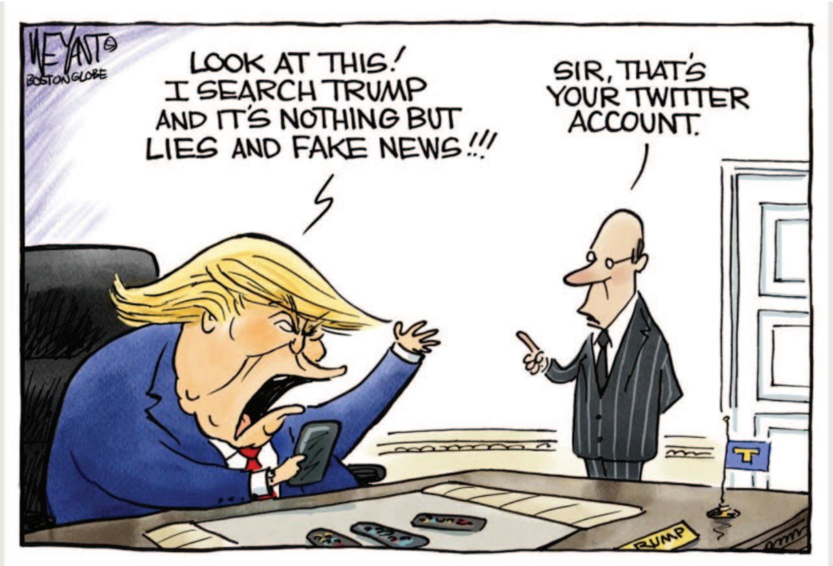
Political Cartooning

A political cartoon is a cartoon that makes a point about a political issue or event. You can find them in any daily newspaper, but they won't be in the comics section. Instead, look on the editorial pages – they're right next to the editorial columns, and across from the opinion essays.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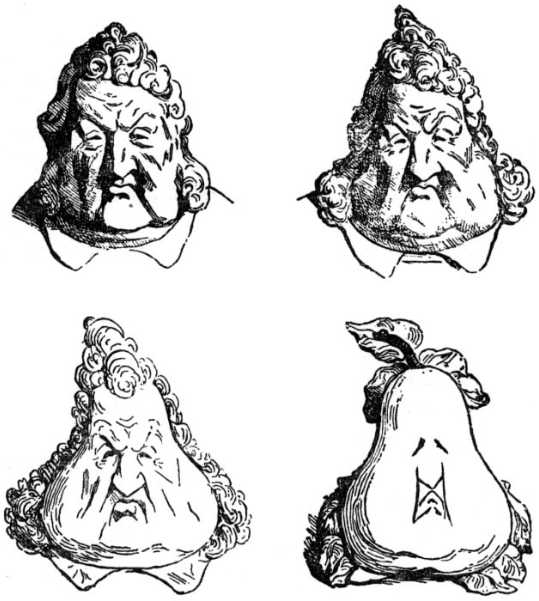
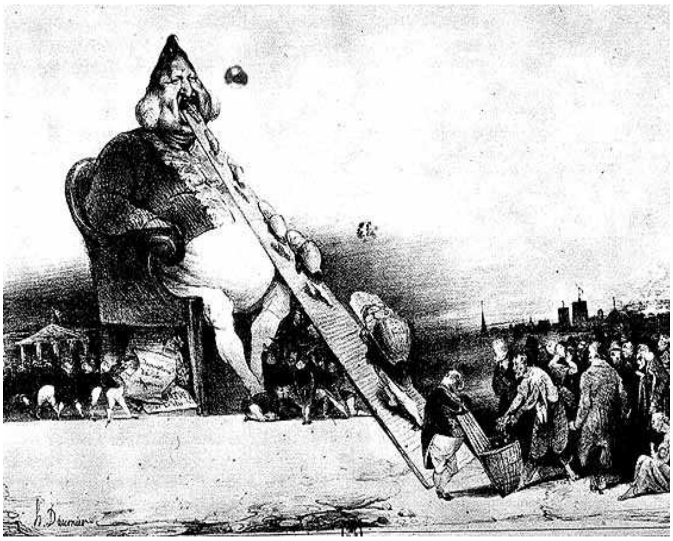
Some History

Charles Philipon (The King as a Pear 1931)



Before taking a look at a number of the cartoons, a quick summary of how the pear became embroiled in the politics of nineteenth-century France is in order. Charles Philipon was a lithographer, caricaturist, journalist, and editor of two journals that were quite satirical: the weekly La Caricature (1830-1835) and the daily Le Charivari (1832-1937). Censorship laws during Louis-Philippe's reign (1830-1848) grew increasingly oppressive for political caricaturists, as many were arrested, put on trial, fined, and jailed. While in court on November 14, 1831 Philipon argued that cartoons published in La Caricature should not be interpreted as harmful to the king because any object can be drawn to resemble the king's face or anything else for that matter. Philipon chose to prove his point by sketching a pear.

Honoré Daumier (Gargantua 1831)

In this controversial lithograph, which was to be published in Charles Philipon's newspaper La Caricature on December 16, 1831, Daumier depicted the corpulent monarch Louis-Philippe seated on a throne, gobbling bags of coins being hauled up a ramp by tiny laborers, the coins having been wrung from the poor of France by his ministers. On the lower right, a crowd of his poverty-stricken subjects stand waiting miserably to turn over what little money they have. Milling around the throne are Louis-Philippe's favorites, also extravagantly fat; they are collecting commissions, decorations, and so forth that are the result of the compulsory offerings of the poor.