

# Aggie van der Meer

## The Eighteen

Opting for personal integrity in times of repression

**In *The Eighteen* the central character finds himself in a position whereby he confronts the collective. His idealism comes up against the corrupting practices of a regime. The need to make choices and the unavoidable consequences are the theme of this novel, a theme that Aggie van der Meer makes concrete in a story that is as succinct as it is moving, with a pertinent structure.**

On 16 January 1969, Prague student Jan Palach set fire to himself, with fatal results, in protest at the quashing of the Prague Spring by the Russians. It was an act that brought hundreds of thousands of people back out onto the streets. To prevent Palach from acquiring hero status, the authorities tried to discredit him by distorting his motives. Relatives of Palach responded by taking legal action against the state.

In *The Eighteen*, one of the eighteen members of the politbureau responsible is given a voice, a past and a conscience. Ferenc Hacha, a Jew, fled from Dresden to Prague as a child to escape the Nazis. He survived the Second World War, and communist ideas restored his faith in the future. In the court case brought by Palach's family against the state he turns against the other members of the politbureau, but to no avail.

The reader follows Hacha on his lonely journey, sharing his thoughts and his memories. He struggles with the question of what to do in the face of a totalitarian system that feels threatened. Hacha's Kafkaesque battle for truth is in essence a desperate attempt to retain his own self-respect. From that position he looks back on his confusing past and ahead to a future that remains for a long time uncertain.



### Publishing details

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### Publisher

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'The set-up of the novel [...] is from a literary point of view perfect.'

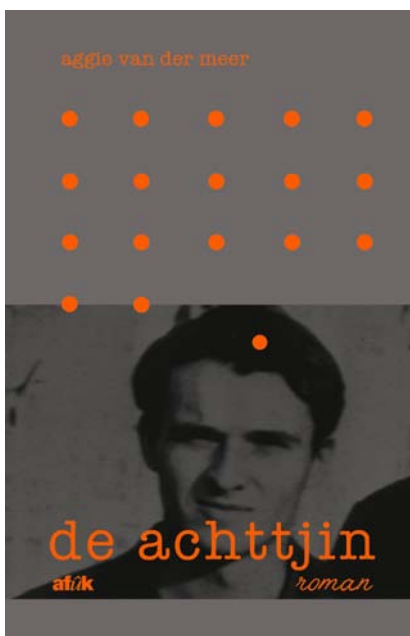
– *Leeuwarder Courant*

'*The Eighteen* by Aggie van der Meer deserves to be translated into Dutch, German, Czech, Spanish, Russian and English, because it is a world-class book.'

– *Friese-literatuursite*

'Aggie van der Meer, the oldest of them all, can inspire the Frisian writers of 2016, by her example, to seek an authentic voice, an impertinence, a contrary position, a personal perspective, both in thinking and in writing style.'

– *Fers2*



**Aggie van der Meer** (b. 1927) worked as an art teacher and as a garden architect. She was active in the peace movement and devoted herself to reform within the Catholic Church. Only later in life did she become a literary author, publishing her first book in 2000. Characteristic of her work – several poetry collections, novels and stage plays – is an engagement that is thoroughly convincing as literature.

Photo: Wietze Landman