comments such as “nice tits luv” are fairly impossible as invitations to dalliance (as I assume they always were), it helps the Confused Sex to have a few accomplishments up their sleeves. One of which is to roll them up and get your fist stuck into a big trembling lump of dough. Images of masculinity are changing. Let us imagine Clint Eastwood, sans gun, in an apron saying “Bake My Way”. Real Men, it seems, have a bun in their own oven.

My bread recipe comes from Doris Brett’s Australian Bread Book. This is a great book, except for the appalling jokes throughout—such as “things you knead to know” as a chapter title. Not that I can talk. The author describes this bread as “like Australian Rules footballers’ because it’s a “high riser”. On the other hand, it is also “like Bo Derek” because it is “tasty, with a lot of body”. Obviously this bread is confused as to its sexuality, but I suggest you go right ahead and eat it anyway.

**Simple White Bread**

2 teaspoons (1 x 7g sachet) dried yeast
1.5 cups lukewarm water
2 teaspoons sugar
4 teaspoons salt
4 cups white flour
1 egg yolk to glaze
sesame seeds for topping

Quantity: 1 large loaf, or 12 small rolls

Dissolve the yeast in 1/4 cup of lukewarm water with 1/4 teaspoon of sugar. Allow to stand 5-10 mins, until frothy. Meanwhile, in a large bowl mix 3 cups flour, salt and remaining sugar. Add frothy yeast mixture and remaining water. Slowly add the last cup of flour until the mixture is stiff enough to form a dough.

Remove the dough from the bowl and knead for 15 mins, until smooth and elastic. Brush dough lightly with oil, cover it loosely with plastic or a damp tea towel, and allow it to stand double in volume. When dough has risen, punch it down and knead it again briefly. Shape into rolls or a loaf. Brush lightly with oil and allow it/them to double again, covered as before. When risen, brush with egg yolk, sprinkle with seeds and bake in preheated 200C degree oven for about 15 mins or until baked through (longer for the loaf).

Personally, I have never had much luck making bread, which is due either to an unconscious rebellion against patriarchal oppression or laziness. Homemade bread makes a lot of the packaged stuff look decidedly ill, and it’s well worth a bit of smugness from someone to get some, girls.

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