

## Macavity: The Mystery Cat

By T.S.Eliot



### About the Poet

Thomas Stearns Elliot born on 26th September, 1888 was an essayist, a critic, a playwright and one of the well-known poets of the twentieth century. Some of his famous poems are 'The Waste Land', 'Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', 'Journey of the Magi', 'Naming of Cats' etc. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948.



### About the Poem

#### A Master Criminal

The poem is about a cat called Macavity. He is also called the "Hidden Paw". The cat is a great criminal. He has openly disobeyed the law. Yet the police of Scotland Yard is helpless before Macavity. Sometimes the Flying Squad runs after it. However, the squad is always disappointed. The cat is never found by it. Macavity moves much faster than the Flying Squad.

#### A Breaker of the Laws of Nature

The poet is sure that there has been no creature like Macavity. Macavity has broken not only human laws but even the laws of nature. He floats in the air without any support. Thus, he breaks the nature's law of gravitation. The fakirs are supposed to have some magical powers but even they stare upon Macavity. Yet, the wonder of wonders is that when one rushes to the scene of the crime, Macavity is not found. Those who look after him find him neither in the basement (i.e. under the earth), nor in the air (i.e. the sky).

#### Appearance

Macavity is a very special cat. He is very tall and thin. It's very easy to recognise him. His eyes are deeply set in his face. His brow has deep wrinkles as if he is lost in deep thoughts. Due to constant negligence, his skin is full of dust. One would find him swaying his head from side to side just as a snake does. He is an expert cheat. When one feels that he is asleep, he is only dozing. Infact , Macavity is always alert.

### Character

Macavity is unique. He is evil incarnate. Ordinarily you can find him anywhere—in a by-street or in a square. However, when you want to punish him for a crime, he is nowhere to be seen.

### Summary

*Macavity is a mysterious cat who baffles the Detective agencies. So, he is considered as the 'bafflement' of the Scotland Yard. T.S Eliot describes a mysterious cat that is known by the name 'Hidden Paw' as he is the criminal mastermind who defies law.*

*The line 'For when they reach the scene of crime-Macavity's not there' denotes the fact it is difficult to catch Macavity red-handed. The poet says that Macavity disobeys all human laws and also the law of gravity. His levitation is so powerful that it even bewilders a fakir. The poet asserts that that we may search for Macavity in the basement or we may look for him in the air but Macavity would not be found. Macavity is described as a ginger cat who is both tall and thin. He can be recognized from his eyes which are deeply sunken in. This cat has lines on his forehead steeped with thoughts with a head that is highly domed while his coat is untidy and his whiskers are uncombed. Macavity moves like a snake and whenever he is mistaken to be asleep, he is wide awake.*

*According to the poet, Macavity is a devil in the disguise of a cat; he is a monster of wickedness. One may meet him in a by-street or in the square but when the crime is discovered, "Macavity is not there." Macavity is actually the symbolic representation of the notorious criminals of the society.*

### Examples of poetic devices used in the poem

- 1) **Alliteration**-He's broken every human law, he breaks the law of gravity.
- 2) **Repetition**- Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity
- 3) **Imagery**-You would know him if you saw him, for his eyes are sunken in.
- 4) **Simile**-He sways his head from side to side, with movements like a snake
- 5) **Metaphor**-For he's a fiend in feline shape, a monster of depravity.
- 6) **Assonance**-Macavity's a Mystery Cat: he's called the Hidden Paw –

**Solved Questions****WORKING WITH THE POEM****Question 1:**

Read the first stanza and think.

- (i) Is Macavity a cat really?
- (ii) If not, who can Macavity be?

Answer: (i) Macavity is a cunning cat.

(ii) If not a cat, he can be an expert thief or criminal or a mysterious creature.

**Question 2:**

Complete the following sentences.

- (i) A master criminal is one who .....
- (ii) The Scotland Yard is baffled because .....
- (iii) ..... because Macavity moves much faster than them.

Answer: (i) evades arrest and escapes from the scene of crime.

- (ii) it fails to get a clue about the criminal.
- (iii) Flying Squad is not able to catch hold of him.

**Question 3:**

“A cat, I am sure, could walk on a cloud without coming through”.

(Jules Verne)

Which law is Macavity breaking in the light of the comment above?

Answer: Newton’s Law of Gravitation.

**Question 4:**

Read stanza 3, and then describe Macavity in two or three sentences of your own.

**Answer:** Macavity is a very cunning and cautious cat. He is tall and thin. His eyes are sunken in, his forehead is wrinkled, and his head is dome like. His coat is soiled. The hair on his cheeks (whiskers) is not combed.

**Question 5:**

Say 'False' or 'True' for each of the following statements.

- (i) Macavity is not an ordinary cat.
- (ii) Macavity cannot do what a fakir can easily do.
- (iii) Macavity has supernatural powers.
- (iv) Macavity is well-dressed, smart and bright.
- (v) Macavity is a spy, a trickster and a criminal, all rolled in one.

**Answer:** (i) True (ii) False (iii) True (iv) False (v) True

**Question 6:**

Having read the poem, try to guess whether the poet is fond of cats. If so, why does he call Macavity a fiend and monster?

**Answer:** The poet admires the cat for his swift movement, expert criminality and the way he gives a slip to the police. But he is a law breaker at the same time. So, the poet calls him a devil and giant.

**Question 7:**

Has the poet used exaggeration for special effect? Find a few examples of it and read those lines aloud.

**Answer:** The following statements are examples of exaggeration.

- He is the bafflement of Scotland Yard, the Flying Squad's despair.
- His power of levitation.
- A fiend in feline shape, a monster of depravity.