Wind accretion by a binary stellar system and disc formation

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ABSTRACT

I calculate the specific angular momentum of mass accreted by a binary system embedded in the dense wind of a mass-losing asymptotic giant branch star. The accretion flow is of the Bondi–Hoyle–Lyttleton type. For most of the space of the relevant parameters the flow is basically an isothermal high Mach number accretion flow. I find that when the orbital plane of the accreting binary system and the orbital plane of the triple system are not parallel to each other, the accreted mass on to one or two of the binary system components has high specific angular momentum. For a large fraction of triple-star systems, accretion discs will be formed around one or two of the stars in the binary system, provided that the mass ratio of the two stars in the accreting binary system is \( \gtrsim 0.5 \). Such discs may blow jets which shape the descendant planetary nebula (PN). The axis of jets will be almost parallel to the orbital plane of the triple-star system. One jet is blown outward relative to the wind, while the other jet passes near the mass-losing star, and is more likely to be slowed down or deflected. I find that during the final asymptotic giant branch phase, when the mass-loss rate is very high, an accretion disc may form for orbital separation between the accreting binary systems and the mass-losing star of up to \( \sim 400–800 \) au. I discuss the implications for the shape of the descendant PN, and list several PN which may have been shaped by an accreting binary-star system, i.e. by a triple-star system.

Key words: stars: AGB and post-AGB – binaries: general – stars: mass-loss – ISM: general – planetary nebulae: general.

1 INTRODUCTION

Both theory (Soker 1990) and observations (Sahai & Trauger 1998) suggest that many, but not all, planetary nebulae (PNs) are shaped by two oppositely ejected jets from the progenitor system (for a recent review see Soker 2004). If not well collimated, these jets are termed CFW, for collimated fast wind. In principle, the jets (or a CFW) can be blown by the post-asymptotic giant branch (post-AGB) progenitor itself, or by an accreting companion. Theoretical and observational considerations, for example, the detection of collimated outflows emanating from the vicinities of AGB stars (Imai et al. 2002, 2003; Hirano et al. 2004; Sahai et al. 2003; Vinkovic et al. 2004), suggest that in most cases, or even all, a binary companion blows these jets (see Soker 2004). The jets, as with most other astrophysical objects, are thought to be blown when an accretion disc is formed around a compact object and the accretion rate is high enough.

For an accretion disc to form, the specific angular momentum of the accreted mass \( j_a \), must obey the condition \( j_a > j_b \), where \( j_b = (GM_bR_b)^{1/2} \) is the specific angular momentum of a particle in a Keplerian orbit at the equator of the accreting star of radius \( R_b \) and mass \( M_b \). The accretion flow is of the Bondi–Hoyle–Lyttleton type (Hoyle & Lyttleton 1939; Bondi & Hoyle 1944), where gas with an impact parameter of \( b \lesssim R_{acc} = 2GM_b/v_r^2 \) is accreted. The impact parameter is the distance of the accreted mass from the symmetry line of the flow, termed the accretion line, at infinity before reaching the shock wave,

\[
R_{acc} = 10.6 \text{ au} \left( \frac{M_b}{0.6 \text{ } M_\odot} \right) \left( \frac{v_r}{10 \text{ km s}^{-1}} \right)^{-2} \tag{1}
\]

is the Bondi–Hoyle accretion radius and \( v_r \) is the relative velocity between the gas and the accreting body. For the rest of the paper I will be dealing mostly with large orbital separations to the mass-losing star \( a_0 \), such that the orbital velocity is low, and the relative velocity can be taken as the wind velocity \( v_t \simeq v_r \). The condition for a companion in a circular orbit accreting from the AGB wind [but not via a Roche lobe overflow (RLOF)], can be written in the following form (Soker 2001):

\[
1 < \frac{j_a}{j_b} = 0.25 \left( \frac{\eta}{0.2} \right)^{1/2} \left( \frac{M_a + M_b}{1.2 \text{ } M_\odot} \right)^{1/2} \left( \frac{M_b}{0.6 \text{ } M_\odot} \right)^{3/2} \times \left( \frac{R_b}{1 \text{ } R_\odot} \right)^{-1/2} \left( \frac{a_0}{100 \text{ au}} \right)^{-3/2} \left( \frac{v_t}{10 \text{ km s}^{-1}} \right)^{-4} \tag{2}
\]
The orbital separation between \( M_a \) and the centre of mass of the accreting binary system is \( a_0 \), while \( a_{12} \) is the orbital separation of the accreting binary system. I assume circular orbits, with an inclination angle, \( \theta \), between the two orbital planes defined here.

The Bondi–Hoyle–Lyttleton accretion rate is \( M_b \approx \pi \frac{a^2}{2} v_\rho \rho \), where the density at the location of the accretor is \( \rho = \frac{|M_a|}{4\pi a^2 v_\rho} \). Substituting the relevant parameters during the final intensive wind and taking \( v_\rho \approx v_s \), the mass accretion rate is

\[
\dot{M}_b \approx 3 \times 10^{-7} \left( \frac{M_b}{0.6 M_\odot} \right) \left( \frac{v_s}{10 \text{ km s}^{-1}} \right)^4 \left( \frac{a}{100 \text{ au}} \right)^2 \frac{|M_a|}{10^{-4} M_\odot \text{ yr}^{-1}} M_\odot \text{ yr}^{-1}. \tag{3}
\]

It is commonly assumed that \( \sim 10 \) per cent of the accreted mass is blown into the CFW (or jets; Soker & Rappaport 2000), having speeds of the order of the escape velocity from the companion (Livio 2000), \( 100–10^2 \) and \( 10^3–10^4 \) km s\(^{-1}\), for a main-sequence star and a WD companion, respectively.

The basics of the binary model for shaping PNs and related objects, for example, \( \eta \) Carinae, are reviewed in Soker (2004, where more references are given), while the ejection of two jets by a wide binary companion, which is one of several routes for the shaping of PNs and which is a process directly relevant to the present paper, is studied in Soker (2001; see also Soker & Rappaport 2000). Here I notice the following.

(i) By equation (2), accreting WD companions may form accretion discs at orbital separation of \( a_0 \approx 150 \) au, while main-sequence stars must be much closer at \( a_0 \lesssim 40 \) au.

(ii) When the mass-losing upper-AGB star lose mass at a very high rate of \( \dot{M} \approx 10^4 M_\odot \text{ yr}^{-1} \), the condition on the angular momentum (equation 2) is more difficult to fulfil than the condition on the mass accretion rate.

(iii) A single companion star will blow jets perpendicular to the binary equatorial plane. (or the jets will precess around this direction).

In the following sections I will show that these three properties do not necessarily hold for a binary system accreting from the wind of AGB stars. Readers interested in results and observational implications only, may skip to Section 4.

## 2 THE FLOW STRUCTURE

The basic structure of the triple-star system is drawn schematically in Fig. 1, where I refer to stars by their masses. The binary system \( M_{a1} - M_{a2} \) is accreting mass from the wind blown by the star \( M_a \). The orbital separation between \( M_a \) and the centre of mass of the

![Figure 1. A schematic drawing of the triple-star system. The binary system \( M_{a1} - M_{a2} \) accretes mass from the wind blown by the star \( M_a \). Circular orbits are assumed with an inclination angle, \( \theta \), between the two orbital planes defined here.](https://academic.oup.com/mnras/article-abstract/350/4/1366/986224)

![Figure 2. A schematic drawing of the flow structure near the accreting binary system, marked by the two small circles. The arrows represent the flow direction (not scaled with velocity). The preshock stream lines with five consecutive arrows represent the limiting distance from the accretion line; the stream lines closer to the accretion line represent mass accreted to the binary system behind the shock wave; the stream lines at larger distances from the accretion line represent mass which escapes to infinity behind the shock. The dense flow toward the accreting system along the accretion line, represented by three close arrows, is termed the accretion column.](https://academic.oup.com/mnras/article-abstract/350/4/1366/986224)
around the gravitating system. The unperturbed gas flows from left to right, and hits a shock wave as drawn. Gas with an impact parameter smaller than a value of \( b_c \simeq R_{\text{acc}} \) is accreted; in the figure these are streamlines with impact parameters smaller than those of the streamlines represented by five consecutive arrows. Behind the shock wave the gas changes direction, and either flows to infinity or towards the accreting system directly or first to the accretion line behind the accreting system and then towards the accreting body. A high density flow is formed behind the accreting system along and near the accretion line (represented by three close arrows). This is termed the accretion column. The exact structure of the flow and the accretion rate depend on the adiabatic index, \( \gamma \) (e.g. Frank 1995), where \( R_c \) is the radius of the mass-losing star and \( T_c \) is its surface temperature. The corresponding sound speed is \( C \simeq 3 (T_c/3000 \text{ K})^{1/2} (\gamma/10 R_c)^{-1/4} \text{ km s}^{-1} \). The wind Mach number for most relevant cases is \( M \gtrsim 5 \).

I now find the appropriate value of \( \gamma \) for the problem at hand. The flow velocity from an AGB star is \( v_\infty \simeq 10 \text{ km s}^{-1} \). The flow is mostly neutral and dusty. The post-shock temperature will be \( T_s \simeq (3/16) \mu m_H v_\infty^2 / k \simeq 2000 \left( v_\infty / 10 \text{ km s}^{-1} \right) \text{ K} \), where \( \mu m_H \) is the mean mass per particle and \( k \) is the Boltzmann constant. For such a post-shock temperature a large fraction of the dust and molecule are likely to survive the shock and serve as cooling agents for the gas. The pre-shock density is given by

\[
\rho(\alpha) = \frac{M_*}{4\pi d_0^2 v_\infty} \left( \frac{10^{-16} |\dot{M}_\infty|}{\text{yr}^{-1}} \right) \left( \frac{v_\infty}{10 \text{ km s}^{-1}} \right)^{-1} \times \left( \frac{d_0}{100 \text{ au}} \right)^{-2} \text{ g cm}^{-3}.
\]

(4)

The post-shock density will be a few times higher, becoming even higher in the accretion column (Pogorelov et al. 2000). Using fig. 11 of Woitke, Krüger & Sedlmayr (1996), I find the cooling time from \( T \lesssim 8000 \text{ K} \) and density \( \rho \gtrsim 10^{-10} \text{ g cm}^{-3} \) to be \( \tau_{\text{cool}} \lesssim 1 \text{ yr} \). For a density of \( \rho \gtrsim 10^{-10} \text{ g cm}^{-3} \) and a temperature of \( T \lesssim 2000 \text{ K} \), the cooling time is still short, \( \tau_{\text{cool}} \lesssim 3 \text{ yr} \). The typical flow time of most of the accreted gas is

\[
\tau_{\text{flow}} \sim \frac{R_{\text{acc}}}{v_\infty} \simeq 5 \left( \frac{R_{\text{acc}}}{10 \text{ au}} \right) \left( \frac{v_\infty}{10 \text{ km s}^{-1}} \right)^{-1} \text{ yr}.
\]

(5)

I conclude that the post-shock gas for the parameters relevant to accretion from a wind of upper-AGB stars at orbital separations where accretion discs are likely to be formed (see Section 1) is radiative. Namely, the gas is radiatively cooling quite efficiently, such that the flow in the accretion column has a high Mach number, and the effective adiabatic index is \( \gamma \sim 1 \).

The implication of the high Mach number and an efficient radiative cooling is that most of the mass is being accreted in a dense and cold flow near the accretion line—the accretion column. The case for an isothermal flow with very large Mach number, i.e. negligible pressure, has a simple solution (e.g. Lyttleton 1972). In this flow all stream lines hit the accretion line. The total mass accretion rate per unit length on the accretion line is constant \( \dot{m} = \pi R_{\text{acc}} \rho_0 v_0 \), where \( \rho_0 \) and \( v_0 \) are the density and velocity of the unperturbed flow; here they will be taken as \( v_0 = v_\infty \) and \( \rho_0 \) from equation (4). The mass and momentum conservation equations for the flow along the accretion line have infinite number of solutions for the flow from the stagnation point outward, but only one solution from the stagnation point toward the accreting body (Lyttleton 1972, see his fig. 1). The equation for the velocity along the accretion line is given by equation (6) in Lyttleton (1972). The velocity of the \( v(x) \), in units of \( v_0 \), for the case of a stagnation point at a distance of \( x_s = R_{\text{acc}} \) from the accreting body, is presented in Fig. 3: \( x \) is the coordinate along the accretion line measured from the accreting body, given in the figure in units of \( R_{\text{acc}} \) (this is the solution of equation (6) of Lyttleton, with his \( \alpha = 2 \)). It is compared with the Keplerian velocity along a circular orbit around the accreting body \( v_K \). The mass per unit length is then given by \( \sigma = \pi \rho_0 v_0 R_{\text{acc}} (x_s - x)/v(x) \), and it is plotted in Fig. 3 (dashed line) in units of \( 2\pi \rho_0 R_{\text{acc}}^2 \).

When accreting on to a binary system, this solution does not hold any more at distances \( x_s < a_1 \), where \( a_1 \) is the distance of the more massive star in the accreting binary system from the centre of mass of the binary system.

### 3 THE SPECIFIC ANGULAR MOMENTUM OF THE ACCRETED MASS

#### 3.1 General considerations

Each of the two stars, masses \( M_a \) and \( M_b \), accretes mass mainly from the dense flow along the accretion line, i.e. from the accretion column. The accretion flow on to each star does not reach a steady state, because each star periodically changes its distance from the
accretion column as it orbits the centre of mass (beside the case of exactly perpendicular orbital planes; see Section 3.2). I now consider the accretion on star $M_{b1}$. At the closest approach of the star to the accretion column, its orbital velocity is perpendicular to the velocity of gas in the accretion column, and its relative velocity to the gas is

$$v_{1} = \left( v_{K1} + v(a_{1}) \right)^{2} = \left( \frac{2GM_{12}}{a_{1}} \right)^{1/2},$$

where $M_{12} = M_{b1} + M_{b2}$, $v_{K1}$ is the orbital velocity of the star around the centre of mass, $v(a_{1})$ is the Keplerian orbital velocity around the binary system, $v(a_{1})$ is the velocity of gas in the accretion column relative to the centre of mass of the binary system, and $a_{1} = a_{12}M_{b2}/(M_{b1} + M_{b2})$ is the distance of the star from the centre of mass of the binary system. In the second equality I used the result presented in Fig. 3, concerning the inward flow in the accretion column, assuming that $a_{12} \ll R_{ac1}$. Assuming an accretion flow from the accretion column to the star similar to a Bondi–Hoyle–Lyttleton flow, the accretion radius of the star is $R_{ac1} \approx 2GM_{b1}/v_{ac1}^{2}$. The ratio of the accretion radius of the star to its distance from the centre of mass is, using equation (6),

$$\frac{R_{ac1}}{a_{1}} \approx \frac{M_{b1}}{M_{12}}.$$  

(7)

If $M_{12} = qM_{b1} \ll M_{b1}$, then little mass is accreted on to the star $M_{b2}$. In addition, as will be seen later in this section, the specific angular momentum of the mass accreted on to the massive component $M_{b1}$ will be low, reducing the probability of accretion disc formation (the limit of $q \leq 1$ gives the single accreting star case).

The exact conditions for the formation of accretion discs around one or two stars must wait for full three-dimensional (3D) numerical simulations. In the present section I will estimate this value. I will assume

$$R_{1} \ll w \leq a_{12} \ll R_{ac1} \ll a_{0},$$

(8)

namely, the radius of the accreting star is much smaller than the width of the accretion column at the binary location $w(x = a_{12})$, which is smaller than the orbital separation of the accreting binary system, which is much smaller than the accretion radius of the binary system (equation 1), which is smaller than the orbital separation with the mass-losing star. For example, $30 \text{ au} \leq a_{0} \lesssim 300 \text{ au}$, $10 \text{ au} \lesssim R_{ac1} \lesssim 30 \text{ au}$, $10 \text{ R}_{\odot} \approx 0.05 \text{ au} \lesssim a_{12} \lesssim 1 \text{ au}$, with $w(x = a_{12})$ somewhat smaller and $0.01 \text{ R}_{\odot} \lesssim a_{1} \lesssim 1 \text{ R}_{\odot}$. As mentioned in Section 1, the flow on to the binary system will not be exactly axisymmetrical as depicted in Fig. 2, but rather the accreted mass will possess some angular momentum. This excess angular momentum causes the accretion column and shock wave to bend. However, for the large orbital separation $a_{0}$ assumed here, this angular momentum and departure from axisymmetry of the flow at large distances from the accreting binary system can be neglected relative to the specific angular momentum of the accreted mass within the binary system, as I now show. I start with examining the situation for perpendicular orbital planes.

In the calculations to follow I assume that most accreted mass reaches the binary system via the accretion column, so that the characteristic width of the accretion column, $w(x)$, fulfils the condition $w(x = a_{12}) \leq a_{12}$. When $w(x = a_{12}) \gtrsim a_{12}$ the calculations below no longer hold. The binary system will be inside the accreting column, the accretion process will be more complicated, and I expect that the formation of an accretion disc will be less favourable.

### 3.2 Perpendicular orbital planes

In this case $\theta = 90^\circ$ (see Fig. 1). Most of the accreted mass flows toward the centre of mass (again, the flow has a narrow accretion column because it is almost isothermal). The gravitational attraction of the more massive star is stronger on the accretion line, and most of the mass flows toward the massive companion. I treat the more massive companion and the treatment also holds for equal mass components.

The angular momentum of the mass element residing near the centre of mass relative to the centre of the accreting star is

$$j_{\text{cm}} = \omega_{12}a_{12},$$

where $\omega_{12} = [G(M_{12})]^{1/2}/a_{12}^{3/2}$ is the angular velocity of the binary system. For an accretion disc to form, this should be larger than the specific angular momentum on the equator of the accreting star $j_{1} = (GM_{b1}R_{1})^{1/2}$. The condition

$$j_{\text{cm}} = \omega_{12}a_{12}^{2} > j_{1} = (GM_{b1}R_{1})^{1/2}$$

(9)

reads

$$a_{12} > (1 + q^{-1})^{2}/(1 + q)^{-4} \left( \frac{M_{b1}}{0.5M_{12}} \right)^{3/4} \left( \frac{M_{b1}}{0.5M_{12}} \right)^{3/2}.$$  

(10)

This condition can be met by a large fraction of binary systems with a mass ratio of $q \approx 1$. For $q = 1$, a main-sequence accretor, with $R_{1} \approx R_{\odot}$, requires $a_{12} \gtrsim 10 \text{ R}_{\odot}$, and there are many binary systems with $10 \text{ R}_{\odot} \lesssim a_{12} \lesssim 1 \text{ au}$. However, for $q = 0.5$ and $q = 0.3$, the condition reads $a_{12} \gtrsim 54R_{1}$ and $a_{12} \gtrsim 271R_{1}$, respectively. For $q \ll 1$ the condition reads $a_{12} > q^{4}R_{1}$. Therefore, for $q \lesssim 0.5$ only a small number of systems with accreting main-sequence stars are expected to form accretion discs. For accreting WDs, the mass ratio can be as small as $q \sim 0.1$. However, such systems are rare and live for a short time, because, with the mass of a WD being $0.5 \text{ M}_{\odot}$ and a companion being $\sim 10$ times as massive, they will evolve fast off the main sequence. Overall, the formation of an accretion disc requires that the mass ratio in most systems be $q \gtrsim 0.3$ (note that $q \lesssim 1$ by definition).

If the mass is accreted directly from the centre of mass of the accreting binary system, the accretion disc will be in the binary-orbital plane, i.e. perpendicular to the orbital plane with the mass-losing star. Some inclination is expected, though, because the mass will start flowing towards the accreting star before reaching the centre of mass. In any case, jets, if blown, will be in the orbital plane of the triple-star system, or close to it.

### 3.3 Parallel orbital planes

In this case, each of the two stars in the accreting binary system accretes mass in turn, when it reaches the accretion column upstream side. The star in turn, say star $M_{b1}$, ‘cleans’ the accretion column up to a distance of $R_{ac1}$ from its location. Namely, it cleans the region $a_{1} - R_{ac1} \lesssim x < a_{1}$, where as before, $a_{1}$ is its distance from the centre of mass of the accreting binary system, and $R_{ac1}$ is its accretion radius (equation 7). It will be convenient to work with the distance on the accretion column measured from the location of the star $h \equiv x - a_{1}$, and to approximate the density with $\sigma(h) = \sigma(x = a_{1}) + \sigma_{h}$, where $\sigma_{h} \equiv d\sigma/dx$.

After one star leaves the vicinity of the accretion column, some fraction of an orbit will elapse before the second star starts to accrete mass. If the stars accrete only when on the accretion line, the time is exactly half a period. The star, though, will also influence the accretion line when approaching and leaving the line. Crudely, the accretion column has a time of $1/4P_{12}$ to rebuild itself, where $P_{12} = 2\pi/a_{12}$ is the orbital period of the binary system. Under the
assumption \( a_{12} \ll R_{\text{acc}} \), the velocity of the gas in the column density is of the order of the orbital velocity of the binary system (Fig. 3). Therefore, during a time of \( \gtrsim 0.2 P_{12} \) the gas refills the accretion column, and I take the density per unit length as given in Fig. 3. The total accreted mass is then

\[
\Delta m = \int_{R_{\text{acc}}}^{R_{\text{acc1}}} \sigma(h) \, dh = 2 R_{\text{acc1}} \sigma(a_1). \tag{11}
\]

The accreting star crosses the accretion line at a speed of \( \omega_{12} a_1 \), hence the specific angular momentum of the accretion column at distance \( h \) (along the accretion line) from the accreting star is \( \omega_{12} a_1 \, h \). The total accreted angular momentum is

\[
\Delta J = \int_{R_{\text{acc}}}^{R_{\text{acc1}}} \sigma(h) \omega_{12} a_1 \, h \, dh
= \omega_{12} a_1 \int_{R_{\text{acc}}}^{R_{\text{acc1}}} \left[ \sigma(a_1) + \sigma'(a_1) \right] h \, dh
= \frac{2}{3} \sigma(a_1) \omega_{12} a_1 R_{\text{acc1}}^3. \tag{12}
\]

From equations (11) and (12) the specific angular momentum of the accreted mass is found to be

\[
j_{\text{pu}} = \frac{\Delta J}{\Delta m} = \frac{1}{3} \left( \frac{d \ln \sigma}{d \ln x} \right)_{a_1} \left( \frac{R_{\text{acc1}}}{a_1} \right)^2 \omega_{12} a_1^2.	ag{13}
\]

The quantity \( d \ln \sigma / d \ln x \) is plotted in Fig. 3, from which I approximate (1/3) \( d \ln \sigma / d \ln x \approx 0.2 \) in equation (13). I also use equation (7) for \( R_{\text{acc1}} / a_1 \) in equation (13). The condition for the formation of an accretion disc \( j_{\text{pu}} > j_1 \) (equation 9), then becomes

\[
\frac{a_{12}}{R_1} \gtrsim 25 (1 + q^{-1}) (1 + q)^3 = 3200 \left( \frac{M_2}{0.5 M_{12}} \right)^{-4} \left( \frac{M_1}{0.5 M_{12}} \right)^{-3}. \tag{14}
\]

This condition is impossible for main-sequence stars to meet, and almost impossible for WD accreting stars to meet. Considering that the specific angular momentum of the accreted mass is lower than that given by equation (13), as was shown analytically (Davies & Pringle 1980) and numerically (Livio et al. 1986; see the \( \sigma \) parameter in equation 2), no accretion disc will be formed via accretion in the case being studied here, i.e. when the orbital planes are parallel.

### 3.4 Inclined orbital planes

From Sections 3.2 and 3.3 we learned that the angular momentum of the accreted mass is dominated by the component parallel to the accretion line, namely, the accretion disc, if formed, is perpendicular to the accretion line. When the orbital planes are inclined by an angle \( \theta \) (Fig. 1), the closest distance of the stars, say star \( M_2 \), to the accretion line is \( a_1 \sin \theta \). Most of the mass is accreted then, with a specific angular momentum \( j_{\text{inc}} = \omega_{12} a_1 \sin \theta \). The condition for the formation of an accretion disc \( j_{\text{inc}} > j_1 \), now reads (compared with equation 10)

\[
\frac{a_{12}}{R_1} > 8 \left( \frac{M_2}{0.5 M_{12}} \right)^{-4} \left( \frac{M_1}{0.5 M_{12}} \right)^{1/3} \sin^{-4} \theta. \tag{15}
\]

## 4 DIscussion and summary

### 4.1 Summary of the theoretical calculations

In Sections 2 and 3 I calculated the specific angular momentum of mass accreted on to a binary system, with the flow structure as follows. The binary system accretes from the dense wind of a mass-losing giant star (the most relevant are the AGB stars). The flow is such that it is of the Bondi–Hoyle–Lyttleton type, i.e. the orbital separation of the accreting binary system, \( a_{12} \), is much smaller than the Bondi–Hoyle accretion radius of the system \( R_{\text{acc}} \) (equation 1; Fig. 1). I also showed that for relevant parameters, the post-shock wind cools quickly relative to the flow time, leading to the formation of a dense accretion flow behind the binary system: the accretion column. I made the assumptions given in equation (8) regarding the relationships between the relevant length-scales in the problem. Typical length-scales are (see Figs 1 and 2): the radius of the accreting star (a WD or a main-sequence star), \( 0.01 R_{\odot} \approx R_1 \approx 1 R_{\odot} \); the orbital separation of the stars in the accreting binary system, \( 10 R_{\odot} \approx 0.05 au \lesssim a_{12} \lesssim 1 au \); the Bondi–Hoyle accretion radius of the binary system (equation 1): \( 10 \approx \lesssim R_{\text{acc}} \lesssim 30 au \); the orbital separation with the mass-losing star: \( 30 au \lesssim a_{12} \lesssim 300 au \). I examine the formation of an accretion disc by demanding that the specific angular momentum of the accreted mass be larger than that of a test particle orbiting the equator of the accreting star.

The main results of these calculations can be summarized as follows.

(i) The accreted mass acquires angular momentum as a result of the orbital motion of the accreting star around the centre of mass of the accreting binary system. When the orbital plane of the accreting binary system is parallel to the orbital plane of the triple-star system (\( \theta = 0 \) in Fig. 1), the specific angular momentum is too small to form an accretion disc for the assumed parameters, i.e. the condition for accretion disc formation is almost impossible to fulfil (equation 14).

(ii) When the orbital planes are perpendicular to each other, the condition for disc formation is given by equation (10). The accretion in this particular case is in a steady state, because the distance of the stars from the accretion column does not change. The more massive star is expected to accrete most, or even all, of the mass. The condition can easily be met by many systems for which the mass ratio is \( q = M_2 / M_1 \lesssim 0.3 \).

(iii) For an inclined orbit, \( 0^\circ < \theta < 90^\circ \), accretion occurs mainly when the accreting star is closest to the accretion column. The more massive star will accrete more mass, but as a result of the periodic variation in distance from the accretion column of both stars, the less massive star also accretes mass. Assuming most of the mass is indeed accreted when the star is close to the accretion column, the condition for disc formation is given by equation (15). This can be met by many systems if \( \sin \theta \) is not too small and \( q \gtrsim 0.5 \).

(iv) For the calculations here assumption (8) was used. This assumption is that the radius of the accreting star is much smaller than the width of the accretion column at the binary location, which is smaller than the orbital separation of the accreting binary system, which is much smaller than the accretion radius of the binary system (equation 1), which is smaller than the orbital separation with the mass-losing star. However, the basic physics can hold for a binary system very close to the mass-losing star. In that case, the mass in the accretion column will have some angular momentum relative to the centre of mass of the accreting binary system, as single stars do (the term \( j_1 \) in equation 2). The binary system may even have some tidal effect on the mass-losing giant star. The flow becomes very complicated in such a case.

With these and earlier results, the following conclusions can be drawn.

(v) For accreting binary systems which fulfill condition (15), the constraint on disc formation becomes the mass accretion rate as given by equation (3). As the mass accretion rate depends on total
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mass square, the accretion rate is higher than in the case of a single star. Consider two equal mass main-sequence stars of $M_{\text{b1}} = M_{\text{b2}} = 1 \, M_\odot$, and demanding that each star accretes at a rate of $> 10^{-7} \, M_\odot$ yr$^{-1}$. For the mass-loss rate and wind velocity as in equation (3), the constraint from the mass accretion rate becomes $a_0 \lesssim 400$ au. For accreting WD stars, i.e. at least one of the stars in the binary system is a WD which accretes half of the mass, I take $M_{\text{b1}} = M_{\text{b2}} = 0.6 \, M_\odot$ and (as per Section 1) the accretion rate to be $> 10^{-8} \, M_\odot$ yr$^{-1}$. The constraint from the mass accretion rate becomes $a_0 \lesssim 800$ au. These numbers should be compared with the constraint on accreting a single stellar companion (first section) of $a_0 \lesssim 40$ au and $a_0 \lesssim 150$ au, for main-sequence and WD single companions, respectively. In the later case the constraint is the accreted specific angular momentum.

(vi) The constraint on the mass accretion rate can be eased if we consider the nature of the Bondi–Hoyle–Lyttleton accretion flow. The flow along the accretion column is unstable, with a large variation in density and hence in the mass accretion rate over short time-scales (Cowie 1977; Soker 1991). This implies that even when the average accretion rate is lower than the critical value, over short time-scales it can be higher, leading possibly to sporadic jet formation.

(vii) The formation of jets at large distances from the mass-losing star will lead to a departure from axisymmetry, even when jets are blown perpendicular to the triple-star orbital plane (Soker 2001). In addition, because the accretion disc is almost perpendicular to the orbital plane, i.e. its axis, hence the jets (if formed) are close to the triple-star orbital plane and pointing from the accreting binary system to the mass-losing star. This means that one jet expands toward lower density medium and expands almost without disturbance. The opposite jet, alternatively, expands toward the mass-losing star and encounters dense medium. This jet can be deflected and/or slowed down by the dense wind from the mass-losing star.

(viii) In addition to the accreting binary system which can reside at a large orbital separation, $a_0$, the mass-losing giant star may have a close companion. The closer companion will also cause axisymmetrical mass loss, but most likely with a different axis of symmetry.

(ix) When $q \sim 1$, i.e. almost equal mass companions, both stars can blow jets, each stars on its turn. This may further complicate the structure of the nebula.

(x) The allowed large orbital separation for jets formation may result in delayed jets (Soker 2001). When the orbital separation to the mass-losing star is $a_0 \sim 200–500$ au, and the wind is slow $v_\infty \sim 5–10$ km s$^{-1}$, and the time required for the wind to flow from the AGB mass-losing star to the accreting system is $\sim 100–500$ yr. This is a non-negligible fraction of the evolution time during the superwind phase. The jets (or a CFW) may be blown after the mass-loss rate from the AGB star has been substantially reduced. Namely, while the post-AGB star and its wind may show a post-AGB age of 100–500 yr, the jets may still be active!

(xi) The triple-star scenario adds to the many routes through which binary systems can shape PNs (Soker 2002). This strengthens my earlier request not to use phrases like ‘peculiar’, ‘unique’, ‘extraordinary’ and ‘unusual’, in describing the kinematics and structure of PNs. All known PNs with large departures from axisymmetrical structures can be fitted into the binary, including triple, stellar model for the shaping of PNs.

4.2 Observational consequences

The discussion in Section 4.1 shows that descendants of PNs from AGB stars, which have two companions in a binary system that blow jets, will most likely have a significant departure from a pure axisymmetrical structure. These systems may not even have mirror symmetry, because the two jets expand into different media. The exact PN structure which results from jets blown by an accreting binary system must be derived from 3D numerical simulations. Here I only list some PNs which potentially were shaped by jets blown by an accreting binary-system companion to their AGB progenitor. Other types of systems may also lead to departures from both mirror symmetry and axisymmetry, for example, stochastic mass loss from the mass-losing star together with an accreting companion which blows the jets or an accreting close single star companion, together with a wider companion to the AGB star whose sole role is to cause a departure from axisymmetry (Soker & Hadar 2002). With this in mind, therefore, I do not expect all of the PNs listed below to have triple-star systems but some may do so.

**He 3−1375.** This PN has a dense ring and small lobes protrude from the nebula (Bobrowsky et al. 1998). However, no single axis of symmetry, point-symmetry nor a plane of symmetry, can be defined to this nebula.

**IC 2149 (PN G 166.1−10.4).** This PN has an extremely asymmetrical narrow structure (Balick 1987; Vazquez et al. 2002). Vazquez et al. (2002) suggest that this is the equatorial plane of the nebula. Another possibility is that the narrow structure is composed of unequal jets.

**M 1-59 (PN G 023.9−02.3).** This bipolar PN has unequally sized lobes, both without axisymmetry (Manchado et al. 1996). A close accreting single companion which blew two jets and a wider companion whose sole role was the cause of this departure from axisymmetry, may also account for the structure, although this model by itself cannot account for the unequally sized lobes.

**NGC 6210 (PN G 043.1+37.7).** This is a ‘messy’ PN, with a general elliptical structure with unequal sides, blobs, filaments and jet-like structures around it (Balick 1987; Terzian & Hajian 2000$^1$).

**NGC 1514 (PN G 165.5−15.2).** This PN has a general axisymmetrical structure, but with a large departure from exact axisymmetry revealed in both its image (Balick 1987) and its kinematics (Muthu & Anandaloo 2003).

**NGC 6886 (PN G 060.1−07.7).** Two cylindrical-type lobes protrude from a spherical structure. The two lobes are bent relative to the symmetry axis to the same side. Bobrowsky et al. (private communication) proposed that the lobes were formed by two jets (or CFW) blown by a companion at an orbital separation of $\sim 30$ au. The jets were bent by the ram pressure of the wind from the mass-losing AGB stellar progenitor of the PN. This model by itself, however, cannot account for the observation that the two lobes are unequal in size and intensity.

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$^1$ Images available at: http://ad.usno.navy.mil/pme/gallery.html
