

2 THE BUTLER TAKES A GLASS OF PORT

Oil on canvas 94 x 74 cm (37" x 29")

Signed and dated 1890

Beverley Art Gallery,

East Riding of Yorkshire Council (Museums)

Earlier in the day this man discharged his duties in the proper manner, serving his master and guests at table. The same butler now emerges from the shadows of the room to take for himself a furtive glass of port – not for the first time we suppose (judging by his luminous nose!). The playful *double-entendre* on that word “takes” is associated with this very moment of relish painted by Elwell into the picture. The same may be said for the even better title of *All Things come to the Man who Waits*.

Indeed the butler’s shrewd expression, most readable in candle glow, shows he is well informed as to the warmth, quality and glorious nectar to be imbued. As he savours it in anticipation, we perceive Elwell’s extraordinary ability to convey those feelings to us.

Such dramatic use of light was not uncommon among early Netherlandish artists, such as the Utrecht Mannerists. A leading proponent of the style, Gerard Seaghers (1591-1651), shows how skilful and effective this method can be. We consider that Elwell equals this.

