

Van Noppen, Leonard Charles ^[1]

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by D. A. Yanchisin, 1996

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Leonard Charles Van Noppen, poet, literary expert, and translator, was born at Wemeldinge, Zeeland, Holland. His parents, Cornelius Martin and Johanna Maria Cappon Van Noppen, immigrated to the United States settling first in Michigan in 1874 and then near [Greensboro](#) ^[2] in 1877, where they became members of the [Society of Friends](#) ^[3] and their three boys, [Charles Leonard](#) ^[4], John J., and Leonard Charles, attended the New Garden Boarding School. Both parents of Leonard Charles Van Noppen died within a few months of each other in 1887. His brother, C



Leonard Charles Van Noppen.

Photo courtesy from Library of

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^[5]Charles Leonard, sent him to the renamed Friends School, [Guilford College](#) ^[6]. He received an A.B. degree from Guilford in 1890, a B.Litt. from [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[7] in 1892, and an M.A. from Haverford College in 1893. He returned to The University of North Carolina in 1893 to study law. Although he was licensed, he never practiced, having found literary endeavors more suited to his temperament.

For two years he attended lectures at the [University of Utrecht](#) ^[8] and the [University of Leiden](#) ^[9], where he immersed himself in the study of Dutch literature. On his return to the United States he published his translation of Joost van den Vondel's *Lucifer* ^[10] in 1898. It was heralded as a major literary event. The parallels between this first English translation of *Lucifer* and *Paradise Lost* ^[11] led some critics to pronounce Milton a plagiarist. The translation was of such a fine quality that Henry Hadley set it to music, and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra presented two performances of it in Carnegie Hall. Van Noppen translated two other Vondel works, *Sampson* and *Adam in Banishment*, which reinforced the claims of Vondel's influence on Milton.

Because of his translations, Van Noppen became well known as an authority on Dutch literature. He presented lectures at Princeton University, Johns Hopkins University, the Lowell Institute of Boston, and a number of other institutions, and from 1913 to 1917 he was the first Queen Wilhelmina Lecturer at Columbia University. He was made an honorary member of the Society of Netherlands Literature, and at various times before 1918 he continued his studies at the Dutch universities.

Although preoccupied by his literary endeavors, Van Noppen had brief stints as a journalist in Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and New York City, and at various times he was a private secretary to Justice John Woodward of Jamestown, N.Y., Major William J. Gaynor of New York City, and Nathan L. Miller, who later became governor of New York. In 1913 he read his own poem, "The Vision—The Palace of Peace," at the dedication of the Carnegie Peace Palace at [The Hague](#) ^[12] and in 1916 presented his "[Abraham Lincoln: An Elegy](#)" ^[13] at the dedication of Lincoln Memorial University. On his first visit to Holland Van Noppen became a Boer sympathizer. He returned to the United States with Boer propaganda and translated the Independence Proclamation of Martinus Theunis Steyn, president of the Orange Free State. During his second trip to Europe he met African statesman Paul Kruger in Paris, and he assisted the Boer Press Bureau at Dordecht.

After the United States became involved in [World War I](#) ^[14], he enlisted as a lieutenant in the U.S. Naval Reserve. Appointed assistant naval attaché at The Hague, he was reputed to have carried on some secret work. He held the same post for eight months at the U.S. embassy in London. In 1919 his collection of war poems, *The Challenge* ^[15], was published first in Great Britain and then in the United States. In London it was praised by Laurence Binyon, Sydney Brooks, and Thomas Hardy. Van Noppen spent the remainder of his life working on an epic poem, "Cosmorama: A Symphonic Poem of Evolution," sometimes referred to under the title "An Epic of the Cell from Protoplasm to Deity."

Van Noppen had the well-proportioned physique and physical capability of an athlete. Although he favored a Byronic appearance in dress and demeanor, his face also presented the qualities of strength and stolidity that are usually associated with the Dutch character. He possessed a dynamic and outgoing personality that generally made him a focus at social gatherings. His poetry was popular during his lifetime, especially before and during World War I in the midst of a neo-romantic revival. His poetry appeared in the *Christian Quarterly* ^[16], *Current Opinion* ^[17], and *Independent* ^[18], and his work was reviewed in the major magazines and newspapers including *The Times* ^[19] of London.

On 28 Sept. 1902 he married Adah Maude Stanton Becker, of Jamestown, N.Y., a former journalist who turned to editing his work after their marriage. They had no children. Van Noppen died at age sixty-seven in Glen Cove, Long Island. After her husband's death, Adah Van Noppen spent the remainder of her life preparing Van Noppen's manuscript of his epic "Cosmorama" for publication until her own death in Cambridge, N.Y., on 25 Feb. 1944.

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Authors:

[Yanchisin, D. A.](#) ^[26]

Origin - location:

[Greensboro](#) ^[27]

[Guilford College](#) ^[28]

[University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#) ^[29]

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