

LIZ SMITH



Theories in Dallas

I AM not arguing with you — I am telling you," said James McNeill Whistler.

PRODUCER LESTER Persky has renewed his option on the film rights to the John Davis book "Mafia Kingfish" about the Marcello crime family of New Orleans and its involvement in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Persky is the man who brought "A Woman Named Jackie" and "Poor Little Rich Girl" to the mini-screen. (He also has his eye on giving the mini-series treatment to Edward Radzinsky's "The Last Tear." Disney is interested, and so is Jessica Lange — she'd like to play the doomed czarina, Alexandra.)

Meanwhile, author Davis, along with many other assassination theorists, is off to Dallas for the 30th anniversary of JFK's death and the famous symposium on same. Norman Mailer is the keynote speaker today (he is working on his own book about Lee Harvey Oswald). John Davis will speak on Nov. 21. Many others will be there to attack Random House author Gerald Posner, who believes Oswald was the lone assassin. (His best-selling book, "Case Closed," sold thousands of copies recently on Barry Diller's QVC network.)

Theorists are taking with them to Dallas the new book by Cyril Wecht, "Cause of Death." This Dutton book calls President Kennedy's murder "the most controversial assassination of a world leader in all of history."

Wecht, an outstanding forensic pathologist, investigated the murders of both John and Robert Kennedy, the drowning of Mary Jo Kopechne, the slaying of Dr. Herman Tarnower and the Sunny von Bulow poisoning, among the more fascinating cases. Wecht's tome is considered to be the not-so-secret weapon of assassination buffs, up against Gerald Posner, who would like to put them all out of business with "Case Closed."

By the way, Viking Studio has brought out a large volume described as "the complete photographic record of the JFK assassination, the conspiracy and the cover-up." But don't go flipping through the pages of "The Killing of a President" unless you have a strong stomach. Compiler-author Robert Groden has spared us nothing, including the gory autopsy pictures. There is a foreword by the controversial "JFK" director Oliver Stone.

IN HOLLYWOOD, the bottom line is usually money. But not always. And here's a terrific example. James Woods, who won an Emmy for his portrayal of an alcoholic in "My Name Is Bill W.," kept hearing from members of Alcoholics Anonymous, asking when would the acclaimed TV movie go to video? They considered it a great recruiting film for AA — something that could save thousands of lives.

Woods put in a call to Warner's Television, and was stunned to learn the movie never would come out on tape — because of his profit participation guarantee! The actor immediately asked what would happen if he gave up his profit position.

What happened is that the video of "My Name Is Bill W." comes out next June, and James Woods has been promised 1,000 copies for distribution among AA chapters around the country.

P.S.: Woods' positive karma is apparently working. The day after he waived



James Woods
Bottom line is concern

his profits on "Bill," he was cast opposite Sly Stallone and Sharon Stone in "The Specialist."

ANTHONY HOPKINS and Emma Thompson got on so well during "The Remains of the Day," they've laid down plans to co-star again. The two Oscar winners (who may be nominated again for their marvelous "Remains" work) rejoin for a big-screen version of "Macbeth." Hopkins will portray the weak-willed, fatally ambitious Macbeth. He will direct as well.

Miss Thompson, who recently scored in one of the Bard's lighter efforts, "Much Ado About Nothing," is bound to have fun displaying new facets of her talent. The upwardly mobile Lady Macbeth is among the handful of female characters all actresses want to try on for size. Emma, a glorious chameleon, should be dazzling!

TERRY McDONELL? A villain? The former editor of Esquire, who made news recently when Hearst moved him from that venue to Sports Afield, is indeed going to be a villain, an acting one.

Former NBC Entertainment and Paramount Pictures titan Brandon Tartikoff has produced a TV pilot for a fall 1994 syndicated comedy titled "Last Call." Editor McDonnell will appear, cast as the series heavy. ABC-TV is said to be interested. The question is, if "Last Call" (a show where the characters discuss top news stories of the day) takes off, will Terry McDonnell remain in his editor's chair, or will he go Hollywood?

I wouldn't think at this point that Terry is just riddled with feelings of loyalty for Hearst.

THE CITYMEALS-on-Wheels Women's Power Lunch at the Rainbow Room this week was one of its best ever! What frisson, what emotion, what feeling, what a whopping \$275,000 for this needy cause — feeding the indigent, elderly and lonely.

Kudos to Jessye Norman, Gail Greene, Gloria Steinem, Ruth Messinger and all the famous women who attended, from Jean Harris to Ivana Trump, from Diane von Furstenberg to Erica Jong. And we're not forgetting the 10-plus "\$10,000 Men." These generous males contributed their cash to the cause, and in return could select the women with whom they wanted to sit.