Accretion states and thermonuclear bursts in neutron star X-ray binaries
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Acknowledgements

Grant me chastity and continence,
but not yet.

Saint Augustine (354-430)

Hello world, welcome to this book. It’s been a long way to write it, and it’s been great fun. This would have not happened without many of you. It sounds like a cliché but it is a very true one. I’ll explain why in the following lines. Given that the acknowledgements are one of the “most frequently read” Sections of a PhD thesis, and often the first and only pages glanced by the rushed reader, let me encourage you to sit back and have a look also at Chapter 1, which gives an overview of the research topics presented herein.

Thanks Michiel. Once again, many thanks for giving me this job and for these fruitful and enjoyable years working together. In science, one of the first and many things I learned from you is to recognize the sometimes thin line that separates facts from interpretations, and to work with both sides of it. I have also much appreciated your positive attitude and learned from your skills of turning things the right way. When I landed in Amsterdam it took me a while to get acquainted with the timing jargon\(^2\). Back then, however, I was happy to see that I was not alone in the dark:

Michiel’s second Sco observation showed a narrow peak at 1100 Hz. The signal is clear, but weak. In this case, the large collecting area of the PCA was crucial. (...) A shorter VLE window improved observation by extending frequency range (I DIDN’T GET ALL OF THIS). The data also show a normal 6 Hz QPO.

From the RXTE Users’ Group Minutes, April 2-3, 1996

\(^2\)Which later turned out to be much easier to understand than certain Dutch behaviours like, e.g., stuffing a few dry bread and cheese slices into a tiny red plastic box, adding some chocolate sprinkles and calling this “lunch”.

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And then there was light, and I was proud to hear that incredulous “Did you write this?” when I gave you the draft of our first paper. During these years you always left room for all my interests, and at the same time you were always there when needed. In short, you have been an excellent advisor and promoter. We will continue to collaborate on the ongoing projects and, I hope, on the future ones.

Rudy, much of this happened thanks to you. It’s been a privilege to work with you, and I hope we keep doing so. It was a great pleasure to learn from you from the very moment I could understand what you were saying. We’ve also had fun. Everything changed when I saw you inhaling Helium and I heard that high-pitched voice coming out of your belly (I can still hear it). I just couldn’t stop laughing. I really appreciate your help (and Anna’s) in the job search and the many conversations about life and science. The rest of the group has been almost a family, to which I am thankful. To Mariano and Rob for sharing their wisdom when they were around, Diego for the initial help, Marc for the script support, Simone for so many things that I won’t pick one here, Elena for her jet ways and Boston tips, Alessandro for the gusty winds, Paolo for our good office times, Nanda for so many things that I won’t pick one here, Nathalie for the swift and gentle translations, Yuri for his tex mastery and proof reading, Dipankar for the great rallies, Anna for her burst expertise and the projects together, and the newcomers for bringing new blood. I also want to thank sincerely all the collaborators involved in every Chapter of this thesis for their contribution, and Deepto in particular for his support in my new position.

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Arriving to the cold Amsterdam autumn from the warm Spanish summer was not that painful thanks to the API and its warm atmosphere. The API is a very special place and I proudly belong to it. The first week I thought
“Do these guys only eat cake and drink coffee?”. While this might be true for Martin, in general there is much more than cake and coffee, and from the first moment Lide, Minou, and many others were helpful, kind and open. I will never forget the great ping-pong moments with big-Al, Ato, Diego, Simo, Gemma, Valeriu, Martin (remember when you used to beat me?), Dipankar et al., the heerlijk pierogi of Maciej’s grandma and Eduardo’s laughs and lectures on Guatemalan history. Martin, you’ve appeared twice in this paragraph but you deserve more text as I have to admit, here, now, publicly, that I will miss you. As much as I miss Peter, my dear Pedro Curranino, since he embarked on a boat trip to the wild side with crazy-Agnieszka. And as much as I’ll miss sweet-Nicole and her gekke stories. But I’m quite sure we’ll get together to drink two-many beers again, maybe talking nonsense, burning noses or biting arms. And hopefully my dear Atakan will also be there. Thanks for all the fish dude, we should get our winery-brewery plans going. Special thanks to Samia for the brief office-sharing period and the great API logo! To Arjan, Alícia, Eva, Esther, Dave, Ton, Nick, Evert, Atish, Raman... for these wonderful years, to all of you APIs!

And needless to say, I will miss Amsterdam. Crossing the Amstel by bike every day, having a couple of (well maybe three) biertjes next to the canal, and all the good friends I’ve made here. Ewa, thanks for being the almost-perfect flatmate for so many years, it really felt like home. My dear Spanish crowd welcomed me since the very first evening in the Plantage Muidergracht, when they still thought I was an innocent guy, and has been my beloved family in the Netherlands. Uncles Ruben and Nacho, with their wise ad-vice on how to pick up girls, my dear bros Dieguito and Tury (yes, both in the Spanish crowd after all), auntie Miriam and her irresistible profiteroles, Jorge and Maria and their smoothie-and-cake-based parental care, the unforgettable Barça nights with my cousins Jordi and Annemarieke, Juan-Gurrix-the-crazy-grandpa letting me drive his car through the Vondelpark, Juan-the-boquerón, the uncle who lives on the mountain\(^3\) with Vero-vasca-de-altos-vuelos and who kills a cow every time we visit them, my cousins Nacho G. and Raul, the real party animals together with Timi the French auntie and the squat-cousin Maria Z., uncle Javier from Colombia, and I start to lose track here but that’s the good thing of a family, you don’t really know where it ends. The same happens with my dear Italian crowd; grazie mille a tutti per tutte le serate e il buon cibo, and for reminding me that even where things are arranged at least two months in advance you can actually plan something half an hour after it started, and

\(^3\)For the Dutch readers: mountain: a natural elevation of the Earth’s surface rising more or less abruptly to a summit, and attaining an altitude greater than that of a hill, usually greater than 610 m. From http://dictionary.reference.com.
it is usually much more fun. Thanks to those who defy classification and have shared so many good things with me: Leslie, Phil, Keshri, Viney, Zuli, Gabriele, Paola, Bill, Alessia, Daniele, Busy, José, and many others that would make this list hard to read. Y a mis queridos latin-american-splash friends, Pauli, Nuri, Matthieu (jusqu’à présent plus latin qu’américain), Viole, Beins, Cas, Cons y compañía, gracias por las parrandas y las jodas, los quilombos, las juntadas, las tocadas, los asados y los momentos recopados/chidos/chévere.

Thanks to those who kept me alive with their music and helped me keeping my music alive. This means in the first place The Silk Roads\textsuperscript{4}, the one and only, the cult band from the lowlands formed by three very good friends. Stefano, the greatest (cheer)leader; Nanda, my cara paranimfa, and Simone, the hottest sax-player wherever he goes (here you are again, see what I mean?). È stato bello carissimi, I hope we’ll keep filling concert halls and rocking in the studios. To Sahand and his Mezrab for the sparkling moments, and to Carles (who refers to my PhD as ‘el título de astronauta flamenco’) for giving me the opportunity to play what I like the most, flamenco, in no less than Het Concertgebouw. Cesar, Pastora, Haik, Ermínia, Arturo, Nuri, Babak, Branko... for the beats and notes and chords we shared.

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This is the end
Beautiful friend
This is the end
My only friend, the end.

Jim Morrison (1943-1971)

\textsuperscript{4}http://www.myspace.com/thesilkroads.

\textsuperscript{5}También llamada “sistema” en ciertos ambientes.