I Never Asked You to Listen
(after the painting by Wengechi Mutu)

I always knew you were listening
to the rhythm of my heart,
the river-rush of blood
through veins and arteries
and for the words
I could not speak or ever will.

If you must listen
without permission
without the hope of knowing me
as you imagined
you will learn how silence speaks
the truest feelings of the heart.

Try Dismantling the Little Empire Inside of You
(After the painting by Wengechi Mutu)

Inside of you
an empire grew
from molecules
and single cells
to complex organs
villages to city states
of every kind
and shape
with a single purpose
to stay alive.
Take one away
and the others fail—
such is the fate
of empires
great and small
inside of you and out
ey they come and go
in the blink of an eye
every one of them
as well as you.

A Dragon Kiss Always Ends in Ashes
(after the painting by Wengechi Mutu)

If you kiss a chicken
on its beak
the worst that can happen
is that it will cluck at you;
if a frog,
you might not get
the handsome prince you imagined
but a case of warts instead;
a chameleon, more likely,
will change from blue to green
a sign that it sees in you
a perfect mate;
but kiss a dragon on its lips
or on its tail
and watch its anger grow
its eyes get red
with malevolent intent
and feel it breathe ferocious fire
as you are turned to ash.
The moral, then:
ever love another woman
more than she cares for you
and know how to kiss your wife
when you come home.

Neil Ellman is a poet from New Jersey who has published numerous poems in print and online journals, anthologies and chapbooks throughout the world. He has been nominated twice each for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net.