



Daumier's Lithographs

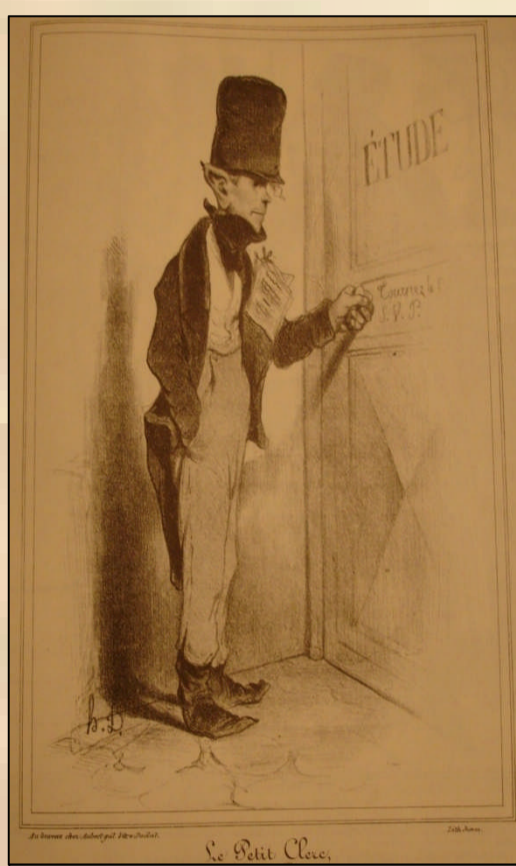
Lawyers Set in Stone

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WHO WAS DAUMIER?

Honoré-Victorin Daumier (February 26th 1808 – February 10th 1879) was a French artist, painter and sculptor who was most famous for his satirical caricatures (for which he was once sentenced to imprisonment). Over the course of his career he produced around 4000 lithographs and 1000 woodcuts over a period of more than 30 years. Of these, he dedicated 39 plates to legal scenes in his series, *Les Gens de Justice* and later produced two other series, *Les Avocats et les Plaideurs*, and *Les Physionomies du Palais de Justice*.

Daumier was born into a working-class family. His father was originally a glazier, but had literary aspirations. At the age of 12, Daumier was exposed to the legal circle through working as a *sauté-ruisseau*, an errand boy for the attorneys and bailiffs.



The Little Clerk Boy, 1835

After several months, Daumier worked as a clerk in a bookstore situated near the Louvre, where he spent time copying works on display and developed a passion for art. In 1822, he became the student of Alexandre Lenoir, a friend of his father, and later enrolled in the Academie Suisse.

Daumier's first experience with lithography was when he worked for a publisher named Belliard. He soon became adept in the medium and worked for *La Caricature* (a comic journal) during the reign of Louis Philippe (1830 - 1848). The majority of his lithographs during this time depicted political and legal satire and social commentary on the bourgeoisie. He continued his social satires in *Le Charivari*, with another series of political caricatures in 1848.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Born shortly after the French Revolution, he grew up during a time of great social and political uncertainty. The revolution of 1789 saw the overturn of the incumbent medieval hierarchy of clergy, nobility and gentry by the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Since suffrage was based on ownership of property, this meant that the political environment was determined by the upper-middle classes. This prompted satirical artists and writers to turn their attention to this new target, giving rise to a highly derogatory stereotype of the bourgeoisie. Daumier was one of these artists. Social satire also took the place of political satire due to periodic bouts of censorship that were imposed by the state.

Throughout Daumier's life, he was a witness to the Glorious Revolution of July 1830, (which promised the press a new freedom), the revolution of 1848, the coup d'état of Louis-Napoleon, the Crimean War and even the Franco-Prussian War.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The project focuses on Honoré Daumier's satirical lithographs, specifically, his work on lawyers. We investigated reasons for Daumier's scornful attitude towards them and the techniques he used to bring out his message. We found that not only did he draw heavily upon his direct experiences with the legal profession, but that there were political reasons behind his denouncement of lawyers.

OUR THEORY

Commentators suggest that Daumier's focus on the legal profession reflects his own interest more than any public interest. May M. Stokes argues that there was no historical reason for a sudden interest in the courts during that period as the corruption of the law courts did not contribute to the revolutions of 1830 and 1848. With little evidence for any substantial public animosity to the courts, she believes that Daumier's focus on lawyers is largely due to his brushes with them in his own life. It can be argued, however, that political censorship forced artists to express themselves obliquely – attacking symbols and representations of the state, such as the legal profession, rather than the state itself.

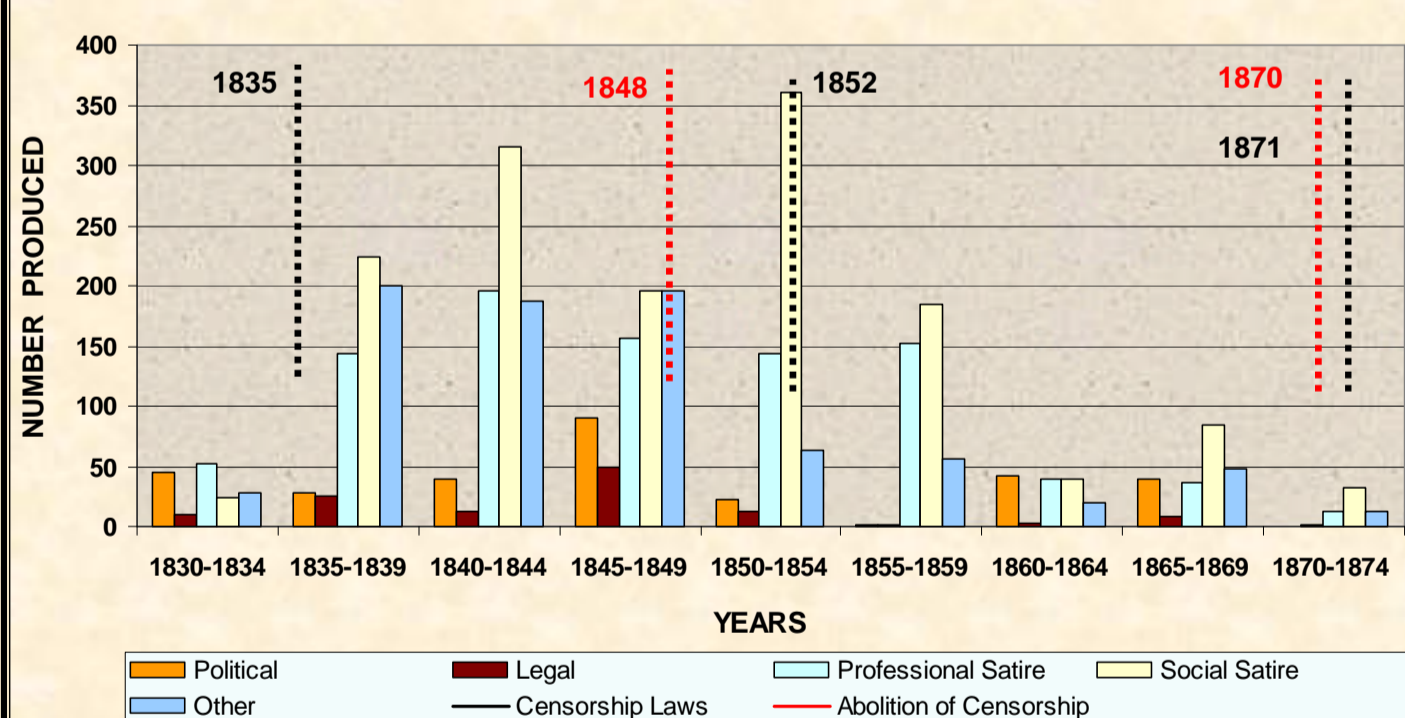


METHODOLOGY & APPROACH

- ✓ **Research:** Used electronic-journal databases to search for articles relevant to the topic. Also used the university and public libraries to find useful books.
- ✓ **Organizing:** Read the research found and organized them into relevant and irrelevant folders.
- ✓ **Summarized** key points in research into a report and created a chronology of Daumier's life
- ✓ Looked through Daumier's lithographs and categorized them into 5 aspects: Political Satire, Legal Satire, Professional Satire, Social Satire, and Other.
- ✓ Created a **graph** depicting the results

NB: We used the digitized lithographs found in Brandeis' Special Collection Department: <http://dcoil.brandeis.edu/handle/10192/5>. Some works fall into more than one category due to their subject matter. Moreover, many of Daumier's lithographs can be subjective. As such, these statistics are more of a guide than a complete picture.

DAUMIER'S LITHOGRAPHS BY YEARS AND CATEGORIES



RESULTS

The data appears to suggest that Daumier's focus on legal lithographs originated in his personal experiences, more than in his undoubted political opposition to the State. It is true that his first works along legal lines appeared in 1835, shortly after the introduction of restrictive press laws, and the majority were made during 1845-1849 when censorship had not yet been repealed, but there is no significant inverse relationship between the number of political works and legal satires produced which we might expect during the run of censorship laws. Our conclusion, therefore, tends toward the theory that lawyers are featured in Daumier's work due to his observations of lawyers in everyday life from living close to the Palace of Justice and his own encounters with the law (including his prison sentence of 1832). We should note that our results may be skewed by the inclusion of 'international politics' within the main politics category. It may be interesting as an extension of the project to see if the results will change if domestic and international politics are separated out.

DAUMIER'S LEGAL LITHOGRAPHS

Daumier's legal caricatures move past the majestic, upright and honorable image of the legal profession that the lawyers cast upon themselves and bring out their fallible nature. His lithographs also show that he has a sound knowledge of the settings of the court. Images alternate from the Salle des Pas Perdus and the Central Criminal Court itself to the great flight of steps leading down to the courtyard entrance. This 'stony' reality makes an impression on the audience through the medium of lithography (litho = stone). Daumier tends to portray lawyers as two-faced; to the outside world they appear proud and important but in the trial room, they are actors on stage with their exaggerated expressions and gestures. They have interior and exterior "faces", like buildings of stone.

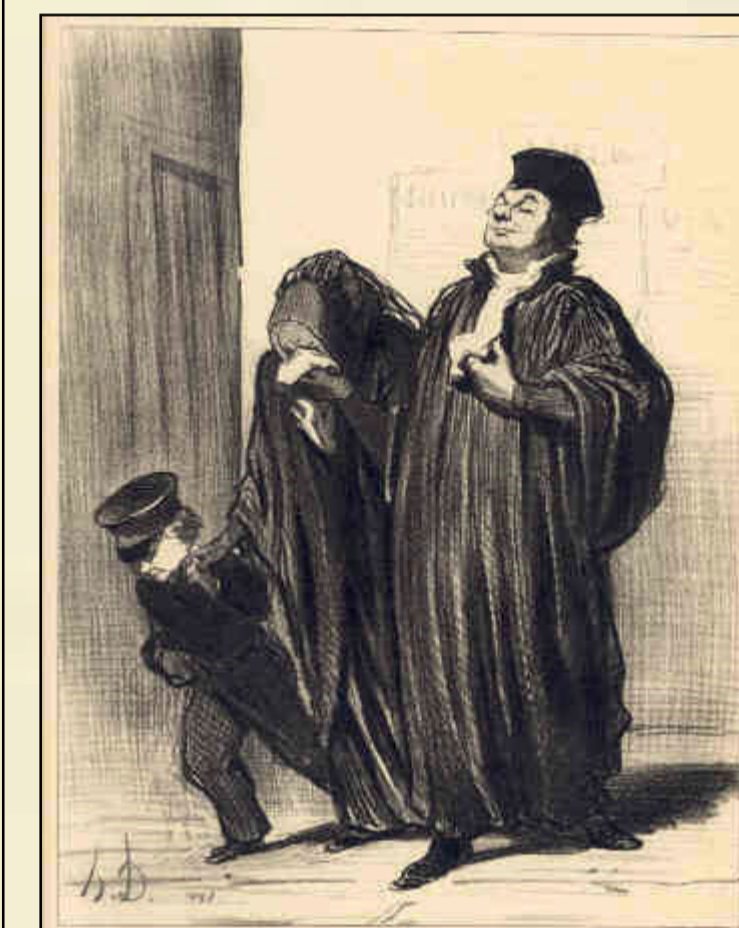


Tell me, dear colleague...
[to the left] illustrates the lawyers in between the non-trial and trial phase where they are changing into their gowns for trial and getting into their role of counsel (as if they are actors getting into character). The two lawyers are given exaggerated, inhuman features – hunchbacked and looking like rival birds of prey with pointed talons-like fingers.

A Demosthenian Peroration depicts a lawyer in action in the courtroom. He uses chiaroscuro (contrast of dark and light) to emphasize the lawyers at trial as if they are performers under limelight. The Lawyer is at the height of his performance, with his wide gestures, flailing his arms, exaggerating his expressions to make his point and to make the case seem more dramatic.



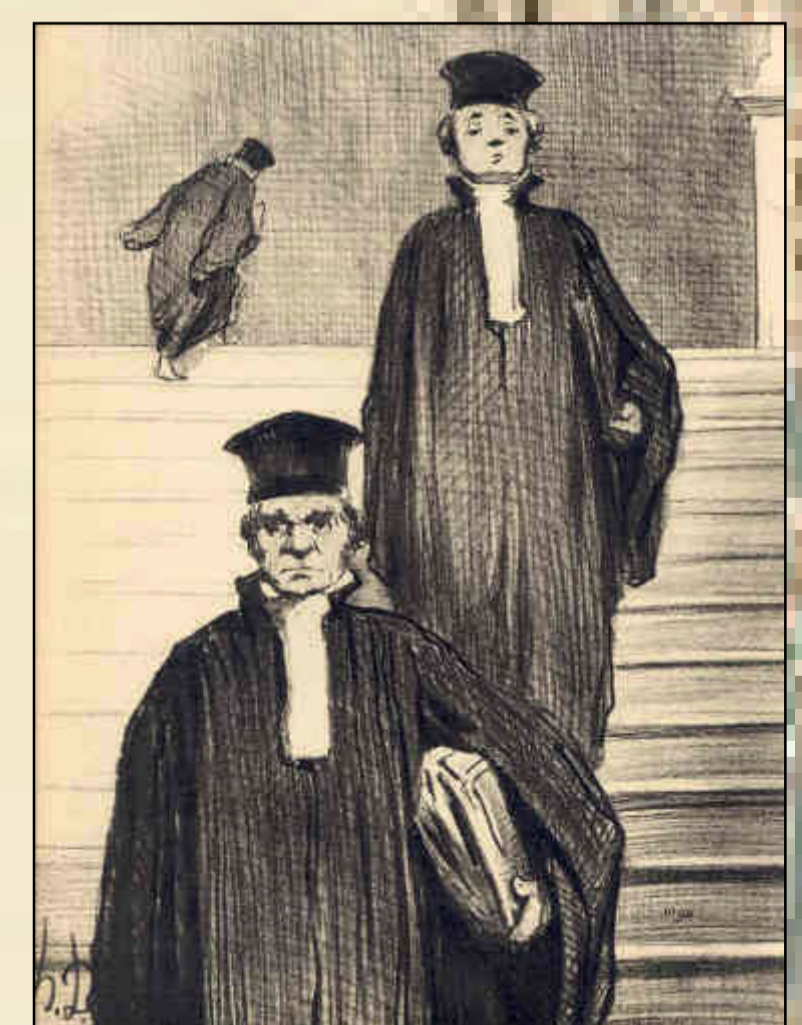
Peroration in the manner of Demosthenes, 1847



'You lost but you had the pleasure of hearing me plead your case.' 1848

You have lost your case, it is true... but you must have enjoyed hearing me plead it depicts a plump egotistical lawyer who has the nerve to praise himself in front of the client despite the fact that he lost the case. He holds his nose up high and pushes his chest up, making himself look physically bigger and more important. This image of arrogance contrasts with that of his client: a weeping widow and her child, both bowing their heads down in distress and are all but a symbol of suppression and oppression.

The reference to "vue de faces" is architectural: here, in the language of architects, is a "front profile of the grand staircase" and here – in the shape of lawyers – are two cold and rigid men of stone. The fact that the plate is itself a lithograph – and was therefore set in stone – adds a further dimension to the metaphor. Daumier revisited the image around 1865 in the form of a mixed media work (charcoal, soft pencil, ink, watercolor and gouache on paper). The composition of the picture broadly corresponds to the earlier lithograph, but there are significant differences. There is only one lawyer walking down the stairs and, significantly, he is clearly moving – his hat is soft and sitting somewhat askew, his robes are flowing, his white scarf is ruffled and shifting and his feet can be seen stepping down the stairs. His face is still aloof but he is moving down from his lofty place. This progress of the image might indicate a softening of Daumier's attitude to lawyers generally later in his life.



The Grand Staircase, Palace of Justice: View of the Faces, 1848

26 February 1808 Honoré Daumier born in Marseilles

1815 Jean-Baptiste Daumier leaves for Paris to pursue in a literary career, leaving his children and wife in poverty.

1818 Death of Cecile-Catherine Daumier's mother. There is a long and costly dispute over the estate.

1820 Honoré takes a job as an errand boy to a tipstaff. His first brush with legal circles.

1829 The Daumier family move to 33 rue de la Barillerie, near the Palais de Justice

1830 Daumier contributes to the first edition of *La Caricature A* law respecting freedom of the press is passed.

1832 Censorship means Daumier is arrested later in the year for his *The Court of King Petaud*. He spends five months in Sainte-Pelagie prison.

1835 The assassination attempt on Louis-Philippe results in the 29 August censorship law. *So this is all we got ourselves killed for* becomes Daumier's last political caricature for several years (until 1843); he switches tack to social commentary.

1845 Produces *Men of Law*.

1851 Death of Jean-Baptiste Daumier. New series of lithographs on the law courts, *Lawyers and Litigants*