Narrative tense

When does the story take place? Really there are only three answers to this question:

1. **Past** - The story is told in the past tense. Since events are already over, the narrator can decide in which order to tell them and which events are most important.

2. **Present** - In the present tense, events unfold before the reader's eyes. The narrator is just as surprised by the events as the reader and has no knowledge of where the story is going. Sometimes the story really took place in the past but is told in the present for dramatic effect. This is called the historical present tense.

3. **Future** - Sometimes entire narratives are about events that will happen in the future. These take the form of predictions or instructions.

Read these three versions of Raymond Queneau story below and state which tense is used in each story. Comment on the effects of verb tense on the reader.

**Version 1**
I got into the Porte Champerret bus. There were a lot of people in it, young, old, women, soldiers. I paid for my ticket and then looked around me. It wasn't very interesting. But finally I noticed a young man whose neck I thought was too long. I examined his hat and I observed that instead of a ribbon it had a plaited cord. Every time another passenger got on there was a lot of pushing and shoving. I didn't say anything, but all the same the young man with the long neck started to quarrel with his neighbour. I didn't hear what he said but they gave each other some dirty looks. Then the young man with the long neck went and sat down in a hurry.

**Version 2**
At midday the heat coils round the feet of bus passengers. If, placed on a long neck, a stupid head adorned with a grotesque hat should chance to become inflamed, then a quarrel immediately breaks out. Very soon to become dissipated, however, in an atmosphere too heavy to carry ultimate insults very vividly from mouth to ear. Thus one goes and sits down inside, where it's cool.

**Version 3**
When midday strikes you will be on the rear platform of a bus which will be crammed full of passengers amongst whom you will notice a ridiculous juvenile: skeletal neck and no ribbon on his felt hat. He won't be feeling at his ease, poor little chap. He will think that a gentleman is pushing him on purpose every time that people getting on or off pass by. He will tell him so but the gentleman won't deign to answer. And the ridiculous juvenile will be panic-stricken and run away from him in the direction of a vacant seat.
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<th>Version</th>
<th>Which form of narrative tense is used? Comment on the effects of verb tense in each story.</th>
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