British women writers represented the shattering social conditions of the home front; the bombing, however, usually provided only a backdrop to dramas instigated more by the social pressures driven by wartime domestic ideology. Many writers only found the emotional stability to write about women’s wartime lives years after, while others felt compelled by the urgency of the moment to put pen to paper, even as paper was becoming a luxury. Noel Streatfeild, a successful children’s author, wrote in her diary of the Blitz: ‘Tried to write yesterday and couldn’t. Repeated to myself over and over again all that anyone has ever said about carrying on as usual, but sat with my pen in my hand staring at a blank sheet’.

For some women writers the end of the war was therefore cause for many celebrations, not the least of which was the peaceful time to translate their wartime experiences into written narratives. One of the most successful examples is dramatized in the work and life of Betty Miller (1910–65), who was still struggling to become a serious writer when the war broke out. Having to uproot herself and her two children each time her psychiatrist husband was moved to a different army hospital made the act of writing impossible. But the experience also inspired her major novel, *On the Side of the Angels*, which resounds with the clashes of army and domestic life. She later said that in order for a wife and mother to become a writer, she would ‘have to conform with... all the rituals of domesticity... but keep the true faith to yourself and hide every trace of it’.
In her novel, *On the Side of the Angels*, the 'sereneness' of women's courageous resolve is tied to their entrapment in the domestic and romantic myths legitimized by total war. Honor Carmichael's relocation to a Cotswold town where her husband Colin will serve as army medical officer signals women's isolated status amidst the conflict between the family life established among the officer corps, the village community which keeps army wives at arm's length, and the expectations of the middle-class family home. The routines that unite these public and private worlds and yet keep them embattled are used by Miller to reflect how women became catalysts for change in the social morality of the British upper middle class and in the domestic novel. The novel opens with a section called 'Afternoon', evoking the sense that even though life and purpose 'flagg' and 'wilt' in an atmosphere of lassitude they also 'hissed with unavailing fury, like a kettle on the boil' (*Angels*, pp. 7, 9). The domestic metaphor is an appropriate bridge between the aimless, deflated home front of the 'phoney war' depicted in Evelyn Waugh's *Put Out More Flags* and the battles raging around the world. For it is the women, managing a domestic camp of British displaced persons, who will 'throw off the afternoon sloth, to seek again the direction, purpose, relinquished during these hours of inertia' (*Angels*, p. 9).

War, in *On the Side of the Angels*, is both an experience and the subject of debate for the two central female characters. Recalling Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Lawrence's *Women in Love*, and Elizabeth Bowen's *Friends and Relations*, Miller's novel works around two sisters who represent different responses to the power structures which drive the war machine, but which are now exposed as having primed the heart of British middle-class society. In a 'state of perpetual civil war', Claudia is a portrait of ambivalence (*Angels*, p. 99). She is 'irritated' by 'all this male pirouetting' and by her older sister's 'complacency, accepting everything' (*Angels*, p. 18). Yet despite the fact that she is a teacher of history, its lessons are lost on her when she is seduced into a romance starring a tall, dark commando, the enigmatic Neil Herriot. Claudia searches for her own point of view between two traditional tales which inscribe the constraint of women in both fictional and social conventions. Engaged to a young man with a damaged heart, she is expected to become part of his tradition bound and privileged family home, but in her vision of it as 'the future', she is already 'opposed' to the 'cherished past' of 'the temperate life at Honeybourne' (*Angels*, p. 99).