Bushido: The Warrior’s Floral Way

“A military man without poetry is a savage, not a samurai”
— KUOZO UCHIMURA

They deployed a florid language of death:
the rhetoric of Brooke’s precious earth
is far outdone by the troops of Arakan
whose rotting flesh would turn to grass
and wave forever in the breezes that blow
from Japan; a general versified how
his men were plucked like wild flowers
of the mountains; another could dream
the screaming Burmese hills would become
his next-world highway; what their foes
dubbed crazed kamikazes blossomed into
Ten Thousand Petals, Floating Chrysanthemums.

Capture dishonored the warrior
whose sword was his soul,
whose last choice was to impale
himself in the sap and flush
of a life anyhow frail:
the poetry was in the spring cherry —
Sakura! Sakura!
signaled the deathward defenders of Peleliu,
we are the scattered brief blossoms. . . .

MICHAEL THORPE

Arakan, Peleliu: Two of the bloodiest battlefields in the Pacific War, 1942-45.

Floating Chrysanthemums: Code-name of the Kamikaze (“Divine Wind”) suicide-bombing campaign.

Sakura: Cherry blossoms.