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Technique Analysis

Gregory Burnham, in his story "Subtotals," uses a remarkable structuring unique to short story writing. The narrator in this tale spews out only a list of seventy seemingly cold, hard facts about himself. He offers no comments about what he has done thus far with his life; yet, through the narrator's accomplishments the reader sees a character equally as developed as in any traditionally narrative form. The man reveals he can be both kind ("Number of compliments, given:4051") and cruel ("Number of insults, given:10,038"). He shows himself as affectionate (kisses, given:21,602) yet disloyal ("unfaithful to wife: 2"). He is a man who has walked up more stairs ("745,821) than down ("743,609), has wished he was dead ("2") and yet keeps a sense of humor by ending the story with "Number of times I forgot what I was going to say: 631." Ultimately, he is a person no better or worse than any of us, and Burnham's technique of character development from a mere list has exciting possibilities. If we praise Hemmingway for a style we call spare or lean, we should definitely be spotlighting a new ground breaker named Gregory Burnham.