Arguably one of the most interesting conjunctions of material situatedness and transformative social discourse in D. H. Lawrence’s work appears in his play *A Collier’s Friday Night* (written c. 1909; published 1934). At the beginning of the play the audience is introduced to the figure of Mrs Lambert as she sits in a rocking-chair reading *The New Age* magazine (2001, p. 4). For my purposes the interest here comes from the setting in which the woman’s reading takes place: ‘[t]he kitchen or living-room of a working-man’s house’ (as the play’s stage instructions inform us), a space featuring shelves and shelves of books on which stand ‘an edition of Lessing’, ‘a large set of the World’s Famous Literature’, and ‘prize-books in calf and gold, and imitation soft leather poetry-books, and a Nuttall’s dictionary and Cassell’s French, German and Latin dictionaries’ (p. 3). These primarily popularizing publications give some sense of the cultural and intellectual aspirations of the Lamberts’ household, a household similar to, because largely inspired by, Lawrence’s own domestic background. However, the presence of *The New Age* positions Mrs Lambert in particular as part of a reading public seeking some sort of ‘mediation’ between ‘specialized fields of knowledge’ (Martin, 1967, p. 3), on the one hand, and as an early instance of the Lawrentian individual for whom spaces of labour (domestic, agricultural, and industrial) are inseparable from different (and not always broad-minded) kinds of ameliorative desires, on the other. *The New Age* is more than just a detail among details, in other words, more than just a small allusion to be glanced over by impatient readers or a minor prop to be placed in an actress’s hand. Indeed, it is hardly stretching a point too far.
to say that the presence of this periodical in particular situates the Lamberts’ household as marked by desires aiming away from the toil endured by Mr Lambert ‘down pit’ towards ‘a new contemplative and imaginative order’ of the kind envisaged by Orage in the first issue of *The New Age* (1907, p. 8).

John Ruskin defined ‘work’ in *Unto This Last* (1862) as ‘a luxury and a necessity’ and argued that ‘no man can retain either health of mind or body without it’ (1985, p. 201). Mr Lambert, who is in many ways an early version of Walter Morel in Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers* (1913), no doubt would take issue with the intellectual and material privileges upon which any view of work as ‘luxury’ depends. Nevertheless, in speaking of work as a ‘necessity’ Ruskin dovetails with Lambert’s understanding of labour as some mandatory process through which individuals, especially young men, might be fortified. Indeed, so profoundly did Ruskin feel that work represented a tonic for mind and body that he urged all ‘benevolent and practical persons’ to ‘induce rich people to seek for a larger quantity of this luxury than they at present possess’ (p. 201). Ruskin’s argument, as Morag Shiach notes, depended on the existence of a ‘rightly ordered society’ in which different classes take on ‘different sorts of work and with the division between mental and manual labour absolute’ (2004, p. 42). Hence such claims as the following: ‘There is rough work to be done, and rough men must do it; there is gentle work to be done, and gentlemen must do it; and it is physically impossible that one class should do, or divide, the work of the other’ (Ruskin, 1869, p. 24). For Ruskin there needed to be a firm division between different kinds of labour according to the alternative capacities of individuals and the multifarious opportunities determined by class position, a division founded on a basis of fair reward for services rendered. To understand the relevance of these issues to Lawrence’s early work it is necessary to take a short detour through a selective history of late Victorian and Edwardian philosophies of labour.

**Labour and happiness**

Ruskin’s belief in man’s ‘lowliness’ did not prevent him from seeing in forms of labour that openly accepted ‘bodily death’ a route to ‘unselfish hope and love’, in which ‘our lives [would] be but a little lessened from those of the angels’ (quoted in Anthony, 1983, p. 156).