

'I ran into my late wife in Wigmore Street an hour ago, and had to take to my heels,' wrote Eliot in 1936; 'only people who have been "wanted" know the sort of life I lead.'

This volume tells the story of the decision to commit Vivien Eliot to a psychiatric asylum – after she had been found wandering in the streets of London. It publishes all of the available correspondence.

Eliot becomes more and more of the public man, visiting everywhere from East Coker and Little Gidding to Dublin, Edinburgh, Paris, Portugal and the USA. The engaging and inventive letters are with many of the best-known writers of the 1930s: W. H. Auden; George Barker; John Betjeman; Djuna Barnes (Eliot fights to publish *Nightwood*); Basil Bunting; Lawrence Durrell; Laurie Lee; Hugh MacDiarmid; William Saroyan; Henry Miller; Anaïs Nin; Ezra Pound; Stephen Spender; Vernon Watkins; and Virginia Woolf. In addition, Eliot sits for a portrait by Wyndham Lewis, which is infamously rejected by the Royal Academy.

Other letters show the poet's delight in his godchildren – to whom he posts the verses that will become *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (1939). 'The verses were certainly intended for children. I don't want . . . to write children's poems which will appeal primarily to sentimental adults. That kind of verse seems to me definitely unpleasant.'

All the while these strands of correspondence are being played out, Eliot struggles to write his second play, *The Family Reunion* (1939). The exchanges with his advisers show he can take strong criticism, and he bites back with frank replies.