The legacy of Robert Burns exerted such a powerful influence upon nineteenth-century Scottish verse that some critics have suggested that he was the last Scots poet, leaving no credible successors in his wake. However, the terrain of nineteenth-century Scottish verse is peopled with great unknowns, especially labouring-class poets who responded strongly to Burns’s example. In fact, Scottish labouring-class poets in the nineteenth century far outnumbered their eighteenth-century predecessors, and many from all over Scotland found their way into print. For such poets, the legacy of Burns held promise for their literary efforts but also served as a cautionary tale about the high costs of fame. This paper will examine the verse of these “great unknowns,” with attention to their varying efforts to achieve recognition in the literary marketplace. To the extent that such poets could be said to express a collective vision of Burns, I will focus on the works of several symptomatic poets whose verse expressed key representations of their predecessor, including the verse of Alexander Balfour, John Struthers, Robert Tannahill, and Margaret Chalmers. I will ask if such poets believed that Burns’s shadow had eclipsed their chances to be granted recognition in the literary field. My paper will argue that although these poets were connected with Burns through class and nation, they were also confined by his overarching influence upon not only their works but also upon their possibilities for acceptance as legitimate contenders in the literary field. Indeed, their writing displays persistent, self-reflexive questioning of Burns’s enduring influence upon their lives and careers. These great unknowns deserve closer attention in the present, for their work writing in the shadow of Burns invites serious inquiry into the nature of literary recognition and reveals the powerful forces that shape the processes of reception and influence in the literary marketplace.