



In all crime thrillers and suspense stories, the criminal or villain is shown to be very smart, cunning and evil. But the criminal need not be always a human being. In T. S. Eliot's poem, *Macavity-The Mystery Cat*, which has been taken from *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, Macavity is described as a highly mischievous and criminal cat, who is too clever to leave behind any trace of his tricks.



Macavity's a Mystery Cat: he's called the Hidden Paw—

For he's the master criminal who can defy¹ the Law.

He's the bafflement² of Scotland Yard³, the Flying Squad⁴'s despair:

For when they reach the scene of crime—Macavity's not there!

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,

He's broken every human law, he breaks the law of gravity.

His powers of levitation⁵ would make a fakir⁶ stare,

And when you reach the scene of crime—Macavity's not there!

You may seek him in the basement, you may look up in the air—

But I tell you once and once again, Macavity's not there!

(Macavity's a ginger⁷ cat, he's very tall and thin; You would know him if you saw him, for his eyes are sunken in.



¹defy refuse to obey ²bafflement confusion ³Scotland Yard headquarters of the London Metropolitan police ⁴Flying Squad specialist crime and operations section of the London Metropolitan police ⁵levitation ability to rise and hover in the air ⁶fakir a religious ascetic ⁷ginger a light reddish-yellow or orange-brown colour

His brow is deeply lined with thought, his head
is highly domed;

His coat is dusty from neglect, his whiskers
are uncombed.)

He sways his head from side to side, with
movements like a snake;

And when you think he's half asleep, he's
always wide awake.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like
Macavity,

For he's a fiend⁸ in feline⁹ shape, a monster of
depravity¹⁰.

You may meet him in a by-street,
you may see him in the square—

But when a crime's discovered,
then Macavity's not there!

He's outwardly respectable. (They
say he cheats at cards.)

And his footprints are not found in
any file of Scotland Yard's

And when the larder's¹¹ looted, or
the jewel-case is rifled¹²,

Or when the milk is missing, or
another Peke's¹³ been stifled¹⁴,

Or the greenhouse glass is broken,
and the trellis¹⁵ past repair

Ay, there's the wonder of the
thing! Macavity's not there!

And when the Foreign Office find a Treaty's
gone astray¹⁶,

Or the Admiralty¹⁷ lose some plans and
drawings by the way,

There may be a scrap of paper in the hall or
on the stair—

But it's useless to investigate—Macavity's not
there!

And when the loss has been disclosed, the
Secret Service say:



⁸fiend demon ⁹feline related to the
cat family ¹⁰depravity wickedness
¹¹larder a room or large cupboard with
food in it ¹²rifled to rob or search with
the intent to rob ¹³Peke a breed of
dog ¹⁴stifled suffocated or restrained
from acting on ¹⁵trellis wooden or
metal bars used as support for
creepers ¹⁶astray away from the
correct path or direction, in this case
misplaced ¹⁷Admiralty a department
of the Ministry of Defence (UK)

It must have been Macavity!'—but he's a mile away.

You'll be sure to find him resting, or a-licking¹⁸ of his thumb;

Or engaged in doing complicated long division sums.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,

There never was a Cat of such deceitfulness¹⁹ and suavity²⁰.

He always has an alibi²¹, and one or two to spare:

At whatever time the deed took place—MACAVITY WASN'T THERE !

And they say that all the Cats whose wicked deeds are widely known

(I might mention Mungojerrie, I might mention Griddlebone)

Are nothing more than agents for the Cat who all the time

Just controls their operations:
the Napoleon of Crime!

T.S. ELIOT

¹⁸**a-licking** the act of passing the tongue over something to clean it ¹⁹**deceitfulness** ability to misrepresent truth or cheat easily ²⁰**suavity** the quality of being charming and confident ²¹**alibi** a piece of evidence to prove one was elsewhere when a criminal act was committed

Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888–1965) was an essayist, publisher, playwright, literary and social critic and a prominent poet of the 20th century. Introduced to the world of literature due to his physical limitations as a child, Eliot read voraciously and thus developed and sharpened his literary skills. Eliot's poems made their mark as pioneers of modern day poetry. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1948 and is well known for his poems, *The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock*, *The Hollow Men* and *The Waste Land*.



COMPREHENSION SKILLS

A. Answer the following questions.

1. His powers of levitation would make a fakir stare

- Whose powers of levitation are being referred to here? *Macavity's*
- What do you understand by powers of levitation? *Pg 78*
- Why is Macavity being compared to a fakir here?

2. Macavity's a ginger cat, he's very tall and thin;

You would know him if you saw him, for his eyes are sunken in.

- What does the term ginger cat mean? *Pg 78*
- Why do you think Macavity's eyes are being described as sunken in? *He is very thoughtful planning and plotting*
- How do you think being tall and thin would have been of advantage to Macavity? *He can escape easily. It gives him agility and speed. He is always at ease.*

3. You'll be sure to find him resting, or a-licking of his thumb;
Or engaged in doing complicated long division sums.

- Do you think a-licking of his thumb is a deliberate act of pretence on Macavity's part? Say Yes or No and give reasons for your answer.
- Why do you think Macavity would engage himself in doing mathematical problems?
- Do you think a cat like Macavity can ever be in a restful state? Could he have afforded that? Why or why not?

4. Describe Macavity's physical appearance in detail. *He looked decent and demanded respect.*

5. Why does Eliot call Macavity the Napoleon of Crime? What would be the connection with Napoleon? *Napoleon had a sword and he was the mastermind of every activity he took part in.*

6. Have you ever watched a cat anywhere? Describe some of the distinctive characteristics of cats.

7. Do you think problem-solving activities, like crossword or Sudoku, help sharpen our mind? Do you engage in any such activities? How have they helped you in your day-to-day life? **VB**

8. Why is Macavity called the mystery cat?

9. State any 4 crimes done by Macavity.

10. State the positive traits in the character of Macavity.

APPRECIATION

Figurative language

Literal language in a text states facts as they are. **Figurative language** has a different role to play. With the aid of certain devices, figurative language adds multiple layers to the meaning that is to be inferred. Eliot makes use of this extensively throughout his poem *Macavity-The Mystery Cat*.

Let us look at these devices closely now.

Simile is used to express comparison between two things with the help of words or phrases like *like*, *as*, *than*, or *seems*. Look at the lines:

*He sways his head from side to side, with
movements like a snake;*

Here, the movement of Macavity, the cat's head is being compared to the way a snake moves from side to side.

Metaphor is used to make comparison between two things which are essentially unrelated.

*Are nothing more than agents
for the Cat who all the time
Just controls their operations:
the Napoleon of Crime!*

Macavity, the master criminal cat's skills are being compared to the successful French military and political leader, Napoleon.

Hyperbole is a kind of an overstatement which is used to exaggerate or heighten the stature of something being described.

*He's broken every human law, he
breaks the law of gravity.
His powers of levitation
would make a fakir stare,*

The *He* here, that is Macavity, is said to be capable of defying the law of gravity. This is to affirm his super skills at the job he does best—loot, and the fact that he escapes getting caught each time.

Personification is to attribute human form or characteristics to an animal, object or idea.

*His brow is deeply lined with thought, his head
is highly domed;
His coat is dusty from neglect, his whiskers
are uncombed.*

Macavity, the deft criminal cat, is portrayed to be lost in thoughts of the deeds accomplished or otherwise. His demeanour seems to be suffering from neglect due to his mind working overtime.

A. Write a poem describing any of your favourite things. It could be your pet, a book, a pencil/pen, etc. Use the poetic devices mentioned above.