

# 'Fun' Parks Offer Outlet To Inhibited

By MARTIN TOLCHIN

WHEN Maxim Gorky visited Luna Park in 1906, he concluded that Americans must be a very sad people. Why else, the Russian novelist asked, would they have to go to such lengths to amuse themselves?

Through the years, many others have marveled at the steady stream of patrons who pay for the privilege of becoming starry-eyed and vaguely discontented. This is considered particularly noteworthy in a nation that so assiduously woos euphoria.

But the amusement parks continue to flourish as an American tradition. If anything, the lines are longer than ever as young and old alike wait their turns inside a variety of bizarre contraptions that promise breathlessness, vertigo and a peculiar feeling in the pit of the stomach. Why do they do it?

## Clues Are Suggested

"For fun," according to most of the children interviewed recently at Steeplechase Park, Coney Island. A new book by a British psychoanalyst offers some clues.

At the amusement park, children who seemed to be suffering unspeakable agonies while imprisoned in gravity-defying machines raced to the end of the line once the ride had ended. Some youngsters spent the entire afternoon revisiting two or three attractions.

An exception was the parachute jump. This device hoists passengers 250 feet in the air and then allows them to fall freely until they come to within a few feet of the ground.

"I was scared," admitted 13-year-old Anthony Sciara of Mystic, Conn., "but I knew that everything would come out all right."

## Afraid to Ride Alone

On the subject of fear, Carol Coffey, 8, of Brooklyn, said that she was afraid to go on some rides alone.

"My favorite is the roller coaster," she advised, "but I only like to go when someone is with me."

She was accompanied by Mrs. Frances Lake and her daughter, Frances, 9. They are neighbors.

A large wooden slide that empties into a wooden pit was the favorite attraction for Janice Stromberg, 15, of Brooklyn. What did she like about it?

"When you go down," she explained, "you feel as if your stomach is inside out."

In his book "Thrills and Regressions," (\$4, International Universities Press), Dr. Michael Balint suggests that amusement parks are childhood retreats from the inhibitions and decorum of everyday life.

In the workaday world, he observes, people are reluctant

to show emotion, particularly in public. But at an amusement park, the laughter, shrieks and tears are unashamed.

Similarly, in the workaday world, aggressive behavior is frowned upon. But an amusement park provides target shooting and many of the games in which objects are smashed with wooden balls.

"Not only is the individual allowed to give free rein to his aggressiveness," Dr. Balint notes, "but he is rewarded for it. \* \* \* The less anxiety and inhibitions the individual feels, the more aggressive or destructive he can be."

In the workaday world, also, people are not encouraged to take risks if they can help it. The emphasis is on playing it safe.

By contrast, the rides at an amusement park offer the promise of danger. Some are advertised to be not so much an amusement as a dare. They seem to test the courage of the patrons.

But actually, although these devices seem to defy the law of gravity, there is no real risk involved. They are tested continuously, and patrons know that they are assured of a safe ride.

In placing themselves in a contraption that appears perilous but is actually safe, in placing their fate in the laps of the gods, customers are regressing to the helplessness of infancy, Dr. Balint contends.

An indication that Steeplechase Park appreciates the basis for its popularity is a sign at the entrance to an attraction. In letters one-foot tall, it reads:

"Let Me Be A Child Again."



**MIXED EMOTIONS:** Their eyes closed in fright, but with smiles on their faces, two young girls ride the dizzying "Silver Streak" on visit to Steeplechase Park.