

The Post-War Dream (1919)

There was no point in pretending, Richard realised, that London would now return to the way it had been four years before. Physically, the city looked the same, having avoided the immediate ravages of war (barring some zeppelin raids), but its inhabitants had not emerged unscathed. Instead, a dazed population wondered how long it would take to mourn those who had been killed (or died subsequently of the Spanish flu epidemic) and when, if ever, it would be appropriate to enjoy oneself again? The intellectuals wondered how long it would take for the patriotic fervour to die down and allow the return of 'foreign' cultural influences to the capital again, while millions of returning soldiers asked, on a more practical level, when they would get the 'homes fit for heroes' that had been promised in the wake of the 'khaki election'. Indeed many had not even got home yet and served in new conflicts in White Russia, 'Mespot' (Mesopotamia), Ireland, India and the dying Ottoman Empire. And artists who had fought in this 'War For Civilization', were now aware of their new duty: to re-cast (or at least reinvigorate) the very civilization for which such a heavy price had been paid. But how? The nation had scored a hard fought victory over the Central Powers, in which artists had played no small part, but this had also been a rite of passage, suffocating the radicalism of pre-war modernism and the extreme ideas, which had accompanied it. Artists like Richard who had once been expected to be loners, revolutionaries, eccentrics, and yet who had still been valued as analysts and observers of the society in which they lived and worked, now found themselves faced with a continued cultural resistance to pre-war polemics, combined with a revulsion for all that had happened between 1914-18. There was no return to the status quo ante, and in short, the standard bearers who had come this far, were not necessarily the same artists who were now going to thrive in times of peace. But if anyone was likely to succeed it was Richard. He had proved time and again that he was a survivor, even when he had had to build his career on depictions of a war which everyone knew had appalled him. Now, in its place there could be

construction, based on all the positive values of modernity, as opposed to those that had systematically destroyed his generation since 1914. In fact it was widely held that Richard might fit rather well into the dizzying frivolity of the Jazz Age, within a society now relieved of the onerous baggage of war. And so, as Bonar Law was observing 'The crying need of the nation at this moment is that we should have tranquillity and stability. . . .',¹ Richard would have known that he and his art would have to be prepared to respond accordingly, and so matched Law's sentiment with his own 'enormous longing for order'.²

There was an additional problem however. Richard had made some fairly substantial enemies over the past decade, and these now began to resurface leading him to comment 'The relief that the war was over was tremendous, yet this turned out to be for me the most repulsive time of my life.'³ Even old allies like Frank Rutter, within weeks of the Armistice, seemed to be abandoning him when writing 'There is a danger that Mr Nevinson may have survived the war only for his art to be killed by his popularity',⁴ then publishing an even less subtle article entitled 'Exit Nevinson'. In his review of the first major peace-time show, 'The Canadian War Memorial Exhibition' at Burlington House in January 1919, he even suggested that the government thin out their collection of Nevinsons and 'lose the later ones in the Atlantic'.⁵ Richard, never slow to defend himself publicly, responded with a letter to the *Sunday Times*:

However, when your critic announced, with thinly disguised pleasure, my deterioration, he ought to prove his case – to be able to distinguish between my early and later work. This he has failed to do; therefore I feel I am entitled to some explanation, not to mention my 'ignorant and contemporary public' whom I presume your critic is employed to enlighten.⁶

There were others who felt the same disappointment, and in an article entitled 'The Backslider', the *Daily Mail* noted not only how far away from his pre-war, and early war, ways he had drifted, but took the opportunity to leak a rumour of the ultimate u-turn: that his name had been put forward for membership of the Royal Academy.⁷ The extremists on the left, where he had once belonged, had disowned him a long time ago for capitulating his rebel stance when the going had got tough in the war years. This had won him favour amongst his old enemies of the conservative 'right', such as Claude Phillips, who celebrated the fact that such a promising young talent was 'no longer [to] be counted among cubists, hardly indeed among the ultra-moderns'.⁸ Disorientated, Richard didn't seem to defend his pre-war stance and actually added fuel to the fire in an article entitled 'Are Futurists Mad?' in which he openly declared 'I have now given up Futurism

and am devoting my time to legitimate art'.⁹ Anyway, as a 'liberty-loving artist' he had decided a long time ago to leave the paths that led only to the dreary and oppressive cul-de-sac of the so-called art rebel'.¹⁰ But the conservative 'right', having used him, and having enjoyed their triumph in his abandonment of modernism, now ousted him too as they felt that he would not join the national sentiment that, however ghastly and costly the war, had been, it had, on the whole, been worthwhile. This became even clearer when Alvaro Guevara suggested joining the Chelsea Arts Club, the membership of which Richard revoked after only one night following a series of insults by Derwent Wood. It was becoming very clear to him instead that he would have to steer away from group identities, away from isms and institutions, away from the company of other artists, and to go it alone, distanced from previous associations and drawing inspiration now from much more positive and constructive times. Turning to stability, construction and order he concluded 'My joy in chaos is gone' then suggested a route modelled on that other historic loner, saying 'The immediate need of the art of today is a Cézanne, a reactionary, to lead art back to the academic traditions of the Old Masters, and save contemporary art from abstractions, as Cézanne saved Impressionism from "effects"'.¹¹ Not everyone, he knew, would share such a retrospective vision and so he got his retaliatory strike in first, renouncing vociferously in particular the Francophile Bloomsburys with all their associations of pedantry in the name of cultural liberation, which he considered nothing grander than a faddish despotism. But they were re-emerging in influence and now taking the helm of the London Group (Roger Fry had become a member in 1917 and Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant joined in 1919), taking the twice-yearly exhibitions very much in their own direction, and away from anything he might have sympathy with artistically. On a personal level too, Walter Sickert also introduced the 'young Nevinson with the Prince Albert Whiskers' to Virginia Woolf, who had at that time just completed *Night and Day*,¹² but they cared little for each other and no friendship resulted. In fact Richard's feelings, both personal and professional, were aired very publicly in an article entitled 'Bolshevism in Art: Catering For The Intellectual Snob', in which he attacked élitist coterie who worked for a minority intelligentsia, and who prided themselves in the comprehension of the obscure as a form of 'one-up-man-ship'. These rebels, he claimed, were a 'parasitic growth', and should not be the voice of all labelled 'rebels' in the capital, concluding rather opaquely 'When a movement becomes a movement it ceases to be a movement; which means that organisation kills the idea.'¹³ Others of Richard's generation agreed and, rather than fight this Bloomsbury dominance, walked out of the London Group, and in some cases began to group around Lewis

once again and the ray of hope that was Group X. But too much water had passed under the bridge for Richard to go anywhere near Lewis again, and besides, he knew, even if Lewis' optimism seemed undented, that the cultural context in which they had once flourished before the war, had not survived. Group X was soon to disappear. And unlike Paul Nash and David Bomberg, Richard possessed no real wish to hide away or to retreat into a convalescent post-war period, where a return to nature and all things natural seemed to dominate. Instead, he was raring to go, determined to retain the momentum of his celebrity while converting his artistic currency into something palatable for the public and critics. The balancing act would be in retaining his individualism, his kudos as a rebel and his unassailable reputation for valued critique, without sinking alone, submitting to the hated Bloomsburies, or taking his place in Burlington House. It was understandable then that Richard should write of the post war period:

In the artistic muddle I now found myself to be in, I decided that the only thing possible for me to do was to break from all studiotic theory and find my way as best I could.¹⁴

As if this disorientation was not enough, the war as a subject refused to die too, despite the claim in *Paint and Prejudice* that 'after the Armistice I did not do a stroke of painting which dealt with the war'.¹⁵ Instead he had been called upon to paint one final, grandiose statement (to match the historic dimensions of Paolo Uccello's *Rout at San Romano*), for the nation's permanent exhibition in the Hall of Remembrance.¹⁶ Within this wider scheme, as pioneered by the Canadian War Memorial Fund, the British commissioned seventeen 'history paintings', to go alongside two large sculptural reliefs and twelve smaller canvases, all of which would eventually find their way into the Imperial War Museum. Richard's swansong image, to be called *Harvest of Battle* (commissioned for £300) was to be one of memory, of a collective national sentiment which recoiled at the reality of the last four years and yet allowed for the fact that there may be a future again for those who came home, enhanced by the merits of the cause for which they had fought. Unsurprisingly, in the epic canvas he set out to portray no glory, no victory and refused to pander to cheap jingoistic sentiment. In earlier canvases his men had been regimented, on their way to battle, blissfully naïve as to what lay ahead; firm in their nationalist convictions and uninitiated in the business of modern war. Now they were 'experienced', broken and represented both the lost generation and the lost innocence that the war had brought about. Richard, acknowledging this, combined it with the sentiment of another family friend, Thomas Hardy, who had lamented:



C.R.W. Nevinson, *Harvest of Battle*, 1919

Calm fell. From Heaven distilled a clemency;
 There was peace on earth, and silence in the sky;
 Some could, some could not, shake off misery:
 The Sinister Spirit sneered: 'It had to be!'
 And again the Spirit of Pity whispered, 'Why?'¹⁷

They had, at least, survived, despite each other, and could leave this field of destruction together (as rugby players do at the end of a muddy and painful, though ultimately honourable, match) to embark on a life of reconstruction in the post-war world. Richard strongly suspected, in the light of the calamitous Versailles Treaty (in his view a 'patched-up peace'), that they were merely staggering towards another war. But a panoramic scene of the Great War, he also knew, was not going to be particularly eye-catching unless it could be unveiled in a context that was interesting in its own right. Not quite exhausted with polemics, therefore, he expressed publicly his intention to exhibit *Harvest of Battle* at the May 'Peace Show' at the Royal Academy. The idea was immediately rejected on the grounds that it would seriously dilute the impact of 'The Nation's War Pictures and Other Records' exhibition later in the year for which it was originally intended.¹⁸ The *Daily Express* was even denied its request to publish a photograph of the artist at work on his large canvas for the same reason, and the resultant publication showing only Richard in his studio.¹⁹ (Here Richard saw his chance (not least as the same restrictions had not been placed on John Singer Sargent and his painting *Gassed*), sending invitations to a private studio viewing of the work, complete with bus and tube routes, at which the press would surely enjoy the opportunity to get a controversial 'scoop'.²⁰ The subsequent



*C.R.W. Nevinson in his studio,
Leeds Mercury, 1 April 1919*

stories concerning the 'cloak and dagger' *exposé* ran rampant with one headline telling readers of the 'Mystery of a War Picture... Academy Closed to Grim Flanders Scene',²¹ and others conjecturing that 'it is considered to be not only his finest painting, but the most wonderful of all war pictures'.²² Of course it had not been the academy which had closed its doors to the painting, nor had there been any issue with its 'grim' contents, but nevertheless, that is the way the press reported it, and in so doing manoeuvred Richard into the spotlight on the censorship ticket one more time. Neither did it harm his now inescapable reputation as the truth telling, uncompromising, modern, military and often misunderstood, artist, who was constantly

thwarted by the establishment. In the end his painting did not appear in the Royal Academy 'Peace Show' of May, 1919, and Sargent's did, but he had made sure that even its absence had created attention. This would, he would later discover, turn out to be a pyrrhic victory.

Richard knew only too well that these mini pyrotechnic displays would not pass for progress for very much longer. Accordingly, and in an attempt to make a clear break with all that had gone before, he returned to Paris and to his old friend Severini who still had a studio, albeit a freezing cold one, at Denfert-Rochereau. Though he and Kathleen went and renewed their acquaintances with Kissing, Metzinger, Laurencin, Zadkine and Asselin (and bought a Modigliani for £5, which immediately re-sold for £120), poor health and his impending 'Peace Show' necessitated a return to London before much serious work got done. More depressingly still, they observed the lack of post-war spirit in the once great art capital and

perhaps this drummed home the fact that both London and Paris would take quite some time to recover from the ordeal they had just passed through.

New York, on the other hand, seemed to boast a youthful exuberance and confidence in which modern art must surely thrive, and with which Europe could not, at this time, compete. *Les transatlantiques* were also becoming the set to know and *americanisme* appeared, in the post-war world, to be emerging as a viable alternative to Paris for bohemian chic. Richard, and his fashionable wife were nothing if not chic, and no evening in London seemed complete without them taking their seats at the Café Royal,²³ singing bawdy songs at the Poet's Club,²⁴ dressed in 'Futurist' costume at the Chelsea Art Club Ball at the Albert Hall, or dancing (and sketching) at London's other re-emerging nightclubs such as Desti's.²⁵ Would not the world of the cocktail, the bobbed hair style, the short dress, the 'Shimmy', 'Twinkle', 'Jog Trot', 'Vampire', 'Missouri Walk', 'Elfreda', and 'Camel Walk', be ideal for them? And might not New York then be the answer to the dilemma that post-war London had created for him socially and artistically? This being the case, he was determined not to skulk off like an artist caught in a retreating tide of popularity, or worse, one scuttling away from re-emergent competitors. As he had embraced Futurism and then the war unreservedly, now he would turn to the New World for inspiration while the old world gradually recovered from the latest bloody page in its history. A going away dinner was held in his honour at the Café Royal, organised by Grant Richards, The Right Hon. Lord Henry Cavendish-Bentick, M.P., H. Chadwick Moore and Mr Charles Sims, RA (absent), and was chaired by Walter Sickert, at which about sixty people in all were present. His father's diary entry reads:

Then Richard spoke and read a long defensive offensive as to his position in art against narrow cliques + little sets who try to scorn and reject him as successful. Many of the words & illustrations were daring and violent: but the general effect fine and powerful.²⁶

Indeed, the old Marinettian protégé seemed to be back on form when, in his speech, he dramatically announced:

An artist cannot be too aggressive. As I have often said, an artist should be a bellicose Jesus Christ: a man convinced of his mission and unashamed, with a song to sing impossible to repress, and determined to be heard.²⁷

The press reported fully on his 'fiery and warlike response' which proclaimed absolute freedom from all groups and ideologies, against which he was

happy to declare war if they would not respect his autonomy. Other papers published extracts which attacked 'little Revolutionary groups in art which call themselves free, yet tyrannise their members into one formulated expression and turn themselves into narrow little academic societies'.²⁸ Years later Gerald Cumberland had not forgotten the words, nor indeed the attitude of the artist who had delivered them, when he wrote:

Self-confident? One might use a harsher term for that flamboyant and not too intelligible speech he delivered at the dinner some of his admirers gave in his honour on the eve of his departure for America. It was a clever, muddled, conceited harangue, which must have been regretted by all who had his interests at heart. But it was delivered without a single doubt, or a moment's hesitancy, or even the first faint fluttering of a qualm.²⁹

Not without significance one report in London stated:

I see that a farewell dinner is to be given to Mr Nevinson before his departure to New York. I wonder whether he is going to be feasted by his erstwhile colleagues of the advance guard in art, or by his future fellow-members of the Royal Academy.³⁰

Though tongue in cheek, Richard would have observed how notoriety had brought with it implications of conservatism, and this must have haunted him as he sailed up the Hudson on board the *Mauretania* (then a troop ship). This fresh start in the new world, and this re-invention of himself and his work, was going to have to be dramatic.

Richard adored New York from the moment he saw it, and New York seemed to love him in return – at least initially. Of it, he wrote:

Then came New York. It was a wonderful morning, with some of the skyline in the mist and the higher towers jutting out of it in clear silhouette. Much as I love Venice, I was overjoyed by that glimpse of beauty New York gave me as we made our way up from Staten Island to the docks.³¹

In return the press welcomed their grateful guest about whom they wished to know so much more. The *New York Evening Post* led by presenting a generous two-page spread which let him speak, introduce himself to the new world, and create the image of the modern master. Here, the readers learned, was the veteran artist who had been a patriot, a youthful rebel, a lone intellectual, a victimized genius, and a rankless soldier, who had turned down a captaincy in the British army for the benefits of access that only a freelance could have.³² Who could doubt the sincerity of an artist who, in his two years of almost unbroken service,

had had his car blown up on the front line as he drove it, had survived an attack on a balloon in which he was sketching high above the Western Front and who had heroically dragged back the body of a comrade in arms from no-mans-land. From Ypres at the beginning; Cambrai at the dawn of the great offensive in 1917; and the German collapse at St Quentin in 1918 – Richard had seen it all. His American audience must have felt that there could be no greater miracle than the survival of this reckless youth who had ‘hunted at night’ and who had received numerous ‘invitations to commit suicide’.³³ With such a pedigree, the press declared confidently ‘There is no other living artist who is so equipped as he is to show the inhabitants of this city what an interesting place they are living in.’³⁴ In the *New York Times Magazine* the good work continued when he reiterated the distance between himself and the macabre, and from the war in which 100,000 American ‘doughboys’ had died. He declared:

Having lived among scrap heaps, having seen miles of destruction day after day, month after month, year after year, they are longing for a complete change. We artists are sick of destruction in art. We want construction.³⁵

Besides, he did not want to be seen as cashing in on, or benefiting inappropriately from, what in the end was the tragedy of others less fortunate than himself, and on a war that many Americans had yet to be convinced had been their war at all. When Hamilton Easter Field concluded his article with the statement ‘Nevinson is a master’ there could have been little doubt that the red carpet had been rolled out and that Richard had only to turn up to ensure that the next stage of his career was off to a dynamic start like those to which he had now become accustomed.³⁶

Away from the popular press and the attentions of journalists and gossip columnists however, the real New York avant garde clearly did not require the paternal guidance of this young and eye-catching Englishman, who seemed only to mimic the earlier pronouncements of other European émigrés. Francis Picabia had, after all, ‘discovered’ their city in 1913 and declared ‘Your New York is the cubist, the futurist, city. It expresses in its architecture its life, its spirit, the modern thought...’³⁷ Richard’s ‘discovery,’ therefore, was really no discovery at all in their opinion, rather a second rate repetition of the ideas of the real pioneers, including Marcel Duchamp, Albert Gleizes and Elie Nadelman. Though their aloof attitude had been tolerated and even welcomed as an education, Richard’s did not follow suit as he didn’t seem to wish to learn anything from the city and its inhabitants – coming across instead as the altruistic missionary in the midst of an uncultured mob. Such arrogance became intolerable following a series of high profile speeches at the American Federation of Artists, and

at the Society of Independent Artists at the Waldorf-Astoria where over two hundred artists were present. Perhaps remembering the manner in which his old mentor Marinetti had come to London in 1910, or perhaps riding on the back of his own polemical outbursts during the war years, Richard surprisingly, and unnecessarily, went on the attack. He repeated, and intensified the barrage, in a further lecture delivered at the Kevorkian Gallery (40 West 57th Street), entitled 'Art as a National Asset' where he not only read the old Futurist Manifesto, but described Americans as 'splendid painters, but no artists'. He then distanced his audience further by saying that 'It was with horror that I found artists in America a thing apart and of little importance' and then finally, burned the last of his bridges with 'The impression I have thus far gained of the American public is one of mental sterility.'³⁸ Little wonder that James Montgomery Flagg (the designer of the Uncle Sam recruitment poster) could write in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* 'Don't you think your remarks were at least tactless and at most gratuitously insulting?'³⁹ After a mere week in the United States Richard was snatching defeat from the jaws of victory and the positive impact of his earlier work was now being undone before his highly publicised Keppels show had even opened. Almost two decades later, and by then an outspoken anti-American, he griped in his autobiography 'Americans have no sense of humour, and as I was later to find out they took this Shavian joke in dead earnest.' In their defence, and perhaps as a very late olive branch, he conceded 'Never had I come across so few intellectual people, yet that tiny minority was more first-rate than any circle I have discovered in Europe.'⁴⁰ Horace Brodsky, Joseph Pennell, Miss Bliss and Charles Lewis Hind were all amongst the 'first-rate minority', as was John Quinn who had been one of Richard's earliest patrons. Quinn in particular, in Richard's opinion, was a man of learning and taste, especially as his private collection ran to Picasso, Derain, Matisse, Kandinsky, Yeats, Gertler and John. Quinn, on the other hand, was not so convinced by his new acquaintance and wrote to Wyndham Lewis back in London, saying that Richard had visited, stayed for a few hours and talked a good deal about himself, but not seen much of his collection. Quinn observed 'I do not really think that he does have a feeling for the best art,' then went on to say that, when shown a couple of late Matisse paintings and a few by Walt Kuhn, he had not shown any particular interest or appreciation of them. The letter then got down to the crux of the matter saying:

He seems to realize that the war and the post-bellum art exhibitions have given him a real chance. I have the feeling that he knows that he has not the real stuff but that he wants to cash-in and make big sales now while there is a market for war stuff.

He also could not help but comment upon the onslaught in the press and the legend Richard was building around his own name:

he told about making sketches while sitting on the side of a flying machine, with the shells bursting all around. The damned thing was nauseating and the conceit of it was most amusing. . . .
Nevinson's vanity was really bad taste.

Finally Quinn concluded 'America did not "swell" Nevinson as an advanced artist' and noted that the real artists 'sized him up very quickly as a journalist and a self-exploiter'.⁴¹ There would have been those back in London who would have readily agreed with this assessment, not least the recipient of the letter itself. Eugene Gallatin was another such exception to the scythe-like sweep Richard had made of art personalities, and was described as 'the most amazing art connoisseur I met in New York. . .'.⁴² In fact it was Gallatin who wrote the 'Introduction' for the long awaited exhibition at Keppel's,⁴³ entitled 'Etchings and Lithographs by C.R.W. Nevinson', in which he presented Richard as one of Britain's 'most vigorous and original painters', whilst stating, rather hypothetically, that no American, not even John Marin, could have painted the way he had done on the Western Front. Indeed the show did demonstrate a marvellous diversity of images, from the first year of the conflict through to the last, utilising both 'freelance' and 'official' styles, and displaying the autonomy and diversity that he had fought so hard for. As it turned out, the actual images were well received, even if his comments were not.

At the end of his visit, Horace Brodsky, a mutual friend through the late Gaudier-Brzeska, advised him 'You've made good here, and they seem to like you. Beat it and get away with it, and don't come back. I know these New Yorkers.'⁴⁴ Richard obliged and sailed, first class and still using his King's Guest pass, on the *Aquatania* following 'probably the most extraordinary month ever lived by an artist'.⁴⁵ A journalist for an English paper however reported that he had just sailed away from a storm of his own making, and warned him, as Brodsky had done, 'if he could hear the things they say about him now he would not be so keen to come back in the autumn as he was when he left America the day after that speech was made'.⁴⁶ As it turned out, Richard had much greater problems waiting for him in England as he would surely have realized when he saw his mother waiting for him at the dock.

During his absence Kathleen had given birth to their first and only child, who had attracted media attention, as 'The Cubist Baby'. The joy and the jokes were short lived however as Henry's journal entry for 3 June 1919 explained 'Rich and Kath's child must die.' The following day Henry wrote 'Richard's and Kathleen's child lay dying + died. I was strangely

'The Cubist Baby',
Daily Sketch, 21 May 1919

unhappy at the thought.⁴⁷ A few days later, with Richard mid-Atlantic, he recorded unreservedly that he was 'Overwhelmed by the death of that poor child, now lying still in the studio,' and wrote of his concern for his daughter in law when he 'looked in on Kathleen, sitting in the garden of the nursing home. She cried a great deal when I was 'kind'. Spoke much of the child, its intelligence and strength of will. All very sad.'⁴⁸ On 7 June 1919, the day before Richard's return from New York,

We buried Richard's and Kathleen's little son in a white coffin. Happily the service was short. The poor little thing was dropped into a hole on the top of my father in the old Hampstead Churchyard. His name which we never knew was Anthony Christopher Wynne.⁴⁹

Richard's sole reference to the family tragedy, written almost twenty years later in *Paint and Prejudice*, was to recall 'On my arrival in London I was met by my mother, who told me my son was dead.' He then added 'I am glad I have not been responsible for bringing any human life into this world', especially with 'my blood, my morbid temperament and cursed as I am with apprehension of torments and degradations yet to come'.⁵⁰ But from this point to the end of the year Henry's journals charted no such relief: instead the slow descent of his son towards a nervous breakdown, accelerated by this tragedy, the residual anxiety of war, the failure of his New York experiment and the uncertainty in the post-war world of success as an artist. More personal problems arrived too when Richard found out that Wyndham Lewis had taken the flat above the one that they had just moved to on the Euston Road, leading Kathleen to worry about 'the madman's violence'.⁵¹ Henry was taking no chances and was clearly still prepared to fight his son's battles, physically if necessary, when he recorded 'put off going to see Wyndham Lewis against whom I meant to brawl if he



insulted Richard in his speech'. Lewis was not the only problem and so Richard remembered unhappily:

Still the intelligentsia were showing me every form of hostility and contempt, and when I returned to London I found social life impossible. Everywhere I went I was wounded or driven to fury through some cheap insult from some superior Bloomsbury or an aesthetic bohemian.⁵²

But this was all kept private. Instead, the public image showed no sign of weakness or doubt, and the public image projected was one of an eager artist preparing confidently for the next solo Leicester Galleries show. Richard's 'Peace Show' would open along side the work of Matisse in the same gallery, to a public which eagerly awaited an exhibition of these modern masters, who had known each other in Paris and who were to spend studio time together now in London. Secretly, Richard feared being eclipsed by the French legend (he did however enjoy his company and took the opportunity to buy one of his works),⁵³ and also by his English peers who were showing in galleries elsewhere. Edward Wadsworth and David Bomberg, for example, were creating a stir at the Adelphi Gallery, Wyndham Lewis was at the Goupil and the 7&5 Society was up and running. Almost certainly this accounted for Richard's need to become aggressive again, this time in his catalogue introduction, an early draft of which Henry read. He was immediately concerned and wrote 'Rich showed me his preface & I made a few changes, but it is still bellicose (sic) and too defensive',⁵⁴ in its characteristic struggle for artistic autonomy. Richard warned his reader again that 'I wish to be thoroughly dissociated from every 'new' or 'advanced' movement; every form of 'ist,' 'ism,' 'post,' 'neo,' 'academic,' or 'unacademic.' This was nothing new and one critic retorted 'Good! This saves me a heap of trouble. One need only describe these curious but forceful works as sheer Nevinson.'⁵⁵ So too he was sticking to his ideology concerning eclecticism in art, or 'art rules the artist', by saying 'I refuse to use the same technical method to express such contradictory forms as a rock or a woman.'⁵⁶ This was also picked up on positively by the press which reported 'The versatility of the man is amazing. He can paint in half-a-dozen styles – according to subject – and you feel that, as often as not, he does it with his tongue in his cheek.'⁵⁷ The subject matter of the paintings on display were certainly consistent with this ethos as they ranged widely: from *When Father Mows the Lawn* to *The Inexperienced Witch*; from cityscapes of New York to traditional nudes; from portraits of celebrities to landscapes of England; and from comic pieces to jazz subjects. Perhaps most importantly of all, there was nothing at all to

do with the war. The *Daily News* reported gleefully that ‘the lost sheep had returned to the fold’ whilst observing that amongst other extremists there would surely be ‘wailing and gnashing of teeth as over one who has deliberately chosen to return to the realms of darkness’.⁵⁸ Michael Sadler agreed and summed up by saying that he ‘must be a great trial to those serious young painters who would have English secessionism move relentlessly from one abstraction to another’.⁵⁹ P.G. Konody, not wholly approving of the technical eclecticism, nor indeed the cocktail of subject matters, concluded ‘The sky-scrapers and cabarets of New York are a happier hunting ground for him than Olympus or Parnassus.’⁶⁰ Others shrugged ‘But in spite of his disclaimer, I’m afraid that Mr Nevinson will always be a stuntist.’⁶¹ Despite everything, the show according to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, was an unmitigated success, in terms of attendance and profits, and so Richard could be content that he had bridged the gulf back from war to peace successfully, using a clever combination of versatility, variety and adaptability, in what was reported as ‘the most popular one-man show ever known’.⁶²

A new crisis was looming however, with the ‘Nation’s War Paintings and Drawings’ exhibition at the Royal Academy at which *Harvest of Battle* was finally to be unveiled. Though not a Royal Academy exhibition, the collection of the Imperial War Museum was to be exhibited in the rooms of Burlington House and would represent artists of ‘every sort of school’ who had depicted the ‘Titanic struggle’⁶³ – a fact that would have former academicians like ‘Millais and Leighton turning in their graves’.⁶⁴ Masterman publicly outlined the goal of the exhibition, then identified the hanging committee (who had to select one thousand out of the three thousand paintings in the collection), as, amongst others, Yockney, Bone, Dodd and Tonks.⁶⁵ Richard would have known right away that this was going to lead to trouble and all doubt would have been removed when Henry Tonks wrote to tell him that his dislike of his work was surpassed only by his dislike of him as a person. It was no coincidence then that none of his paintings made the Central Gallery at Burlington House, whilst everything else was divided and scattered throughout the many rooms of the show. Richard was appalled and made his feelings clear when he wrote to the committee:

every single picture but one of mine has been placed in an obscure corner, and every trick, well known to every artist who has hung an exhibition, has been used to dissipate my strength, and handicap me in every way.⁶⁶

On 15 December 1919, the Chairman of the Art Committee received a further letter from Richard to

express my contempt – for the ungenerous and unsporting way you have flung my altruistic efforts at co-operation into the cesspool of artistic intrigue, and the cynical lack of appreciation you have shown throughout.⁶⁷

Kinton Parkes wasn't far off the mark when he observed 'For Nevinson there is no armistice. He is always at war.'⁶⁸ Richard was utterly convinced that he was the victim of a direct conspiracy against him by a vicious and elitist cabal, a suspicion which was confirmed by a further attack on him by Muirhead Bone. Once again Henry had to mediate between the two, and few days later 'Muirhead Bone came to see Richard and apologise. . . . He said he knew there was a violent set against Richard among a clique of artists'⁶⁹

Now Henry could only stand and watch helplessly as his son became overwhelmed by 'a state of anger and despair',⁷⁰ even if, on visiting the exhibition he believed that his son was over-reacting to what was, all-in-all, a 'superb show'.

Though much of the triumph had been taken out of the debut of *Harvest of Battle*, the *Daily Mail* got off to a positive start saying that

It is a large, steel coloured painting. Dawn: somewhere that looks like earth's most God-forsaken region, the sodden flats north-east of Ypres. Guns are blazing away in the half-light; the first of the "walking wounded" and prisoners of the morning's attack are trailing back amid the shell-holes and brimming craters. Terrible! The man who painted that has seen; the man who has seen, that knows the bitterness of things.⁷¹

Others, however, felt it to be terribly distant from the youthful interpretations that his career had been built upon, and somehow removed from any real legitimacy to the lofty status of art. Ezra Pound (whom Richard called 'the Hun'), summed this up perfectly calling it 'a representation of reality and an excellent record of war', before damning it on formal grounds as a 'bad painting'.⁷² Henry didn't agree and welcomed the change from the 'old sword waving, cavalry dashing pictures of Glory!'⁷³ Returning the following day he was especially delighted to see queues for *Harvest of Battle*, rivalled only by Sargent's *Gassed*. But his son's nervous decline had started in earnest now and at lunch on 14 December Henry, perturbed, wrote 'But the sorrows of Richard appal me & and his outbreaks of wrath against Tonks . . . and others only make things worse.'⁷⁴ Time did not alleviate the problem and on Christmas day at Downside Crescent Richard was in real trouble emotionally. The diary entry for that day reads:

Richard came to dinner . . . in terrible state of rage and depression against critics and artists. He is 'obsessed' hardly sane, utterly wretched, incapable of reason or work. He does everything that the enemy wishes him to do. Has written again to Tonks, no doubt with abuse. One of his pictures was rejected by the New English. He must have known it would be, yet he rages, I am in despair of a way out.⁷⁵

Three days later, when Henry called at his son's flat, he found him in bed 'having a sort of cure for his distracted brain',⁷⁶ and conjectured one more time that the mastermind behind this plot against his son was Wyndham Lewis.⁷⁷

Phillip Gibbs wrote, in 1979, about the men who came back from the war, observing that 'Something had altered them. They were subject to queer moods and queer tempers, fits of profound depression alternating with a restless desire for pleasure. Many were easily moved to passion where they lost control of themselves, many were bitter in their speech, violent in opinion, frightening.'⁷⁸ This was most certainly the case for Richard who now, abhorring his role in peace-time, declared 'Everything ought to be done to prevent a man's becoming an artist', and dramatically concluding that the artist of today was 'better dead than alive'.⁷⁹ It was a thought that concerned those who knew him.