An analysis of *The Pulley* by George Herbert

The Pulley by George Herbert is a religious, metaphysical poem which centres on the 'pulley' as a prime conceit in the poem. Herbert wants to unveil the truth that why human beings are so restless and unsatisfying despite having all the things he wants. After God made this universe, he gathered all the blessings of the world in a glass and distributed them to the human beings one after another. First, he gave the strength, therefore human became strong enough to survive. One by one, god gave them the beauty, wisdom, honour, pleasure and many other blessings. When almost all was gone, God kept 'rest' at the bottom of the glass, thinking that 'both should losers be' if the 'rest' is given. When they get all they want, in the sense of sufficiency, they may forget God. On one hand, when human beings get rest, they forget god and take a rest. As a result, god will lose the love and affection of human beings. On the other hand, when rest is given, people will lose strength, honour, wisdom and beauty and all other human capacities. God knows the man is by birth prone to lethargy. They will get rest at the cost of the progress. Progress and the rest never come together. We get one losing the other. God is sure that man will only praise the things God has given to them not the god himself. Mankind will lose their essence, get tired and wander in search of rest. In the concluding part of the poem, Herbert gives two reasons behind human going to god. First, they will go to God out of the goodness, faith or divine emotions and inborn loyalty for him. Secondly, if they do not go to god out of the first cause, they will go to him when they are tired. Weariness takes human beings to the shadow of god. So, the God decides to keep the mankind away from the rest so as to make him feel the eternal rest can only be found in God. For the sake of the rest, at least man will remember to god and go to him for his love and rest. The repining restlessness or the discontentment with the worldly things will finally lead a man to god. He wanted man to discover the real rest only in Him. He alone can truly give the mankind the rest they frantically seek. The poet answers in a simple tone that the reason behind man being so unsatisfying and weary is that God has not bestowed us with his precious jewel 'rest', but kept the jewel 'rest' with him. So, for the sake of rest, we always run from here to there. We think now we are complete because we have everything, but the moment we feel so, another moment we feel empty and become restless. This is what exactly God
wants us to be. If this happens to us then only, we remember god and go to him for the ‘rest.’

The title of the poem the pulley is a conceit that carries the theme of the poem. In pulley from the mechanical point of view to operate it a kind of power and force has to be applied to one end to lift the object of the other end. The force applied makes a difference to the weight that is being lifted. The ‘rest’ that god keeps with him is the leverage that draws the mankind towards god. Two quite different objects are forcefully compared here, one from the pure physics that is pulley and the other from the pure religion that is God. The relationship of man and god is compared with the metaphorical pulley. To pull mankind back to the God, back to his origin, God keeps man away from the ‘rest.’ This can only be possible in the metaphysical conceits. So the title is thematic.

‘The Pulley’ by George Herbert is a four-stanza poem that is separated into sets of five lines, or quintains. Each of these quintains follows a structured rhyme scheme. They conform to a pattern of ABABA, alternating end sounds as the poet saw fit. The consistent repetition in the rhyme helps to give the poem an overwhelming feeling of unity. This makes sense as the entirety of this piece is dialogue spoken by God or about God.

A reader should also take note of the moments of repetition in the starting words of ‘The Pulley.’ There are a few moments in which these words rhyme. One notable instance is stanza two with the words “Then” and “When” at the beginning of lines two and three. There is also an example in stanza three with “So” and “Bestow” in lines two and five.

In regards the meter, the lines are also very consistent. The first and fifth lines of each stanza conform to a pattern of iambic trimeter. This means that there are three sets of two beats per line. The first of these is unstressed and the second stressed.

The stresses remain the same in lines two, three and four, but they mostly contain five sets of two beats. This means they are written in iambic pentameter. The regularity of the rhyme scheme, in tandem with the meter, give the poem a very structured feeling. A reader learns what to expect from line to line, and at least in regards to structure, there are no surprises.
Summary of *The Pulley*

‘*The Pulley*’ by George Herbert speaks on one part of the Christian creation story in which God chose to imbue humanity with blessings. The poem begins with the speaker stating that he is retelling the story of creation. He is particularly interested in the part where God gives humankind knowledge, wisdom, beauty and strength. These are important features of human existence that flowed easily from God to humankind. There is one blessing that God did not let out of his cup, rest. He chose to withhold an innate ability to rest from humankind in order to keep his creation close to him. When one gets weary, they turn to God. Or that is his reasoning. Herbert’s speaker states that God did not want humanity to love Nature more than they love “the God of Nature.”

**Analysis of *The Pulley***

**Stanza One**

In the first stanza of this piece the speaker begins by describing the creation of humankind. Herbert’s speaker is seeking to retell the Christian story of creation with a few added detail. The speaker is able to describe what God was thinking and feeling when he decided to make humanity. God saw what he had made, and decided to pour “a glass of blessings” on humankind. These “blessings” were just “standing by” in a cup, waiting to be used. This speaks to the ease of God’s access to forces separate from human understanding. This fact will become important later on in the text when God decides to withhold a blessing without a second thought.

The speaker relays Gods words at the moment as he addresses all of creation. He decides to “‘Pour on [humankind] all that we can.” The “world’s riches,” everything from strength to beauty is bestowed. They have come together into a “span.”
Stanza Two

The first of the blessings in ‘The Pulley’ that came to humanity was “strength.” It “made a way.” Next came beauty. It was soon followed by “wisdom, honour” and lastly “pleasure.” These are all incredibly important parts of the human experience. There is one more element though that in this retelling of creation Herbert’s speaker chose not to include. That was “Rest.”

“Rest” as a blessing equal to beauty and strength is interesting. It is not something that one might immediately think of as a feature of life that can be given or granted. But in this narrative, it is the “treasure” that remains at the bottom of God’s cup. He chooses not to give it to humanity. His reasoning behind this choice is contained within the next two stanzas.

Stanza Three

In the next five lines the speaker describes how it was God’s choice to not bestow “rest” on humanity. He knew that if he did so, then “He would adore my gifts instead of me.” Herbert’s speaker thinks that God made this choice because he didn’t want humankind spending their days worshiping nature. Instead, they should be appreciating “the God of Nature.”

Rest is not something that is an integral part of human life and God made an informed, at least to him, choice to withhold it.

Stanza Four

In the final lines of ‘The Pulley’ the speaker finishes up God’s reasoning behind his choice not to give humanity a complete life of rest. He doesn’t want humanity to never rest, but there should be different periods. It is ideal for everyone to rest only until they feel restless, then they should get back to their lives. God believes that if there is “weariness” in one’s everyday life then that feeling of exhaustion will “toss” humankind to his “breast.”

These different periods of activity, exhaustion, rest, and rejuvenation are just as integral to human existence as are strength and wisdom. It seems that Herbert’s God
has chosen to add them for a reason that appears entirely selfish though. It is not clear, at least through these few lines of reasoning, how “weariness” helps humanity, aside from forcing them closer to God.