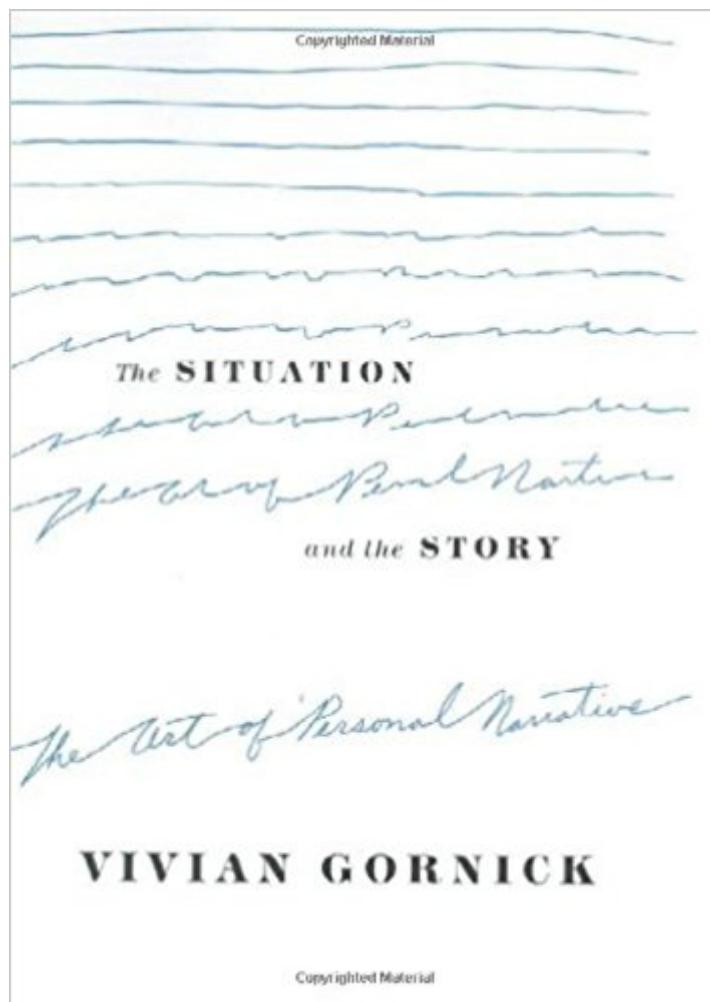


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# The Situation And The Story: The Art Of Personal Narrative



## **Synopsis**

A guide to the art of personal writing, by the author of *Fierce Attachments* and *The End of the Novel of Love* All narrative writing must pull from the raw material of life a tale that will shape experience, transform event, deliver a bit of wisdom. In a story or a novel the "I" who tells this tale can be, and often is, an unreliable narrator but in nonfiction the reader must always be persuaded that the narrator is speaking truth. How does one pull from one's own boring, agitated self the truth-speaker who will tell the story a personal narrative needs to tell? That is the question *The Situation and the Story* asks--and answers. Taking us on a reading tour of some of the best memoirs and essays of the past hundred years, Gornick traces the changing idea of self that has dominated the century, and demonstrates the enduring truth-speaker to be found in the work of writers as diverse as Edmund Gosse, Joan Didion, Oscar Wilde, James Baldwin, or Marguerite Duras. This book, which grew out of fifteen years teaching in MFA programs, is itself a model of the lucid intelligence that has made Gornick one of our most admired writers of nonfiction. In it, she teaches us to write by teaching us how to read: how to recognize truth when we hear it in the writing of others and in our own.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

I rarely write book reviews, but this book was so far from what it is presented to be that I felt I needed to let others know my observations about it. I enjoyed the first 26 pages (the introduction), but reading the rest of the book was an exercise in frustration. The introduction explains the difference between a situation and a story in a piece of writing - very helpful. I thought the remainder

of the book would continue to explain these differences and how to know which one is which in one's own writing. I was wrong. The sections on essays and memoirs were mainly lengthy passages from the writings of others followed by Gornick's opinion on what was beautiful, effective, affecting, and worthwhile about the piece. My frustration with this format is that Gornick continued to use the word 'we' instead of 'I' to describe her own reactions, observations, and connections, thereby presuming that the reader felt the same way and interacted with the work in question in precisely the same way as she did. Presumptions of how the reader feels, thinks, and observes are rampant throughout this book. One should never write as if one knows how the reader understands and responds to a piece. This is a very basic rule of composition. If she had just had the courage to say 'I felt this...This is when I realized what the purpose of the story was...This is how I responded, etc' instead of trying to get me to believe that we shared identical thoughts and experiences, I wouldn't have disliked the book as much as I did. I still would have thought that everything beyond the introduction was unnecessary and not what the book purports to be about, but I wouldn't have hated it like I did.

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