Sherlock Holmes, Arthur Conan Doyle and Queen Victoria

In most cases, targeting people by shooting their initials into a structure might be considered a tad hostile or threatening. However, as we Afghanistan Perceivers and others of our ilk know, Sherlock Holmes defies norms and conventions.

As such, Queen Victoria had no reason to fear our hero when he precisely fires his pistol to honor the woman who became the longest serving English monarch … until her great-great-granddaughter Elizabeth II supplanted her with that distinction in 2015.

In "The Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual," a bored, lethargic Holmes blasts exact holes in one the walls at 221-B Baker St. to form the letters VR, Victoria Regina, the Latin nomen for Queen Victoria. While Holmes's best friend, John H. Watson, wryly states, "I felt strongly that neither the atmosphere nor the appearance of our room was improved by it," we Sherlockians understand The Master's reverence for the Mai Blue, which is what Victoria's German mutter und grosemutter called her since she was born in 1819 on the 24th of May, which is tomorrow.

We're also here because Holmes's creator, Arthur Conan Doyle, was born in 1859 on the 22nd of May, yesterday. These two Victorians – the older being the eponym of the era and the younger being an embodiment of that time – influenced their worlds in similar ways despite their being almost exactly 40 years apart in age.

As longtime Perceivers Dean Clark and Will Thomas have contended for decades, the Victorian London that we picture in our minds is not that of Charles Dickens, but that of Conan Doyle and delivered by Holmes and Watson. And while our two favorite boys can take Turkish baths and three-hour, late-night arm-in-arm strolls together, they and Queen Vic make a mighty *literary* threesome.

The influences of Queen Victoria, Conan Doyle, Holmes and Watson on each other are indelible. The queen was an avid reader of Conan Doyle, Dickens, George Eliot, Alfred Lord Tennyson, the Brontë sisters and others. When Conan Doyle kills off Sherlock in 1893's "The Final Problem," Queen Victoria is reported to

have protested via her courtiers. And, eventually, Conan Doyle revives Holmes from his apparent death at Reichenbach Falls with 1903's "The Empty House."

In 1908's "The Bruce-Partington Plans," set in 1895, Holmes receives an emerald tie pin from a "certain gracious lady ... of august name" and speaks of her with admiration. Readers then and now know *that* is Queen Victoria.

For his part, Watson is the prototypical Victorian gentleman – the polite protector of the realm, the defender of women and women's honor, and, as a wounded veteran from the Fatal Battle of Maiwand, the honorable warrior ready for a righteous fight when danger is imminent. And, as our own Lady Brackenstall has maintained for a half-century, he's a gorgeous hunka-hunka-burnin' love. Had her Scottish butler not gotten in the way, Queen Victoria would have certainly shared a bed, or at least a private Turkish bath, with John Hamish Watson, a much better looking man than Prince Albert and John Brown combined.

Our late friend and Perceiver Joe Kestner, who wrote three academic books on the canon, argued that the Sherlockian stories are testaments to the British Empire, its preeminence in the Victorian Era, and its lingering greatness as its influence began to wane after Victoria's death in 1901.

Queen Victoria's reign was marked by her embrace of technology, science and modernization. Hmmm. Does that sound like a certain consulting detective that we know? One whose innovative techniques actually influenced police procedures in Great Britain, Europe and the United States? Plus, we know that Sherlock Holmes admires strong women (Irene Adler … Helen Stoner … Violet Smith … Kitty Winter). While Queen Victoria and Sherlock Holmes would undoubtedly never engage in sexual congress, they would have certainly exchanged witty repartee and mutual respect had they ever met.

In several areas that we associate with the Sherlockian canon – volumes and volumes of writing, *and* dodging death, Queen Victoria laps by miles Conan Doyle and his greatest character. Conan Doyle was a prolific writer and earned his knighthood from Victoria's son with his pro-Britain justification of the Boer War. His Sherlockian stories and novels came to about 1,500 pages of handwritten

manuscript and his non-Sherlockian work counted for another 7,000 – about 8,500 pages total. However, Queen Victoria wrote nearly 44,000 pages of manuscript! To steal from our dear canonical names chair, Brandi Blankenship, Queen Victoria gave good … pen.

We marvel at how Holmes escapes murder at both Reichenbach Falls and "The Empty House." Those are Gerald Ford numbers; he got shot at two times in September 1975. It's certainly admirable to defy death twice. But Queen Victoria lived through EIGHT assasination attempts, including two by one man. Now I'm certainly one of the first to call her an old bat and Queen Frump, but Victoria's moxy and bravery in the face of death rival that of Elizabeth I, arguably England's greatest monarch.

Queen Victoria and Sherlock Holmes have also affected life in the United States. The only Victorians more Victorian than the British Victorians were the American Victorians trying to out-Victorian the real Victorians. Americans on wagon trails to the western states paused at midday to set up tables, spread table cloths and lay proper place settings to dine. Christmas, Valentine's Day and white wedding dresses, which Queen Victoria adored, were immensely popular in Great Britain, and became rages in the United States. And Sherlock Holmes has often been more popular in the impudent American colonies than in his homeland.

Therefore, whether one is a fan or an opponent of the British monarchy, one cannot deny the impact that Queen Victoria and Arthur Conan Doyle, along with Sherlock Holmes and John H. Watson, have had on Great Britain, America and the world. That's why we're gathered here to celebrate a significant woman's and a significant man's almost identical birthdays.

Now, let's commence with the toasts and doggerel!