In San Francisco’s Palace of the Legion of Honor one can enjoy a typical work by Pieter de Hooch, a leading painter of the so-called Delft School and the Dutch Golden Age. The painting, entitled *A Woman Nursing an Infant with a Child and a Dog*, depicts one of the serene domestic scenes the Delft School is well-known for having repeatedly celebrated, especially around the middle of the seventeenth century (Fig. 10.1). It is a domestic interior, with a woman sitting by a window, where soft, glowing light comes in. Unlike his contemporary Vermeer, whose domestic settings with women sitting or standing by a window usually suggest a state of longing, Pieter de Hooch’s nursing mother, with her infant in her lap and her other child beside her feeding a dog while catching a playful glimpse of the viewer, exudes blissful familial content.

No other representative of Dutch genre painting, with its renowned depictions of everyday life and predilection for interior settings, seems to have explored so persistently the pictorial possibilities not just of the domestic in general but of the familial more specifically.¹ A large number of Pieter de Hooch’s interiors are marked by the unmistakable presence of familial snapshots: children of various ages interacting with their mothers in different spots within the Dutch household. More than just a moral commentary on and confirmation of the Dutch bourgeois household with the nuclear family at its core, these pictures raise broader questions regarding the construction, proliferation, and potential of artistic discourses about the “actual” and the “real” in a given society. Thus de Hooch’s distinctive interest in the familial may be seen as an attempt to further expand on the prevailing Dutch mentality of his day, which encouraged the contemplation of contemporary culture as reflected in the genre images it continually inspired.

From the point of view of a classicist interested in the production, circulation, and interpretation of lyric genres, such phenomena in the history of cul-

ture are significant. Despite the obvious historical divergences between archaic Greece and Golden Age Holland, the taste of both eras for discourses (verbal in the former case, visual in the latter) involving the representation of what appears to be the current reality is noteworthy, especially if one takes into