

Edinburgh International Book Festival 2016 – James Kelman



Photo by Alan
McCredie

James Kelman took to the Baillie Gifford marquee on Sunday to discuss his most recent publication, *Dirt Road*, an event chaired by the BBC's Scottish Political Editor, Brian Taylor. Plugging his new novel, one about immigration, and the connections between Scotland and the U.S, Kelman reads from new novel and takes questions from the audience on this new work.

As an award-winning Scottish influential writer, this was inevitably a sold out event. His most renowned novel, *Kieron Smith, Boy* won both of Scotland's principal literary awards: the Saltire Society's Book of the Year and the Scottish Arts Council Book of the Year, and therefore it is not difficult to fathom why it was difficult to locate a seat at this popular event.

Underpinned by grief, his narrator and protagonist, Murdo, is approaching 17 when he and his father visit relatives in America's Deep South. Kelman informed us that he too had been in the USA with his family around the age of Murdo, finding it "beyond a nightmare" without a job. However, Kelman romanticised the experience, pleasing the crowd. *Dirt Road* is a "portrait of the artist novel."

His reading of the book showed us Murdo expertly playing the accordion. Informed about the connections between Dizzy Gillespie and James Kelman himself, music encompasses the

hour, evoking that this novel, like many others, is more autobiographical than one would necessarily think from the offset.

The extract was long, perhaps too long, and there was a shortage of talking about and around the novel from both Taylor and Kelman. But from the crowd's reaction it appears one thing is clear; a strong will to read this new one published by Canongate, set in Mississippi.