

# Accounts in G. B. Shaw's The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet: A Dramatic Discourse Analysis

Zuhel Khalid Abdul Majeed

And Asst. Prof. Alaa Hussein Sharhan

University of Basrah/ College of Education for Human Sciences/ Department of English

## Abstract

As a linguistic tool, accounts are essential to be applied to literary texts to add further scope to the theory applicability. In dramatic texts, such theory can be proven a useful structural frame within which the characters' verbal practices would be approached as a way to come to terms with their unexpected activities. Thus, the current research aims at scrutinizing G.B. Shaw's "The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet" according to the account theory produced by Scott and Lyman in an attempt to arrive at a recognition and understanding of the characters' various justifications and excuses when such figures, especially Blanco Posnet, are accused of having practised and committed something undesirable. Some other characters have also accepted the responsibility of doing bad things especially when they justified their commitment to such wrong deeds through reciting sad tales and other justified accounts. Excuses, though lesser in frequency than justifications, appeared to mitigate the characters' responsibility, especially Posnet, who practised such technique more than any of the other characters.

**Keywords:** accounts, justifications, excuses, dramatic discourse, discursive psychology.

الاعذار والتبريرات في مسرحة فضيحة بلانكو بوسنيه للكاتب برنارد شو:  
دراسة في الخطاب المسرحي

المستخلص

كأداة لغوية ، تعد التبريرات والأعذار ضرورية للتطبيق على النصوص الأدبية لإضافة حيز تطبيقي للنظرية . ففي النصوص الدرامية ، يمكن إثبات أن هذه النظرية هي إطار هيكلي مفيد يتم من خلاله التعامل مع الممارسات اللفظية للشخصيات كوسيلة للتوافق مع أنشطتها غير المتوقعة . وبالتالي ، يهدف البحث الحالي إلى تحليل مسرحية "The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet" وفقا لنظرية التبرير التي نظر لها كل من سكوت و ليمان في محاولة للوصول إلى اعتراف وفهم المبررات والأعذار المختلفة للشخصيات عندما يتم اتهام هذه الشخصيات ، وخاصة Blanco Posnet ، بممارسة وارتكاب شيء غير مرغوب فيه . كما قبلت بعض الشخصيات الأخرى مسؤولية القيام بأشياء سيئة خاصة عندما برروا التزامهم بمثل هذه الأفعال الخاطئة من خلال تلاوة حكايات حزينة وروايات أخرى مبررة . يبدو أن الأعذار ، على الرغم من أنها أقل تواترا من المبررات ، تخفف من مسؤولية الشخصيات ، وخاصة Posnet ، الذي مارس مثل هذه التقنية أكثر مقارنة مع الشخصيات الأخرى .

الكلمات المفتاحية: التبريرات ، الأعذار ، الخطاب الدرامي ، علم النفس الاستطراذي

## 1. Introduction

The power of language that shapes peoples' understanding of human behaviour and identity is profound in literature and psychology. One fascinating intersection of these disciplines can be found in George Bernard Shaw's one-act play, "The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet," which was written in 1909. This play, set against the background of the American Wild West, delves into the complexities of human nature, justice, and redemption. At its core the concept of accounts abounds there – the descriptions individuals offer of their actions that deviate from societal norms.

In this research paper, a comprehensive exploration of accounts practiced by variety of characters in Shaw's "The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet" is embarked on. By doing so, light is shed not only on the character's motivations and actions but also on the profound ways in which language and performance shape our understanding of human behaviour and the human psyche. Through this exploration, the researcher bridges the gap between literature, psychology, and the dramatic art, offering a deeper insight into the multidimensional nature of the human experience as portrayed in "The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet."

The significance of this study lies in its dual contribution to the fields of discursive psychology and literature. Firstly, It will contribute to the field of discursive psychology by applying its principles to the analysis of dramatic discourse, offering a unique perspective on how individuals construct meaning and convey psychological concepts in a theatrical context. Secondly, such a study enhances the understanding of the play and its characters by examining the motives and ethical reasoning of the characters' use of justifications and excuses. It assists in uncovering the complex layers of characterization and their actions, thereby deepening the comprehension of the dramatic work. Furthermost, this type of analysis can be of great value in an educational setting, offering students and academics a practical example for studying drama and social psychology. It serves as a concrete illustration of how literature can serve as a powerful tool for delving into complicated behavioural practices.

This research paper is limited specifically to the use of Scott and Layman's (1968) classification of accounts: excuses and justifications to George Bernard Shaw's "The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet." The study primarily employs discursive psychology as its theoretical work frame to analyse the discourse of the selected text. The study aims to provide an in-depth investigation of how the

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characters reflect psychological struggles exhibited through their rendering of justifications and excuses in an endeavour to establish their identities as constructed through their discourse.

Blanco Posnet, the central character in Shaw's "The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet," stands accused of horse theft in a lawless town. However, his trial is not just about determining guilt or innocence; it is a form of entertainment for the townsfolk who are eager to witness justice. In his defence, Blanco Posnet invokes a divine revelation. He claims to have encountered God during a moment of solitude in the wilderness. He argues that this divine encounter has transformed him into a better person, deserving mercy.

The research delves into the intricate web of accounts within the play. An account is a linguistic device employed when an act is subjected to evaluative inquiry. The researcher also ventures into the realm of discursive psychology as it is the base of such concepts. Discursive psychology is a field that explores how individuals construct, convey, and comprehend psychological concepts in the context of everyday interactions. But "The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet" is not merely a text to be analyzed; it is a dramatic discourse in its own right. In drama, characters come to life through their speech and interactions, engaging both the actors on stage and the audience in a unique form of communication. This dynamic exchange between text, performance, and interpretation adds layers of complexity to our understanding of the characters' identities, the social norms of the Wild West, and the predominant themes of morality and redemption.

**The study attempts to answer the following questions:**

1. How do the characters in "The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet" employ justifications and excuses to rationalize their actions and behaviours within the play?
2. Are there gender dynamics differences at play in the use of justifications and excuses among the characters?
3. Can the study of justifications and excuses in "The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet" provide insights into George Bernard Shaw's broader commentary on morality, society, and human behaviour?
4. What role do religion and spirituality play in the characters' production of justifications and excuses, and how do religious beliefs shape their moral reasoning?

5. How might the study of justifications and excuses in this play contribute to the construction of characters' identities within dramatic discourse?

## **2. Literature Review**

The traditional concept of Discourse Analysis confines it to the realm of spoken language or conversation. This is reflected in Crystal's (1992) definition of discourse as "a continuous stretch of language, especially when spoken, often forming a coherent unit." However, in the modern context, Ahumaraeze (2011) argued that the scope of discourse extends beyond spoken language. Discourse can encompass written forms as well, and it arises from the practical use of language. It encompasses any organized piece of language that goes beyond a single sentence ( *ibid*). It also considers the context in which language is used and the individuals involved in producing it. A piece of discourse is expected to serve a purpose and should exhibit traits of coherence and cohesion, ensuring it has meaning and unity. Discourse, therefore, can be seen as the actualization of various functions, including the social, expressive, and referential aspects of language (Ahumaraeze, 2011).

Discourse Analysis, in essence, is the study of discourse. It delves into the diverse functions that language can fulfil. Drama, as an independent literary genre with its own distinct characteristics, can be subjected to analysis in its own right. While the language used in drama can take the form of poetry or prose, this fact alone does not justify categorizing it under another genre like poetry or prose. It can and should be analyzed independently as a unique genre, drama (Ahumaraeze, 2011).

In drama, dramatic figures, are portrayed as individuals who communicate verbally. Their speech is the primary and most immediate means through which their identity as "persons" is conveyed. These characters only exist within the language framework established by the script and their complexity as characters is shaped by their actions, interactions, and behaviour in various situations and spoken exchanges. These figures have the flexibility to assume different significance and roles, ranging from leading to supporting characters across different scenes or settings relying on a sequence of spoken events to unfold their personalities. interpreters such as the audience or readers are actively involved in the process of constructing characters' identities. This stands in contrast to other storytelling forms like novels or epic narratives,

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which typically tell rather than show the characters' development through speech and interaction (Herman, 1995).

Dramatic discourse is a distinctive form of communication that goes beyond mere words, encompassing the full engagement of both the speaker and the audience. It is characterized by the clear expression of the intended message, incorporating structural, logical, and pragmatic elements. In dramatic discourse, language is not the sole conveyor of meaning; it is complemented by the harmony of movement, rhythm, and visual imagery. This form of communication serves as a powerful tool for vividly portraying the world on stage. What sets dramatic discourse apart is its step-by-step presentation of the author's speech, the protagonist's speech, and the actor's delivery, resulting in unique pragmatic and socio-pragmatic adaptations that distinguish it from other literary genres (Khursanov, 2022).

Discursive psychology is a field of study that places psychology within the context of real-life interactions and everyday situations. It investigates how individuals construct, convey, and comprehend psychological concepts as they engage with one another in various settings, from family dynamics to institutional environments. This approach prompts us to reevaluate the very essence of psychology, shifting away from traditional notions of mental processes and behavioural patterns occurring behind the scenes. Instead, it centres on the categories, constructions, and orientations that people employ to express aspects of agency, distress, or comprehension during interactions within specific contexts. Discursive psychology is unique in that it prioritizes discourse as the primary arena for human action, understanding, and shared meaning. It views individuals as inherently social and relational, emphasizing psychology as a practical domain rather than a detached theoretical pursuit. Its research methods stem from its foundational theories and concepts, reinforced by empirical insights ( Wiggins and Potter,2007)

For social psychologists, accounts refer to the common explanations people provide for their own and others' actions. These explanations encapsulate attributions and results from personal assessments. Accounts have been considered as tools for shaping how others perceive us and as reactions to challenging situations. They can also be viewed as specific instances of explaining actions used to navigate and resolve conflicts. This concept finds its



roots in the sociology of accounts, with earlier influences from the field of deviance sociology.

## **2.1 Theory of Accounts**

Austin's (1961) influential article "A Plea for Excuses", is a fundamental starting point for the study of accounts in social psychology. He argued that studying excuses is essential for two reasons. First, excuses provide insight into the nature of normal conduct by shedding light on situations where there has been a failure in typical behavior, revealing the mechanisms underlying successful actions and the emergence of social order. Second, Austin believed that understanding excuses was crucial for comprehending the causes of human actions. He suggested that instead of discussing free will in abstract terms, we should examine how people account for freedom and constraint when breakdowns occur and excuses or justifications are needed. Austin's distinction between justifications and excuses is a central contribution, with excuses admitting the wrongdoing but attributing it to external factors, while justifications assert that certain actions are reasonable or even virtuous in specific circumstances without denying responsibility. In sum, Austin's work laid the foundation for contemporary ideas about accounts and their significance in social psychology and understanding human behaviour (Herman, 1995).

Individuals create and maintain a particular image in social interactions, but when this image is disrupted by a failure event, they must provide explanations, or "accounts." ( Goffman, 1967). Scott and Lyman (1968) argue that "accounts" serve as the explanations people offer when questioned about actions that appear unexpected or deviate from social norms to maintain social harmony by bridging the gap between what was expected and what occurred. Accounts can be categorized into "justifications" and "excuses." These categories come into play when an individual is accused of engaging in behaviour perceived as "bad, wrong, inept, unwelcome, or otherwise undesirable." A "justification" states that the unexpected action was reasonable or even virtuous given the circumstances, while an "excuse" declares that the action may not have been right but was influenced by external factors. Accounts assist in making sense of behaviour, whether our own or others' when it falls outside of what's expected. In this manner, they facilitate understanding and reconciliation in social interactions ( Scott and Lyman, 1968).

## **2.2 Scott and Lyman's Justifications and Excuses**

Individuals often employ justifications and excuses as distinct techniques through which they can navigate the ethical implications of their actions, with justifications involving a reclassification of morally questionable acts, whereas excuses entail the acknowledgement of wrongdoing while seeking forgiveness based on circumstances.

### **2.2.1 Justification**

Justifications cover situations where responsibility is acknowledged, but the wrongful nature of the behaviour is rejected (Vaca-Guzman & Arluke, 2005), ( Visscher, 2008). Pleasants (2021 ) suggested that justification is the process of demonstrating that an action, which initially appeared to be morally wrong, actually falls under a category of morally permissible actions. So, for example, a woman fatally stabs a man. At first glance, her action appears to be that of a murder( *ibid*). However, upon further investigation, it is revealed that she was defending herself from an attack by the man she killed. Hence, self-defence is a morally permissible act (justified). Therefore, justification involves the reclassification of actions that initially seemed impermissible into categories of actions that are permissible(Pleasants, 2021). To 'excuse' means to acknowledge that the agent's actions were either wrong or, inappropriate, but it would be unjust to blame them for those actions (Baron, 2006).

In sum, Justification absolves the actor entirely: if someone is excused from blame, it still holds that they acted wrongly (because without wrongdoing, there would be no basis for an excuse). Conversely, if someone acted with justification, they did not act wrongly, and there is consequently no need for an excuse (Pleasants, 2021 ). Distinguishing justifications from excuses lies in their assertion that the wrongdoer's actions were acceptable within the context, thereby absolving them of any legal responsibility (Visscher, 2008). Justifications essentially validate the conduct as morally correct, effectively refuting any wrongdoing (Arye, 2012).

Scott and Lyman ( 1968) proposed that individuals can employ four forms of justifications “ techniques of neutralisation” as in the following:

1. Denial of Injury: This technique involves acknowledging the act but asserting its permissibility because it did not harm anyone or did not harm anyone who deserves concern. It can apply to both people and objects.



2. Denial of Victim: Individuals justify their actions by claiming that the victim deserved the injury. This may involve perceiving certain categories of people or objects as inherently deserving harm.
3. Condemnation of Condemners: This justification involves acknowledging the act but dismissing its relevance because others commit similar or worse acts without facing consequences or condemnation.
4. Appeal to Loyalties: Actors assert that their actions were permissible or even morally right because they served the interests of someone to whom they owe unwavering allegiance or affection.

Additionally, individuals may employ "sad tales," which involve presenting a selective, often distorted narrative of their past to explain their current state. There is also the concept of "self-fulfilment," where individuals justify their actions based on personal fulfilment and the pursuit of their interests. These forms of justification and excuse provide a framework for understanding how individuals rationalize their behaviour when facing accusations of wrongdoing or undesirable actions ( Scott and Lyman, 1968).

### **2.2.2 Excuses**

**Excuse**, on the other hand, means that an individual may be pardoned for engaging in a morally wrong action if there were factors related to their abilities or circumstances that made it challenging for them to avoid such behaviour, or to recognize that their actions were morally incorrect (Pleasants, 2021 ). On the same page, Snyder& Higgins (1988) assert that excuses involve shifting blame for personal setbacks away from central aspects of oneself to maintain a positive self-image and a sense of control (Snyder and Higgins 1988). Excuses, as defined by Loon (2023), seek to lessen the punishment for unlawful acts rather than validate them morally. Excuses according to Scott and Lyman ( 1968) entailed acknowledging that the act in question is indeed bad, wrong, or inappropriate but denying full responsibility. For example, a soldier could admit to the wrongfulness of killing but claim that his actions were not entirely voluntary, as he was following orders and had no choice ( Scott and Lyman, 1968).

Excuses become relevant when one's behaviour is not entirely under his control. This could be due to external physical forces, involuntary reflex actions, or a disability that hinders his ability to be fully responsible or blameworthy for the actions ( Blumoff,2009). Hand in hand with Blumoff, Batey ( 2014) argued that an excuse is valid when it results from a disability or a reasonable mistake, creating a condition that justifies the behaviour ( Batey, 2014). Excuses do not absolve individuals of moral responsibility nor do they alter the moral wrongness of their actions. Instead, excuses focus on the individual and the circumstances surrounding their actions when determining the extent of blame (Sliwa, 2019).

According to Scott and Lyman ( 1968), there are four modal forms through which excuses are typically framed:

1. **Appeal to Accidents:** Excuses based on accidents mitigate or relieve responsibility by pointing to the inherent hazards in the environment, the natural inefficiency of the human body, and the inability to regulate all motor responses. These excuses are acceptable because accidents are irregular and infrequent occurrences in an individual's life.
2. **Appeal to Defensibility:** Excuses based on defensibility argue that individual's actions were influenced by a lack of complete *knowledge* or *free will*. This can include claims that certain information were not available, leading to behaviour that would have been different with full information. Interference with free will can also be invoked, such as situations involving duress or undue influence. Factors like intoxication or temporary lunacy may impair both will and knowledge, justifying individual's behaviour.
3. **Appeal to Biological Drives:** Some excuses attribute conduct to uncontrollable biological drives, often focusing on sexual appetite as a common example. In societies where beliefs in the influence of biological factors on behaviour persist, invoking biological drives can serve as a valid excuse.
4. **Scapegoating:** Scapegoating is another form of excuse in which individuals shift responsibility for their actions onto the behaviour or attitudes of others. This may involve blaming others for provoking a response or using external factors as a justification for one's behaviour.

## 2.3 Linguistic Style and Identity

In day-to-day social interaction, five distinct language styles: Intimate, Casual, Consultative, Formal, and Frozen, as delineated by Joos (1967), hold prominence, each distinguished by its unique characteristics. The **Intimate style** is employed primarily for personal and emotional expression rather than the conveyance of factual information, manifesting in utterances such as "Engn" or "Cold" during family gatherings. Conversely, the **Casual style** is widespread among friends and acquaintances. It uses slang and familiar idioms to establish a sense of belonging and mutual understanding, with phrases like "Come on!" to signal camaraderie. The **Consultative style** takes place when interacting with unfamiliar individuals, it focuses on providing background information and a conducive conversational environment, often incorporating phrases like "yes" and "I see" by the addressee to facilitate dialogue. In contrast, the **Formal style** is regarded as a meticulous adherence to grammar and vocabulary. It is commonly found in professional or academic settings. Finally, the **Frozen style** exemplifies extreme formality. It is typically encountered in written documentation, marked by minimal intonation and the deliberate selection of words that convey utmost seriousness (Joos, 1967).

Identity maintains a close connection with language and human behaviour. It revolves around the relationship between self-evaluation and the other's judgments of individuals. These judgments, in turn, act as tools for shaping, the identities that people present in their daily interactions. It is not an easy endeavour to define identity due to the complexity of personal identity. It encompasses the pivotal role of language in labelling, categorizing, and passing judgments on both oneself and others. Moreover, identity is inherently uncertain, mirroring the perpetually shifting social landscapes that individuals navigate. Identity is a dynamic entity, in a constant state of change, continually adapting in response to the dynamics of society (Strauss, 1969).

## 2.4 G. B. Shaw's Dramatic Style

Bernard Shaw, a renowned playwright in British literature, is celebrated for his thought-provoking and clever plays that challenged the conventional romantic ideals of his era. Through his work, Shaw fearlessly addressed controversial subjects like prostitution, gender discrimination, false morality,

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social class disparities, and political ideologies. He strongly opposed the inequality and injustice perpetuated by capitalism during his lifetime. Shaw's plays were a fusion of drama, comedy, and social commentary, creating a unique genre that revolutionized traditional melodramatic conventions. In his works, he skillfully incorporated philosophical, theological, and psychoanalytical theories, reflecting his own concerns and beliefs. Despite facing criticism, Shaw made a significant impact on British and global theater, particularly through his "drama of ideas" approach, which aimed to impart moral guidance. He employed irony and comedy as powerful tools to convey serious perspectives on moral and social institutions, utilizing techniques such as reversion, inversion, sharp dialogue, and ironic aphorisms. Shaw's plays often defied conventional comedic patterns and offered alternative viewpoints on societal norms and values (Gokaj, 2014).

Shaw was an important figure in English drama. He wrote many plays that were clever, insightful, and socially conscious. He was especially interested in exploring current social issues in his plays, and he frequently used his characters to challenge conventional thinking. His plays can be divided into different stages. His early plays focused on social criticism, and he often used them to address social ills like slum landlordism and prostitution. In his middle stage, Shaw began writing plays that were more historical in nature, and he often used them to explore philosophical issues. His plays became more experimental in his later years, and he frequently used them to explore new ideas and modes of expression (Kulthe, 2016). Bernard Shaw is known for his use of paradox in his plays. He often uses paradox to make audiences think about the world in new and unconventional ways. Some critics argue that Shaw's mastery of paradox is one of the things that makes his plays so unique and powerful (Ajtony, 2012).

"The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet" is a one-act play set in the American Wild West. Written in 1909 by the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw, the play was described by him as a religious tract in dramatic form. The title, with "shewing" being the British equivalent of "showing," hints at the play's theme of revealing or exposing. The central character, Blanco Posnet, is a cowboy accused of horse theft. The play revolves around his trial headed by Judge Balbinder Beecham. In this rough and lawless town, people are eager to see Blanco Posnet put on trial, not necessarily for justice but for their entertainment. During the trial, Blanco Posnet claims that he prayed for

salvation in the wilderness and had a divine revelation in which he encountered God. He argues that this divine involvement has transformed him into a better person and, as a result, he should be shown mercy.

### **3. Research Methodology**

The present research is both quantitative and qualitative in procedure. The frequency of excuses and justifications attributed to each character's dialogical interaction will be focused on. The design of the analysis will follow the emergence of the types of accounts along the plot structure in an attempt to be more systematic when tracing the development of the conflicts and associating excuses and justifications with each stage. Some examples will also be selected as representative of a particular type of excuse or justification which is to be a decisive contribution to the development of the trajectory of events and actions in Shaw's *The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet*. Such qualitative procedure is helpful in presenting not all instances of the characters' accounts, but only those that establish and progress the discussion of the major concepts of the accounts theory and to gather deeper insight into the development of the characters' motivations towards the commitment of the untoward behaviours. The numerical evidence of both types of accounts is to be considered important since frequency is textual evidence that adds validity to the research findings and general interpretations. Thus, the statistical support provides systematicity to the overall analysis of *The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet* when discussing the characters' ways of presenting excuses and justifications.

### **4. Findings and Discussion**

In this section, a detailed examination of the moral landscape within George Bernard Shaw's "*The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet*" is presented. The focus is oriented toward exhibiting the diverse strategies employed by characters to defend their actions categorised into justifications and excuses. Justifications, which encompass logical explanations for untoward behaviour to make them morally accepted, significantly outweigh excuses, implying a deliberate engagement by the characters in a thoughtful manner to defend their actions. This implies a detailed examination of the moral and logical foundations of their conduct. Moving forward, the analysis delves deeper into the types of justifications observed in the play. In the subsequent part, the focus shifts to the

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various excuse and justification strategies employed by characters, revealing prominent themes within the characters' attempts to mitigate blame for their actions. "Appeal to Biological Drives" takes the highest occurring range, followed closely by "Appeal to Defeasibility." These excuses suggest that characters often attribute their actions to uncontrollable biological impulses, lack of knowledge or will in an attempt to distance themselves from full responsibility. Whereas “ Sad Tales” justification emerges as the dominant type, indicating that characters lean toward justifying their actions by narrating unpleasant past events.

Shaw’s “The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet” abounds in accounts in both types, mostly produced by the protagonist, Posnet, though some other characters also contributed to the presence of excuses and justifications. The table and figure below show the frequency of both types of accounts in the play.

Table (1): Account types in Shaw’s “*The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet*”

Type of account	Frequency	Percentage
Excuses	12	24.489%
Justifications	39	75.510%
Total	51	

The table and the figure display that justifications with 39 occurrences outnumber the excuses which feature in 12 dialogical interactions. Further, not only Blanco Posnet is producing accounts for his untoward behaviour, but also some other characters contribute to the development of the presence of some accounts. However, most of the justifications are produced by Blanco Posnet because he admits to the fact of the horse disappearance though denying the stealing act in some fewer situations; Hence, excusing statements emerge. The table and the figure offer a quantitative representation of the frequencies and percentages of account types, shedding light on the characters' motivations and the moral complexities inserted in the play. The first table and figure provide a general overview, highlighting the dominance of justifications over excuses.

The exploration of moral accountability unfolds through the diverse strategies used by characters to defend their actions. Across the play's discourse, a variety of justifications and excuses emerges, portraying a number of social practices where characters navigate the complexities of their choices, highlighting rational explanations over superficial evasions. The findings presented in the



tables indicate a predominant inclination among the characters to rely more heavily on justifications rather than excuses when explaining their actions. Justifications, which make the accusers' actions sound morally accepted, outweigh excuses by a significant margin with a notably higher frequency comprising approximately 75.510% of the identified accounts. In contrast, excuses, which typically aim to reduce blame without substantive reasoning, are comparatively lower at around 24.489 %. This disparity suggests that the characters in the play tend more to engage in thoughtful reasoning to defend their actions, delving into the moral, ethical, or logical foundations behind their behaviour. Hence, Justifications aim to provide a logical or moral basis for what was done. In contrast, excuses often focus on mitigating blame without necessarily providing substantial reasoning. They might deflect responsibility or offer explanations that don't address the core moral or ethical aspects of the behaviour.

#### 4.1 Justifications in Shaw's *The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet*

Through the examination of the frequencies and percentages of various justifications produced throughout the play, a comprehensive view of how characters justify their actions and decisions in moral contexts can be provided. The table and figure below provide a representation of the different types of justifications found in the play with frequencies and percentages.

Table (2): Frequencies and Percentages of Justification Types in Shaw's "*The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet*"

Types of Justifications	Frequency	Percentages
Denial of injury	10	25.641%
Denial of victim	5	12.820%
Condemnation of Condemners	2	5.128%
Appeal to Loyalties:	5	12.820%
sad tales	13	33.333%
self-fulfilment	4	10.256%
Total	39	

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The table unveils a variety of justifications, each offering a particular insight into the characters' ethical reasoning. "Sad Tales" justification type emerges as a dominant form. The table indicates a presence of significant amount of "Sad Tales" (33.333%). This form of justification involves presenting narratives that emphasize unfortunate circumstances or past events to explain current actions. It suggests a reliance on suffering or unfortunate situations as a means to contextualise behaviours within the play. Some characters produce sad tales such as Blanco, Emma, Babsy and Elder Daniels. Their stories allow the major justified accounts to be the focus of the society that they live in and its diversified conditions. The majority of the sad tales are attributed to those produced by Blanco who tried his best to defend his position. Thus, his accounts of such type become a representative of his untoward behaviour. Below are the selected sad tales that are produced by those characters who find themselves obliged to defend themselves through providing this type of justification:

1. *BABSY. You are. Wait till your own horse is stolen, and youll know better. I had an uncle that died of thirst in the sage brush because a negro stole his horse. But they caught him and burned him; and serve him right, too( The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 97).*
2. *BLANCO [with calm conviction] He's a rotten Sheriff. Oh, a rotten Sheriff. If he did his first duty he'd hang himself. This is a rotten town. Your fathers came here on a false alarm of gold-digging; and when the gold didn't pan out, they lived by licking their young into habits of honest industry ( The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 101).*
3. *BLANCO. Never fear. Do you suppose I want to claim you? Do you suppose I'm proud of you? Youre a rotten brother, Boozy Posnet. All you ever did when I owned you was to borrow money from me to get drunk with. Now you lend money and sell drink to other people. I was ashamed of you before; and I'm worse ashamed of you now, I wont have you for a brother. Heaven gave you to me; but I return the blessing without thanks. So be easy: I shant blab. ( The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 102-103).*
4. *ELDER DANIELS. Too late, Blanco: too late. [Convulsively] Oh, why didnt you drink as I used to? Why didnt you drink as I was led to by the Lord for my good, until the time came for me to give it up? It was drink that saved my character when I was a young man; and it was the want of it that spoiled yours. Tell me this. Did I ever get drunk when I was working? (The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 103).*

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5. *EMMA. I have known that a child was born crooked because its mother had to do a horse's work that was stolen. ( The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 97).*
6. *THE WOMAN. The man looked a bad man. He cursed me; and he cursed the child: God forgive him! But something came over him. I was desperate, I put the child in his arms; and it got its little fingers down his neck and called him Daddy and tried to kiss him; for it was not right in its head with the fever. He said it was a little Judas kid, and that it was betraying him with a kiss, and that he'd swing for it. And then he gave me the horse and went away crying and laughing and singing dreadful dirty wicked words to hymn tunes like as if he had seven devils in him (The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 119).*

Each character thus tries to exhibit an aspect of their state and attitude. For example, Blanco attacks the sheriff and even his brother as well as the village through providing historical evidence of the rotten government. The casual style is solely adopted by Blanco since he now considers all other members of the society as peers with greater distance. This is evident in the contracted forms he uses "*If he did his first duty he'd hang himself.*" Babsy provides a sort of evidence to justify her position from the practice of stealing in general. Her account of the untoward event was rendered through a formal style since she was talking to an audience with varied statuses in the courtroom. The formal style is represented by the structured language of her account. Elder Daniels blames Blanco for not following the same routine of life. His act of blaming comes as a justified response to Blanco's position from the overall act of stealing. The intimate style is adopted by Daniels when responding to the unfavoured behaviour initiated by Blanco. The adopted style also sheds light on how Blanco and his brother were still related to each other. The woman's intimate style is also adopted to render her justified account through a sad tale that explains her position from the stealer. Her syndetic listing of a series of events and activities are presented in an attempt to justify her account of dealing with this man.

"Denial of Injury" is the next dominant form of justification with a percentage of 25.641%. Characters here frequently deny causing harm, or assert that their actions did not result in any damage or injury, reflecting an attempt to distance themselves from perceived wrongdoing.

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Below are the selected Denial of Injury examples that are produced by some of the characters:

1. *ELDER DANIELS. He has a soul to be saved, almost like the rest of us. I am bound to try to put some religion into him before he goes into his Maker's presence after the trial( The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 98).*
2. *BLANCO. I can't change my soul, Elder: it changes me—sometimes (The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 109).*
3. *THE WOMAN. No. I say no. I swear it. Sheriff: don't hang that man: oh don't. You may hang me instead if you like: I've nothing to live for now. You darent take her word against mine. She never had a child: I can see it in her face (The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 120).*
4. *THE SHERIFF. In my opinion, to commandeer a horse for the purpose of getting a dying child to a doctor is not stealing, provided, as in the present case, that the horse is returned safe and sound. I rule that there has been no theft (The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 122).*

In the above instances, each character adopts a specific style that aligns with their attitude, their relationship with the listener/audience, and the seriousness of the situation. Elder Daniels is expressing a sense of responsibility towards the salvation of Blanco's soul. His language reflects a sense of duty, aiming to guide someone morally. His statement, "I am bound to try to put some religion into him," reflects a religious background and duty-bound attitude that aligns with the Consultative Style. Blanco's statement leans toward a Casual style. The features of the Casual style is reflected in his presentation of a thought about his soul in a somewhat relaxed manner, using a play on words to express a deeper philosophical idea and in the contracted form "can't". His style is more conversational, even while addressing Elder Daniels. The woman's plea to the Sheriff is emotionally charged and desperate. Her words, "Oh don't. You may hang me instead if you like: I've nothing to live for now," are intimate and emotional, reflecting her state of distress. She is begging desperately by using an intimate style to convey her feelings and situation. The Sheriff's statement reflects a formal and authoritative manner. His explanation, "In my opinion, to commandeer a horse for the purpose of getting a dying child to a doctor is not stealing," is delivered in a formal style. He is making a judgment based on his

authority and interpretation of the law, using a style that is appropriate for a legal ruling. The intimate style is reflected through the employment of simple language suitable to that used between family members.

A significant occurrence is attributed to "Appeal to Loyalties", with a percentage of 12.820%. This type of justification provides a prospect through which characters rationalize their actions, either by denying harm, emphasizing unfortunate past circumstances, or aligning their behaviour with loyalties to justify their moral standpoint. These, justifications, further, serve as moral defences that explain and rationalize the actors' actions or decisions throughout the narrative of the play. Characters adopt such type of justification to defend their actions by emphasizing loyalty to a specific cause or person, framing their behaviour within the context of these loyalties. The following are instances of this type of justifications:

5. *JESSIE: What they call justice in this place is nothing but a breaking out of the devil thats in all of us. What I want to see is a Sheriff that aint afraid not to shoot and not to hang (The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 97).*
6. *Blanco: You laid your hands on everything father and mother had when they died. I never asked you for a fair share. I never asked you for all the money I'd lent you from time to time. I asked you for mother's old necklace with the hair locket in it. You wouldn't give me that: you wouldn't give me anything. So as you refused me my due I took it, just to give you a lesson. (The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 103).*
7. *THE WOMAN. I took it to save my child's life. I thought it would get me to a doctor in time. It was choking with croup. ( The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 118)*

These excerpts display various styles—casual, intimate, and consultative—employed by the characters to express personal opinions, emotions, grievances, and reasons for their actions. Jessie employs a casual style with a touch of intensity. She challenges the notion of justice in the place, attributing it to the inherent evil within everyone. Her use of colloquial language and the phrase "What I want to see" indicates a personal desire or preference. The casual style suggests that Jessie feels comfortable expressing her opinion freely, possibly among peers or individuals she considers on the same level. Blanco's statements reflect a mix of casual and intimate styles. He addresses personal grievances with his brother, revealing a familial conflict and a sense of betrayal "*You laid*



*your hands on everything father and mother had when they died.*” Blanco uses a direct, conversational tone, which falls under the casual style “*You wouldn't give me that: you wouldn't give me anything.*” However, the intimate nature of the content of discussing personal family matters and feelings of betrayal indicates a closer relationship or emotional involvement. The woman's statement adopts a consultative style blended with intimate elements. She provides a reason for her actions, explaining that she took the horse to save her child's life. The use of “choking with croup” demonstrates an attempt to convey specific information. Additionally, her emotional explanation about her child's condition adds an intimate touch, revealing personal pain and the firmness of the situation.

“Denial of Victim” and “Condemnation of Condemners” make up fewer presence, at 12.820% and 5.128%, respectively. These justifications involve arguments asserting that the victim deserved the harm or asserting that others have done the same act and are unpunished. Below are instances of Denial of Victim:

8. *BABSY. There! You hear that? I say stealing a horse is ten times worse than killing a man. And if the Vigilance Committee ever gets hold of you, you'd better have killed twenty men than as much as stole a saddle or bridle, much less a horse*(The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 97).

9. *ELDER DANIELS [coming back to the centre of the group] The strange thing is that he wasn't on the horse when they took him. He was walking; and of course he denies that he ever had the horse. The Sheriff's brother wanted to tie him up and lash him till he confessed what he'd done with it; but I couldn't allow that: it's not the law* ( The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 99).

10. *STRAPPER. If I hadnt promised Elder Daniels here to give him a chance to keep you out of Hell, I'd take the job of twisting your neck off the hands of the Vigilance Committee*(The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 101).

11. *BLANCO. Not they. Hanging's too big a treat for them to give up a fair chance. Ive done it myself. Ive yelled with the dirtiest of them when a man no worse than myself was swung up. Ive emptied my revolver into him, and persuaded myself that he deserved it and that I was doing justice with strong stern men. Well, my turn's come now. Let the men I yelled at and shot at look up out of Hell and see the boys yelling and shooting at me as I swing up* (The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 106).



12. *BLANCO. Lord keep me wicked till I die! Now Ive said my little prayer. I'm ready. Not that I'm guilty, mind you; but this is a rotten town, dead certain to do the wrong thing* ( *The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 109*).

The characters' language choices and styles vary to convey their emotions, justifications, and perspectives effectively within the given social context. Babsy again uses a formal style, addressing the severity of horse theft compared to killing a man in a courtroom setting. Elder Daniels maintains a consultative style by providing background information others do not know about the thief not being on the horse when taken and the ensuing discussion within the group " *The strange thing is that he wasn't on the horse when they took him. He was walking; and of course he denies that he ever had the horse. The Sheriff's brother wanted to tie him up and lash him till he confessed what he'd done with it; but I couldn't allow that: it's not the law.* ". Strapper employs a casual style by using contractions " *hadn't* " and " *I'd* ", expressing a threat to the thief but implying a promise made to Elder Daniels about keeping the thief out of trouble. Blanco's statements exhibit a mix of formal and casual styles. When describing the town and its response to justice, he adopts a formal style " *this is a rotten town* ". However, as he contemplates his fate and the potential injustice, his language becomes more casual, expressing his personal feelings and thoughts " *Now Ive said my little prayer. I'm ready. Not that I'm guilty, mind you.* "

With reference to the occurrence of condemnation of condemners, the statements below are representative:

13. *THE SHERIFF. It does you credit, Elder: every man here will acknowledge it. But religion is one thing: law is another. In religion we're all brothers. In law we cut our brother off when he steals horses* ( *The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 112*).

14. *BLANCO. As to the horse, I say nothing; except that it was the rottenest horse you ever tried to sell* ( *The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 112*).

In the above examples, the sheriff engages in a consultative style, discussing the separation between religion and law. The sheriff supplies background information to Elder Daniels about the distinction between religious beliefs and legal consequences. Blanco responds to the sheriff's statement about horse theft with a casual style to express his disdain for the quality of the horse in question.

Lastly, "Self-Fulfillment," at 10.256%, reflects instances where characters justify their actions by claiming personal development, suggesting that their actions serve their own growth. This interpretation of justification usage reveals how they rationalize their behaviour within the moral framework of their time. The statements below showcase the use of this type of justification by several characters:

15. HANNAH: . *But men are like children when they get a gun in their hands: theyre not content til theyve used it on somebody*(The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 96).

16. BLANCO. *Not a bit of it. Neither God nor Devil tempted me to take the horse: I took it on my own. He had a cleverer trick than that ready for me. [He takes his hands out of his pockets and clenches his fists]. Gosh! When I think that I might have been safe and fifty miles away by now with that horse; and here I am waiting to be hung up and filled with lead! What came to me? What made me such a fool? Thats what I want to know. Thats the great secret* ( The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 106).

17. FEEMY.No: *it wasn't him. I only said it out of spite because he insulted me. May I be struck dead if I ever saw him with the horse!* (The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 120).

These statements showcase a range of linguistic styles. Hannah expresses a casual style in her statement. The Casual Style is characterized by the use of figurative language such as metaphor and simile. Hannah employs a simile to convey her opinion on men and their behaviour when they have power or weapons ("men are like children") to make a point about men's tendencies. Blanco's speech in this instance starts with a casual style "*Not a bit of it. Neither God nor Devil tempted me to take the horse: I took it on my own. He had a cleverer trick than that ready for me* " as he uses a conversational tone. However, it quickly transitions to an intimate and emotionally charged style "*Gosh! When I think that I might have been safe and fifty miles away by now with that horse; and here I am waiting to be hung up and filled with lead! What came to me? What made me such a fool? Thats what I want to know. Thats the great secret* " . He reflects on his actions and expresses regret and frustration. The use of exclamations ("Gosh!") and the questions indicate personal and emotional confusion. Blanco's style shift from casual to intimate reveals his inner conflict and vulnerability. Feemy adopts a casual style with an emotional overtone in her denial. Her statement includes a sensitive plea ("May I be struck

dead") to emphasize the sincerity of her denial. Feemy's language is more informal and emotional, reflecting her attempt to assert her innocence and express her feelings regarding the situation.

#### 4.2 Excuses in Shaw's "The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet"

Within the moral landscape of Shaw's "The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet", characters navigate their moral dilemmas through various excuse strategies, as depicted in the following table detailing excuse types and their frequencies and percentages:

Table (3): Excuse Types in Shaw's "The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet"

Types of Excuses	Frequency	Percentages
Appeal to Defeasibility	5	41.666%
Appeal to Biological Drives	6	50%
Scapegoating	1	8.333%
Total	12	

The outlining table of the types of excuses offers insight into the various strategies used by characters to mitigate their untoward behaviours or decisions within the play. The most prominent type of excuse observed is "Appeal to Biological Drives." This type revolves around assigning actions or behaviours to uncontrollable biological impulses, such as instincts or drives, and constitutes a considerable amount of the characters' use of excuses for their acts. The following instances show how characters employ this kind of excuse in their speech:

18. *JESSIE: They shoot for the love of it ( The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 96).*

19. *BLANCO. Any fool can hang the wisest man in the country. Nothing he likes better. But you cant hang me ( The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 101).*

20. *ELDER DANIELS. That just shews the wisdom of Providence and the Lord's mercy. God fulfils himself in many ways: ways we little think of when we try to set up our own shortsighted laws against his Word. When does the Devil catch hold of a man? Not when he's working and not when he's drunk; but when he's idle and sober. Our own natures tell us to drink when we have nothing else to do. Look at you and me! When we'd both earned a pocketful of money, what did*

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*we do? Went on the spree, naturally. But I was humble minded. I did as the rest did. I gave my money in at the drink-shop; and I said, "Fire me out when I have drunk it all up." Did you ever see me sober while it lasted?* ( The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 104).

21. ELDER DANIELS. *Never mind him, Feemy: he's not right in his head today* (The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 108).

22. ELDER DANIELS. *He's not accountable. He's out of his mind, Sheriff. He's not fit to go into the presence of his Maker* ( The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 108).

Jessie's statement is brief and direct. She employs a casual style that is used among peers or those familiar with the context. The statement "*They shoot for the love of it*" is delivered without additional context or explanation, which indicates a level of assumed shared knowledge within the conversation. Blanco's statement carries a casual tone. He uses informal language ("*Any fool can hang...*") to express his belief in his ability to evade capture or punishment. Elder Daniels uses a mix of formal and consultative styles, incorporating religious and philosophical undertones. His speech is structured and contains reflections on Providence and divine wisdom, suggesting a formal style. However, the consultation aspect arises from his attempt to convey wisdom or knowledge, assuming the audience may not have considered these perspectives. Elder Daniels's second statement adopts an intimate style when addressing Feemy. The statement "*Never mind him, Feemy: he's not right in his head today*" suggests a close relationship with Feemy and a caring by using a reassuring tone. This style is suitable for offering comfort and support in a more personal context. In his third statement, a consultative style is employed to convey a message to the sheriff, asserting that Blanco is not mentally stable and should not face certain consequences.

*Appeal to Defeasibility* appears in five occasions. This excuse involves asserting that actions were not fully within the individual's control due to factors like lack of information, impairment of will, or external influences. It is a usual strategy used by characters to mitigate their responsibility for certain actions. The following are examples of this type of excuse with their analyses:

23. EMMA: *Why don't he put it down on his wife? She wants it worse than half the men he lynches. He and his Vigilance Committee, indeed!* (The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 97).

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24. BLANCO. *I didnt steal it. I distrained on it for what you owed me. I thought it was yours. I was a fool to think that you owned anything but other people's property*( *The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 103*).
25. BLANCO. *Dont deceive yourself, Boozy. You sell drink because you make a bigger profit out of it than you can by selling tea. And you gave up drink yourself because when you got that fit at Edwardstown the doctor told you youd die the next time; and that frightened you off it.* (*The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 105*).
26. ELDER DANIELS. *Sheriff: let me off this. I didn't ought to swear away this man's life. He and I are, in a manner of speaking, brothers* (*The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 112*).
27. THE WOMAN. *Yes: I took it from a man that met me. I thought God sent him to me. I rode here joyfully thinking so all the time to myself. Then I noticed that the child was like lead in my arms. God would never have been so cruel as to send me the horse to disappoint me like that* (*The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 119*).

Emma's statement reflects a casual style. She uses colloquial language and rhetorical questions ("Why don't he put it down on his wife?") to express her opinion. Her tone indicates a level of familiarity and comfort in expressing her thoughts openly to individuals within a close social circle. Blanco's interaction with Boozy showcases a consultative style. He offers information based on what he perceives to be Boozy's motivations, providing background details and a degree of objectivity in his explanation. The use of technical information about Boozy's health situation indicates a consultative approach to fill potential knowledge gaps and clarify aspects of his and Boozy's choices. Elder Daniels uses a consultative style in his plea to the Sheriff. He provides information about his relationship with Blanco, stating that they are "brothers." The use of formal language like "ought to" and the attempt to appeal to a sense of brotherhood suggests an attempt to convey information and influence the Sheriff's decision in a rational way. The Woman's narrative takes on an intimate style as she recounts a personal experience. Her tone is emotive and reflective when she describes her initial joy and subsequent disappointment.



Furthermore, the presence of "Scapegoating," with 8.333% a percentage of occurrences, reflects instance where characters shift the responsibility for their actions onto others, pointing fingers at someone else as the cause for their behaviour. Although less frequent, this strategy is notable within the play's ethical reasoning. Absent from the table is "Appeal to Accidents," which signifies that within the narrative of "The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet," characters rarely attribute their actions to accidental circumstances to mitigate their responsibility for the immoral or unaccepted action. This examination illustrates the primary excuses employed by characters within the play, shedding light on the ethical strategies they use to make their behaviours excused, especially emphasizing biological drives and defeasibility as major types of excuses within the play context just as in the example below:

28. *ELDER DANIELS. Dont dare to put your theft on Him, man. It was the Devil tempted you to steal the horse (The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet p, 105).*

Elder Daniels adopts a consultative style by providing advice or guidance to the person he is addressing. He is asserting his perspective and providing an explanation for the action of stealing, attributing the temptation to steal the horse to the Devil. This style is employed when one person seeks to offer counsel or direction based on their beliefs or knowledge assuming that the other party does not know.

## 5. Conclusion

The detailed analysis helps us understand how characters deal with being responsible for their actions in some complicated situations of verbal combats in "*The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet.*" Looking at the numbers and types of justifications and excuses, one can find how the major characters justify and present a variety of excuses to account for their responsibility, though mostly they denied their commitment to many untoward activities and behaviours. Appeal to biological drives is the most relevant type of excuse used in the play to rationalise untoward actions by pointing to natural impulses of attraction or desire. When characters invoke these biological drives, it creates a sense of empathy and understanding. The dominant type of justification is sad tales. These sad tales often involve personal suffering. By sharing these stories, characters seek to gain empathy or forgiveness for their behaviour, framing their



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actions as understandable reactions to their past experiences. The domination of such excuse and justification suggests a thematic focus on empathy, understanding, and the complexity of human motivations. The language styles adopted by Blanco and some other characters are all in all oriented towards the mitigation and relief of their responsibility. The play features many instances of justifications than excuses. This can be attributed to the nature and danger of the issue being argued and/or investigated about (stealing the horse) in that most of the characters involved in this case, particularly Blanco Posnet, asserted several positive values directly related and contradicted with the case of stealing the horse.

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